

THE USE OF ELECTRIC ENERGY FOR HOUSEHOLD NEEDS AT SUKAWATI DISTRICT, GