

Sacred Shores, Shadowed Lives: Unpacking the Politics of Tourism in Parangkusumo, Yogyakarta

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Article Info	ABSTRAK
Article history: Received Jun, 2025 Revised Sept, 2025 Accepted Sept, 2025	Pengembangan pariwisata di kawasan Pantai Parangkusumo, Yogyakarta, tidak hanya menawarkan peluang positif, tetapi juga memunculkan tantangan sosial yang signifikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menelaah bagaimana pertumbuhan sektor pariwisata yang berdampingan dengan praktik budaya lokal turut berkontribusi pada munculnya praktik prostitusi di wilayah tersebut, sehingga menimbulkan dilema kompleks bagi masyarakat dan pembuat kebijakan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengandalkan studi literatur, observasi, dan dokumentasi untuk mengungkap dinamika antara pembangunan pariwisata, penegakan peraturan daerah, serta kepentingan politik berbagai aktor terkait. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun praktik prostitusi memberikan keuntungan ekonomi bagi kelompok masyarakat lokal yang terpinggirkan, keberadaannya bertentangan dengan norma hukum dan dipengaruhi oleh dinamika politik serta efektivitas penegakan hukum. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan masukan bagi perumusan kebijakan daerah yang lebih responsif dan berkontribusi pada peningkatan kesejahteraan masyarakat setempat.
Kata Kunci: Tourism Development Prostitution Local Regulation Political Interest Yogyakarta	ABSTRACT <i>Tourism in the Parangkusumo Beach area of Yogyakarta presents positive opportunities and negative social challenges. This study reviews how the growth of tourism, alongside local cultural practices, has coincided with the emergence of prostitution in the area, creating a complex dilemma for the community and policymakers. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research draws on literature, observation, and documentation to examine the interplay between tourism development, local regulations enforcement, and various actors' political interests. The findings indicate that while prostitution provides economic benefits for marginalized local people, it also conflicts with legal norms and is influenced by political dynamics and law enforcement practices. This paper discusses the implications of these findings for regional policy and community welfare.</i>



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Email: carlosiban@ugm.ac.id**1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism development in the Parangkusumo area has brought opportunities and challenges to the local community. Tourism can boost the local economy by creating jobs, promoting local products, fostering regional pride, and encouraging the preservation of culture and traditions (Dredge & Jenkins, 2011; Gursoy et al., 2010; Oktavia, 2021; UNWTO, 2018). However, these benefits are not evenly distributed. While residents with tourism-related skills, such as cooking, guiding, driving, or hospitality, can tap into these opportunities, those without such competencies are often excluded. Moreover, tourism has also introduced negative externalities, including traffic congestion, environmental degradation, and cultural disruption. Other regions have also documented similar patterns of uneven benefit distribution and moral regulation. For instance, Fauzi (2015) shows how local bylaws on prostitution in Bantul —formulated within a moral-political framework— tend to criminalize women while neglecting broader structural factors, such as poverty and institutional complicity. These dynamics raise critical questions about who truly benefits from tourism-led development and how local policy narratives obscure the power asymmetries they help sustain.

One immediate way for unskilled local people to profit from a tourism influx is by engaging in prostitution. According to Suyanto et al. (2020), the pressures of poverty and lack of education or skills in marginalized communities often drive women to enter the sex trade. Suyanto et al. (2020) add that poor education, limited employment opportunities, and social marginalization make the prospect of income through prostitution highly tempting. One location where this dynamic has been observed is Parangkusumo Beach in Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, which has become known as a site of prostitution.

Historically, prostitution in the region has deep roots. During the Dutch colonial era, the construction of roads and railways coincided with increased demand for lodging and sexual services. By the 1990s, prostitution, along with karaoke bars and alcohol vendors, had begun to thrive in the Parangkusumo area to cater to the growing number of tourists visiting Parangkusumo Beach and the nearby Batu Cepuri shrine (a cultural heritage site). Batu Cepuri is said to be the meeting place of Panembahan Senopati (the first King of Mataram) and the Queen of the Southern Sea, Nyi Roro Kidul; rituals are performed there on Tuesday Kliwon and Friday Kliwon nights (according to the Javanese calendar), drawing many pilgrims to offer prayers in the area. The influx of these spiritual tourists contributed to a local market for accommodations and entertainment, inadvertently also triggering a proliferation of commercial sex activities.

The rise of prostitution cases in Parangkusumo created unrest among residents and community members, together with local government officials, organized raids on brothels in the area. In response, the Bantul Regency Government enacted Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2007 on the Prohibition of Prostitution in the Bantul Regency. This regulation provided a legal basis for Satuan Polisi Pamong Praja (Satpol PP), the Civil Service Police Unit, to conduct raids and enforcement against prostitution activities.

According to Fauzi (2015), however, enforcement of the 2007 regulation has primarily targeted female sex workers suffering from economic hardship, with little to no action taken against pimps or brothel owners. Fauzi (2015) notes that, as of several years after the regulation's implementation, no pimps or brothel proprietors had ever been

brought to trial under the law. In contrast, there were instances of mistaken arrests of pilgrims who were presumed to be sex workers. This selective enforcement led women's activists and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to criticize the regulation for effectively criminalizing impoverished women. Indeed, activists attempted to challenge the regulation through a judicial review in the Supreme Court, although these efforts have been unsuccessful.

This study also examines other legal and political factors intertwined with the issue, including Law No. 10 of 2009 on Tourism, relevant articles of the Indonesian Criminal Code on prostitution, the role of "flow politics" (religious-political alignments) in local policy, the criminalization of women, and the involvement of law enforcement officers in the prostitution economy. The focus is to explore how these elements connect and contribute to the tourism dilemma in Parangkusumo.

The contrasting viewpoints and interests at play create a public policy dilemma. Gaskarth and Langdon (2022), define a dilemma as a situation in which a person (or policymaker) is forced to choose between two difficult decisions. In politics and public policy, interest groups often exploit such decisions. Politics is frequently regarded as a competition of interests where, in the classic phrase, the question of "who gets what" is paramount. Despite social condemnation of prostitution, it can also be seen as a vital economic lifeline for community members who lack alternatives to benefit from tourism. In this sense, prostitution might function as a social safety net that helps to prevent other crimes born of economic desperation. This paradoxical situation is reminiscent of Marcel Mauss's concept of the gift (Mauss, 1954): a social practice can provide hope and solidarity in a community while simultaneously serving as a source of problems and moral conflict.

Based on this context, our research aims to unravel the complex interplay between tourism, prostitution, local policy, and politics in Bantul Regency, focusing on the Parangkusumo Beach area. A qualitative descriptive approach is employed, drawing on literature studies, direct observation, and document analysis, to understand how political interests and power relations among various actors have influenced the handling of prostitution amid tourism development.

Having established the local context and highlighted the uneven distribution of tourism's benefits and drawbacks in Parangkusumo, the following section provides the theoretical foundations necessary to analyze these dynamics critically. It specifically introduces feminist theory and Mauss's Gift Paradox as essential lenses for understanding the complexities surrounding tourism and prostitution, setting the stage for deeper empirical inquiry.

Law No. 10 of 2009 on Tourism provides the legal framework for tourism businesses in Indonesia, including a list of obligations and rights for tourism entrepreneurs. Among the obligations, the law mandates that tourism businesses must "maintain and respect religious norms, customs, culture, and local community values" and "prevent all forms of actions that violate moral norms or legal provisions in the business environment." In the context of Parangkusumo, any tourism-related enterprise implicitly upholds community morality — a duty violated by the presence of prostitution. Thus, the existence of commercial sex in a tourism area stands in direct contradiction to these obligations and indicates a failure to realize the law's intent.

The law also states that tourism entrepreneurs can "obtain legal protection in their business." In practice, this provision can be subverted: prostitution business operators (pimps and brothel owners) in Bantul appear to have secured a form of *de facto* protection, not through legitimate means, but via collusion with certain authorities. Fauzi (2015) documents that in Bantul District Court cases related to prostitution, the defendants have almost always been women working as sex workers rather than the pimps or brothel owners who profit from the trade. This suggests that those running the prostitution business may be shielded — effectively enjoying informal legal protection — likely by bribing or influencing law enforcement. The outcome, as Fauzi (2015) observes, is that law

enforcement has been "sharp downward but dull upward," meaning harsh toward the powerless (the women) and lenient toward the powerful (the organizers).

Indonesia's Criminal Code (Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana) contains provisions directly addressing prostitution. Article 296 criminalizes anyone who deliberately provides opportunities or facilities for obscene acts for profit ("pimping"), with a maximum sentence of 1 year and 4 months imprisonment or a fine of 15,000 rupiahs (Republic of Indonesia, n.d.). Article 506 stipulates that anyone who lives off the earnings of a female sex worker (as a pimp) can be punished by up to one year in jail (Republic of Indonesia, n.d.). Notably, the monetary fine mentioned in Article 296 is extremely low (Rp. 15,000, less than 1 USD), a relic of the early legal code and certainly not a deterrent by today's standards. In practice, these provisions of the Criminal Code have rarely been rigorously enforced against those who profit from prostitution in places like Parangkusumo, again reflecting the pattern that pimps often escape significant legal consequences.

Bantul Regency's Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2007 explicitly prohibits prostitution in the region. It forbids anyone from engaging in prostitution, acting as a pimp, providing buildings or rooms for prostitution, or protecting such activities anywhere in Bantul (Bantul Regency, 2007). The regulation also authorizes the local government to close down any business found to facilitate prostitution. Violators of this regional law face criminal penalties of up to three months' imprisonment or a fine of up to Rp 10,000,000 (approximately 700 USD). The regulation empowers Civil Service Investigators and Satpol PP officers to conduct raids, investigate suspected offenders, and coordinate with police and prosecutors to process violations.

While this local law provides a tool to suppress prostitution, its enforcement has been uneven. As noted earlier, despite numerous raids, it has primarily been the sex workers who face sanctions under this regulation rather than the individuals controlling the prostitution business. This uneven enforcement raises concerns about the potential misuse of the regulation to target vulnerable women without dismantling the networks of pimps and brothel owners. Kantola and Squires (2004) identify four prevalent approaches in political discourse on prostitution policy: viewing prostitution as (1) a social disease, (2) a threat to public decency, (3) a form of oppression against women, or (4) sex work akin to any other occupation. In contemporary debates influenced by gender equality ideals, the narrative of prostitution solely as female oppression has been challenged by those who argue for recognizing sex work as legitimate labor. Women and children are indeed often victims of exploitation in the sex trade. Still, paradoxically, this exploitation is used to justify punitive measures against them rather than against those who exploit them. Some scholars even contend that under certain conditions (with regulation and rights protections), legalizing prostitution could better safeguard women's welfare and rights rather than pushing the trade underground where women have no protections.

The situation in Bantul reflects a punitive approach that ends up criminalizing women. Fauzi (2015) reports that the majority of individuals prosecuted for prostitution-related offenses in Bantul were the women engaged in sex work, not the pimps or establishment owners. Poor women who turn to prostitution out of economic necessity have borne the brunt of law enforcement, especially under the 2007 regional regulation. This outcome is an apparent injustice and indicates a gender bias in policy implementation. It is an issue that ought to alarm political parties, particularly secular parties not bound by religious platforms, because it contradicts social justice and equality principles. However, to date, there has been little political will to address the gendered inequity faced by these women.

The collusion of law enforcement in sustaining prostitution networks is a critical factor. He and Peng (2022) provide qualitative evidence from China's illegal sex market, showing that police complicity is common knowledge among prostitutes, with widespread collusion enabling the sex trade to operate. In their study, brothel owners openly acknowledged bribing or cooperating with police to avoid raids and crackdowns, a form of systemic corruption that is widely understood among those in the trade.

In the Parangkusumo context, there are strong suspicions of a similar pattern. Harmundoro (2019) found that information about planned raids on Parangkusumo's brothels was frequently leaked beforehand to the prostitution business operators. As a result, pimps and brothel owners could evade arrest, undermining the efforts of any genuine enforcement. This kind of tip-off indicates an internal complicity: officers tasked with upholding the law may themselves be protecting the prostitution enterprise, likely in exchange for bribes or other benefits. If this collusion is indeed occurring, it means that the local regulation (No. 5/2007) is being selectively applied and cannot effectively achieve its goal of eradicating prostitution. In such a scenario, a review or reform of the policy — and a cleanup of the enforcement apparatus — would be necessary to ensure that the law does not simply punish the powerless while empowering corrupt officials.

The complex role of prostitution in the community can be analyzed through the lens of the gift paradox. Mauss's theory of the gift (Mauss, 1954) reveals a duality in social exchanges: they can create solidarity, mutual support, obligations, and conflicts. Lee (Lee, 2020) discusses how modern governments evoke a "spirit of giving" to remedy social ills, promoting ethical idealism and conscious capitalism to restore social bonds in an impersonal market system. In the case of Parangkusumo, prostitution can be seen as a gift paradox to the community — it offers economic hope and sustenance to those who partake in it (the gift). Nevertheless, it simultaneously introduces moral and social problems that the community must bear (the burden). Prostitution for some residents functions as an informal welfare mechanism, distributing financial resources to people who might otherwise have none. At the same time, it conflicts with prevailing religious and moral norms, creating tension and division in the community.

In this paradoxical light, the community's response to prostitution is understandably conflicted. There is an implicit recognition that prostitution provides income for the destitute (a "gift" in an economic sense), even as there is public condemnation and legal prohibition of the practice due to its moral costs. This theoretical perspective underscores why simple legal bans may not suffice to eliminate prostitution; the practice fulfills certain socio-economic functions that laws and policies must contend with.

Feminist theories offer further insight into the prostitution issue. As outlined by Suyanto et al. (2020), liberal feminism views a woman's decision to become a sex worker as an exercise of her freedom — a rational choice made because it offers higher earnings than other available jobs. In contrast, Marxist feminism argues that many women enter prostitution not truly by choice but due to structural factors: being unskilled, poor, and excluded from the formal job market, they are effectively forced into prostitution as a last resort for livelihood (Suyanto et al., 2020). Radical feminism focuses on the patriarchal structures of society, asserting that prostitution exists because of male dominance and the objectification of women. From this perspective, the sex industry is a form of exploitation perpetuated by a system in which women's bodies are commodified under male power. Patriarchal culture and expectations (such as the pressure on women to cater to heterosexual male desire) ensure the continuation of practices that oppress women, including prostitution (Suyanto et al., 2020). A post-feminist or sex-positive perspective, however, offers a divergent view: It suggests that women's participation in consensual erotic labor can be an expression of agency and sexuality rather than merely a symbol of subjugation. As noted by Suyanto et al. (2020), this viewpoint considers sexual autonomy — even in the form of sex work — as a potential source of empowerment for women, arguing that the pleasure and economic gain from such work can be seen as a woman's right, not solely as a manifestation of male power over women.

To deepen the feminist theoretical foundation guiding our empirical analysis, we draw upon key feminist theorists whose works critically inform our perspective. Rosemarie Tong (2009) provides a comprehensive overview of feminist perspectives, allowing us to approach prostitution through individual autonomy and structural constraint lenses. Silvia Federici's (2004) Marxist feminist critique reveals how capitalist economic relations

commodify women's bodies, an insight that shapes our understanding of prostitution as an economic survival strategy. Catherine MacKinnon's (1989) radical feminist theory exposes how systemic patriarchal structures perpetuate gender-based exploitation and violence, guiding our interpretation of local regulatory and enforcement practices. Additionally, Rosalind Gill's (2007) analysis of post-feminist discourse on empowerment and morality helps us critically examine the contemporary rhetoric surrounding prostitution in tourism contexts, highlighting subtle mechanisms that obscure persistent inequalities. These feminist perspectives illustrate the nuanced debate: Is a woman in Parangkusumo who becomes a prostitute a victim of circumstance or an agent of her economic betterment? The reality likely contains elements of both, which means any policy approach must be sensitive to issues of choice, coercion, and the broader patriarchal context. The application of these theoretical lenses to the empirical setting of Parangkusumo is summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework Connecting Theory to the Parangkusumo Case

Theoretical/Analytical Lens	Focus in this Study	Application in Parangkusumo Case
Liberal Feminism (Tong, 2009)	Individual agency in economic decisions	Sex work seen as constrained but rational survival strategy
Marxist Feminism (Federici, 2004)	Capitalist commodification of women's bodies	Tourism-driven informal exploitation of women's labor
Radical Feminism (MacKinnon, 1989)	Patriarchal structures sustaining oppression	Selective law enforcement targeting women while protecting economic elites
Post-feminism (Gill, 2007)	Negotiation of empowerment within constraints	Sex work reframed as empowerment despite structural vulnerability
Gift Paradox (Mauss, 1954)	Informal exchanges balancing survival and stigma	Prostitution seen as both moral taboo and informal community welfare
Discourse Analysis (Kantola & Squires, 2004)	Political use of competing moral, economic, and cultural discourses	How moral discourse justifies selective enforcement and conceals power relations

This study also examines the application of legal frameworks that regulate prostitution and tourism activities in the Parangkusumo area, including:

- Articles 296 and 506 of the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP): These articles criminalize the facilitation and profiting from prostitution activities, serving as the basis for police operations against sex work.
- Regional Regulation No. 5 of 2007 on the Prohibition of Prostitution in Bantul Regency: This regulation explicitly bans prostitution in Bantul, providing local government and law enforcement agencies with the authority to conduct raids and issue sanctions.
- Law No. 10 of 2009 on Tourism: This national law emphasizes the need for tourism to respect cultural values and public morality, which local authorities often interpret as a mandate to eliminate prostitution from tourism zones.

This theoretical groundwork and normative documents inform our methodological approach, guiding the qualitative descriptive analysis by framing our investigation into how local regulations, economic survival strategies, and gender dynamics interplay within the context of tourism-driven prostitution. The methodology section clearly details how these theoretical perspectives shape our research approach and data collection processes in practice.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to examine the phenomena surrounding tourism and prostitution in Parangkusumo. According to Moleong (2006), qualitative descriptive research is characterized by a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts and relationships among the studied phenomena. Secondary data were collected through an extensive literature review of academic studies, legal documents, government reports, and media sources related to tourism and prostitution in Yogyakarta. Direct observations of the Parangkusumo area were also conducted, and relevant documents (such as local regulations and records) were examined to inform the study. Triangulating these data sources increased the validity of the findings by cross-verifying information from multiple angles. The descriptive qualitative approach is well-suited to uncover the reality behind the tourism dilemma in Parangkusumo because it enables analysis through multiple lenses. For analysis, the findings are viewed through three main lenses: the legal/regulatory framework (how laws and local regulations shape the issue), the political context (including flow politics or local power alignments), and feminist theory (considering gender and power dynamics). Using these perspectives provides a comprehensive understanding of why the prostitution issue persists despite tourism development and regulatory efforts.

This research employed a qualitative descriptive methodology, with a deliberate sampling strategy designed to maximize depth and contextual relevance. Document selection focused specifically on local government regulations, court cases, and regional policy documents related directly to tourism and prostitution in Parangkusumo, chosen due to their direct relevance and capacity to reveal the regulatory environment and institutional biases clearly. Observational protocols included systematic visits to Parangkusumo to document interactions, patterns of economic activity, and the visible impacts of law enforcement practices. Observations were conducted at various times, including both peak tourism periods and off-season intervals, to ensure comprehensive contextual understanding. Such methodological rigor enhances the reliability and credibility of our qualitative findings by ensuring the representativeness and triangulation of data sources.

Equipped with a transparent methodological framework, the subsequent results and discussion section presents detailed empirical findings. Here, data obtained through literature review, observations, and document analysis are interpreted through the theoretical lenses outlined previously, allowing a nuanced understanding of the relationships between tourism, local politics, and gender dynamics

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Empirical Findings

3.1. History of Prostitution in Parangkusumo

Parangkusumo Beach, located in Bantul Regency, is a popular tourist destination on the southern coast of the Yogyakarta Special Region. It is rich in cultural legend and mystical significance; for instance, local tradition holds that Parangkusumo (specifically the Batu Cepuri site) was where Panembahan Senopati, the founder of the Mataram Kingdom, met with Nyi Roro Kidul, the mythical Queen of the Southern Sea. Batu Cepuri is still regarded as a sacred place. Ritual ceremonies are held there every Tuesday Kliwon and Friday Kliwon night, attracting many pilgrims who believe their prayers at this site will be answered (Yuwono, 2023). This steady stream of visitors seeking spiritual experiences has had tangible economic impacts on the surrounding community. The influx of tourists and pilgrims during ritual events has spurred local entrepreneurship. Numerous warungs (food stalls), small shops, karaoke lounges, and homestays have sprung up around Parangkusumo to serve visitors. However, alongside this economic activity, the prostitution business has also taken root. The high number of visitors on ritual nights creates a surge in demand that entices some women to offer sexual services for money. Over time,

prostitution has become increasingly prevalent in the Parangkusumo Beach area, particularly on busy ritual nights (Saputra, 2017).

Prostitution in this area is not a recent phenomenon; it interweaves with the broader historical context of sex work in Java. In the mid-19th century, under Dutch colonial rule, authorities accumulated and maintained brothels. By legalizing and supervising prostitution, the colonial government aimed to control the spread of venereal diseases and manage the booming sex trade that accompanied the establishment of new transportation infrastructure (Fauzi, 2015). In the late 1800s, the growth of plantations and industries in Central and East Java, combined with investments and the development of road and railway networks, drew many male laborers to urban centers. This led to increased demand for commercial sex, and prostitution expanded as a result (Fauzi, 2015).

Yogyakarta city hosted a well-known red-light district in the Pasar Kembang area (near the Tugu railway station) throughout the 20th century. By the 1990s, however, social and political pressures led to the closure or relocation of many city brothels. Pimps and sex workers migrated to more peripheral locations. Parangkusumo Beach, being relatively secluded yet attracting tourists and pilgrims, became one such new center of the sex trade (Fauzi, 2015). Thus, by the early 2000s, Parangkusumo had inherited the mantle of an active prostitution zone, with entrenched networks of pimps and establishments operating under the radar of —and sometimes with the collusion of— local authorities.

3.2. Political Interests of Key Actors

The persistence of the prostitution issue in Parangkusumo cannot be separated from local political dynamics. Clifford Geertz's classic categorization of Javanese society into *santri*, *abangan*, and *priyayi* offers a starting point for understanding how different segments of society respond to issues like prostitution. *Santri* are pious Muslims who emphasize Islamic values, *abangan* are more syncretic or less observant villagers, and *priyayi* are the bureaucratic or aristocratic elite. Traditionally, these groups aligned with different political streams. However, political alignments in contemporary Indonesia have shifted significantly from Geertz's 1981 observations. Daud (2021) notes that in the post-1998 Reformasi era, ideological boundaries between Islamic and secular-nationalist political parties have blurred. In recent local and national politics, parties that once were opposed on religious or ideological grounds have often formed alliances to achieve power, indicating that pragmatic political interests override rigid ideological divides.

In predominantly Muslim communities like Bantul (where roughly 95% of residents are Muslim), issues of morality — including prostitution — become a politically charged arena that both Islamic-oriented and secular parties seek to exploit. On the surface, one might expect Islamist parties to champion anti-prostitution crackdowns and secular parties to be more lenient, but the reality is more complex. Fauzi (2015) observes that even the secular-nationalist Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), which typically avoids overtly religious agendas, supported the passage of the national Anti-Pornography Law and local regulations enforcing Islamic norms (such as mandatory jilbab rules at the regional level). PDIP's stance illustrates that a secular party may adopt moralistic policies if it sees a political advantage — for example, to curry favor with conservative constituents or to avoid being painted as anti-Islam in a Muslim-majority region.

The phenomenon of prostitution in Bantul thus presents a lucrative political issue. Both Islamist and non-Islamist parties can use it to project themselves as guardians of public morality. Supporting harsh anti-prostitution measures allows politicians to claim they are defending community values and Islamic principles. At the same time, these parties often do not address the underlying socio-economic causes of prostitution because the existence of the problem can continue to be used for political posturing. The enforcement pattern of Bantul's anti-prostitution regulation reflects these political interests. It is politically safer (and more visibly gratifying to the public) to arrest poor sex workers — who have little voice or social standing — than to go after brothel owners who may have

power connections highlighted by Fauzi (2015), since the implementation of Regional Law No. 5/2007, no brothel owner or pimp has been prosecuted. In contrast, numerous female sex workers have been detained in raids. Such actions appease conservative voters and religious groups calling for moral enforcement without actually dismantling the networks that profit from the sex trade. They enforce a helpful narrative to politicians: taking decisive action against immorality, even if that action targets the wrong people.

3.3. Key Empirical Patterns

The following synthesis summarizes the key empirical patterns identified through field observations and policy document analysis in Parangkusumo. These patterns illustrate not only the gendered nature of law enforcement but also the strategic deployment of moral discourse and legal ambiguity within tourism governance.

Table 2. Summary of Key Patterns in Regulation, Enforcement, and Political Interests in Parangkusumo

Category	Observed Pattern	Interpretation
Law Enforcement	Raids focus on female sex workers; pimps rarely prosecuted	Selective enforcement; reflects gendered bias and possible collusion
Legal Framework	Local regulation exists but is weakly enforced at upper levels	Laws used for symbolic politics more than systemic change
Political Dynamics	Both Islamist parties and secular-nationalist parties like PDIP exploit the prostitution issue for political gain	Moral narratives are strategically employed across party lines to gain legitimacy, often without addressing structural inequality or community needs
Community Impact	Prostitution acts as informal safety net	Reflects economic desperation and limited livelihood alternatives
Tourism Governance	Disconnect between tourism promotion and social regulation	Tourism growth indirectly sustains hidden prostitution economy

As shown in Table 2, the governance of prostitution in Parangkusumo is shaped by selective enforcement, institutional ambivalence, and the pragmatic use of morality by both religious and secular actors. The patterns reveal a governance structure that operates less as a system of formal regulation and more as a network of negotiated moral performances, political interests, and economic dependencies. Law enforcement in Parangkusumo is not neutral; it systematically targets female sex workers while rarely prosecuting pimps or establishment owners. This pattern reflects radical feminist critiques (MacKinnon, 1989), where the state becomes an agent of patriarchal power—regulating women’s bodies while protecting male-dominated economic actors. The weak implementation of existing legal frameworks further emphasizes their symbolic function. Regional Regulation No. 5/2007, for example, is invoked periodically to demonstrate moral vigilance, yet remains inconsistently enforced, especially against higher-level actors. This aligns with Mauss’s gift theory (1954), where prostitution operates in the shadows—not eradicated but tolerated, functioning as an informal support mechanism for low-income groups. In this light, enforcement itself becomes a ritual of giving and withholding legitimacy: arrests appease public morality, while toleration maintains economic equilibrium. The political dynamics revealed in the table are especially telling. While Islamic parties often lead moral campaigns, secular-nationalist parties such as PDIP also adopt anti-prostitution rhetoric

during campaign cycles. This cross-party exploitation of morality illustrates what Kantola and Squires (2004) identify as discursive flexibility: moral panics serve as political instruments to galvanize support without addressing structural conditions. Thus, the prostitution issue becomes less about legality or public health and more about symbolic alignment with cultural authority. Furthermore, the role of community tolerance—as noted in the “Community Impact” row—reflects an ambivalence that feminist economists have long critiqued. While prostitution is condemned publicly, it persists because it meets real economic needs. This mirrors critiques from Marxist feminist theory (Federici, 2004), which see unpaid and precarious female labor as foundational to capitalist accumulation—even in informal or illicit sectors. Finally, the misalignment between tourism growth and moral regulation, as shown in the “Tourism Governance” category, highlights a lack of integrative planning. Tourism agencies promote the Parangkusumo coast for spiritual and leisure value, while turning a blind eye to the socio-legal implications of the surrounding sex economy. This disjuncture reveals a governance gap: one that maintains economic flow while outsourcing social risk to women at the margins.

3.2. Comparative International Insights

Additionally, evidence of information leakage before raids (Harmundoro, 2019) suggests that some local officials deliberately allow the prostitution business to continue while staging periodic crackdowns for show. Brothel owners who are forewarned can avoid capture, ensuring their business survives. Meanwhile, the officials and politicians behind the raids can claim credit for being vigilant and satisfying public demand for action. This cynical arrangement indicates that the fundamental interests—whether financial, institutional, or electoral—lie in maintaining the status quo covertly, even as overt politics demand that prostitution be condemned. National-level data further underscores the scale of the issue. In 2019, an Indonesian NGO (OPSI) estimated that out of 230,000 individuals were engaged in prostitution across the country. According to Havocscope (2020), the underground prostitution economy in Indonesia generated roughly 32 trillion rupiah (over 2 billion USD) annually around that time, making Indonesia one of the largest prostitution markets in the world. These figures highlight the challenging issue: the economic forces and interests involved are enormous. For government officials and politicians in regions like Bantul, completely eradicating prostitution would require confronting powerful incentives and networks—a task many are unwilling to undertake. Instead, the issue is often managed in a way that addresses surface-level symptoms (through raids and moral rhetoric) while deeper drivers and collusive arrangements remain unchallenged. Furthermore, prostitution in Parangkusumo exemplifies a policy problem that straddles moral, economic, and political domains. Economically, it is a symptom of poverty and lack of alternative livelihoods. Morally, it offends the predominant Islamic norms of the community. Politically, it provides a platform for actors to signal virtue publicly or to benefit covertly. Government agencies, such as the Social Affairs Department in Bantul, have attempted rehabilitation programs for sex workers caught in raids (for example, sending women to rehabilitation centers for skills training or religious counseling). However, there is little transparency about the long-term effectiveness of these programs. Without sustained support and realistic alternative income sources, many women return to sex work after rehabilitation, continuing the cycle.

As suggested by social policy experts, a more effective approach would be to ensure that rehabilitation and empowerment initiatives are participant-centred and adequately resourced. This means involving the women in designing programs that meet their needs, guaranteeing non-discriminatory and respectful treatment, and providing tangible opportunities (such as seed capital for small businesses or guaranteed job

placements) that can help them transition out of prostitution. At the same time, tackling corruption and collusion within law enforcement must be a priority. Local leaders would need to enforce accountability for officers who tip off pimps or accept bribes and perhaps involve independent watchdogs or community leaders in monitoring anti-prostitution efforts. The data collected from regulatory documents, court cases, and field observations indicate that the enforcement of anti-prostitution regulations in Parangkusumo has disproportionately targeted women working as sex workers. At the same time, brothel owners and political patrons remain largely untouched. This pattern mirrors findings in Bantul, where the implementation of prostitution byelaws similarly marginalized women while overlooking the roles of male stakeholders (Fauzi, 2015). In summary, the interplay of tourism, prostitution, and politics in Parangkusumo reveals that the issue is not merely about individual moral choices but about systemic factors and vested interests. Prostitution persists because it fills an economic void. After all, local power structures allow it to, and because it can be politically expedient to let it exist while publicly decrying it. Any meaningful resolution will require aligning initiatives across these domains: providing better economic opportunities for the community, enforcing laws fairly and without corruption, and shifting political incentives so that protecting vulnerable citizens becomes more critical than exploiting a moral issue for gain.

Unlike previous studies that frame prostitution primarily as a consequence of poverty or moral decay, this research highlights how institutional actors—ranging from local law enforcement to political figures—strategically manage the presence of prostitution to balance moral expectations with economic pragmatism. This aligns with observations in Bantul, where local policies on prostitution were influenced by political interests and resulted in the marginalization of women (Fauzi, 2015). Analyzing the gendered dynamics observed in Parangkusumo through specific feminist theoretical lenses deepens our understanding significantly. Liberal feminist theory, emphasizing individual rights and equitable access to economic resources (Tong, 2009), clarifies how restricted formal employment opportunities position local women towards prostitution as a viable yet precarious survival strategy. From a Marxist feminist perspective, prostitution in this tourism zone exemplifies exploitative capitalist structures, commodifying women's bodies predominantly for the economic gain of powerful stakeholders rather than benefiting women themselves (Federici, 2004). Radical feminism further enriches this understanding by highlighting patriarchal power dynamics inherent in local regulations and selective law enforcement, perpetuating systematic gender oppression and control over women's autonomy and agency (MacKinnon, 1989). Finally, employing a post-feminist lens reveals contemporary discourses on morality and empowerment in tourism contexts that paradoxically obscure structural gender inequalities, thus masking ongoing marginalization faced by women engaged in prostitution (Gill, 2007).

The dynamics observed in Parangkusumo find echoes in tourism contexts globally, particularly in developing regions where economic disparities intersect with tourism-driven informal economies. For instance, similar patterns of selective enforcement and institutional complicity in sustaining prostitution economies have been extensively documented in Thailand, where tourism-driven sex work remains pervasive despite formal prohibitions, reflecting deeply embedded economic and gendered vulnerabilities (Jeffrey, 2002; Truong, 2013). Likewise, studies from the Philippines reveal comparable intersections of local governance, moralistic regulatory frameworks, and economic pragmatism. Sex tourism continues to thrive due to tacit acceptance by local authorities who benefit economically (Cabezas, 2009). In Caribbean nations, tourism's reliance on informal and often exploitative economies similarly perpetuates gender-based inequalities and selective morality enforcement, maintaining women's marginalization within broader economic and political structures (Kempadoo, 2004). By situating Parangkusumo within

these broader comparative contexts, our study underscores locality-specific features and universal elements in how tourism intersects with governance structures and gendered vulnerabilities. Having presented and critically discussed these complex dynamics in Parangkusumo through feminist and socio-political lenses, the following comparative discussion briefly situates these findings within a broader international context, emphasizing both unique and shared features of tourism-induced prostitution across developing regions. The conclusion will synthesize these insights to underline the study's original contributions and implications.

4. CONCLUSION

This study offers a novel contribution by unpacking the intersection between tourism development, moral regulation, and political interests in a localized coastal context. While previous research on tourism and prostitution in Indonesia has often focused on socio-economic drivers or legal prohibition alone (e.g., Suyanto, 2020; Fauzi, 2015), this study reveals how informal survival economies such as prostitution are sustained not only by poverty and marginalization but also by selective law enforcement and political ambivalence. By incorporating the concept of "flow politics" and critically analyzing the role of local power holders and religious narratives, this research highlights the structural entrenchment of moral governance failures within the broader context of tourism-based regional development. Such an integrated lens—linking spatial tourism dynamics with gendered criminalization and political economy—is rarely found in Indonesian tourism literature.

Prostitution in the Parangkusumo Beach area exists not only because some residents seek to capitalize on tourism but also due to underlying economic, social, and political issues. Economically, prostitution offers a quick way to earn income for individuals who struggle to access other means of livelihood, helping them meet daily needs in the absence of viable jobs. Socially, cultural factors — such as persuasion by pimps and the allure of an instant better life, as seen in peers who have entered the sex trade — play a role in drawing women into prostitution. Politically, the persistence of prostitution is entangled with the interests of local actors in the Bantul Regency, some of whom may quietly benefit from or tolerate the activity despite publicly opposing it.

The politics of interest in Bantul is evident in how local parties and authorities have handled the prostitution issue. Regardless of ideological affiliation, local politicians prioritize immediate political gains over consistently applying their stated values. For instance, parties that typically champion secular or nationalist agendas have endorsed moralistic regulations when it suited their interests, and this is reflected in the enforcement (or selective non-enforcement) of prostitution laws. The notable absence of pimps and brothel owners being prosecuted — despite explicit legal provisions — signals potential collusion or at least a tacit understanding that specific individuals are "off-limits." Meanwhile, law enforcement officers have, whether by directive or discretion, concentrated their actions on the most vulnerable participants in the prostitution trade. This pattern implies that parts of the law enforcement and political establishment may serve unjust interests, intentionally or not, by shielding profiteers while penalizing those with the least power. Therefore, addressing the tourism dilemma in Parangkusumo requires an integrated and multi-faceted approach. Economic empowerment and education programs should be implemented to provide alternative ways to earn a living for at-risk community members, especially women with limited skills. This could include vocational training tailored to local opportunities, microfinance initiatives for small businesses, or community-based tourism programs that involve locals in legitimate roles. Social interventions are also needed: public awareness campaigns and community discussions can help reduce the stigma faced by former sex workers and build local support for their reintegration.

Legally and institutionally, enforcing existing laws fairly and consistently is imperative. This means breaking the cycle of impunity for pimps and brothel owners. Stronger

oversight of law enforcement, perhaps through internal audits or involving independent bodies, can help ensure that those who facilitate and profit from prostitution are investigated and prosecuted. Simultaneously, the protection of the rights and dignity of sex workers during raids and legal processes must be ensured so that these women are treated as individuals in need of assistance rather than as mere offenders. Politically, genuine commitment from local leaders is crucial. Elected officials and community leaders must be willing to expend political capital on long-term solutions rather than short-term symbolic actions. This might involve forging partnerships with NGOs, health agencies, and social workers to create a comprehensive rehabilitation and support system for individuals exiting prostitution. It also means being transparent with the public about both the challenges and progress in dealing with the issue, which can build public trust and reduce the temptation to use prostitution purely as a political talking point. Ultimately, resolving the prostitution dilemma in Parangkusumo is not just about enforcing morality or maintaining the image of a tourist destination. It is about social justice and inclusive development. It requires acknowledging and addressing the socio-economic inequalities that drive vulnerable people into the sex trade while also confronting the power structures that have allowed the trade to flourish. By pursuing policies that empower the community economically, uphold the rule of law impartially, and cultivate accountable governance, stakeholders can move towards a solution that mitigates the negative impacts of prostitution without ignoring the needs and rights of those involved.

Future research could build on this study by incorporating direct testimonies from sex workers, local officials, and community members in Parangkusumo to gain deeper insights into the personal and power dynamics at play. Such qualitative data would further inform policies and programs, ensuring they are grounded in the lived realities of the people affected.

4.1. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish transparent anti-corruption oversight specifically for prostitution-related law enforcement; Create Tourism-Community Partnership Councils to ensure local livelihoods are incorporated into formal tourism planning; Implement community-based monitoring mechanisms for police and administrative enforcement actions.

Expand formal alternative livelihood programs and education access for vulnerable women and marginalized communities.

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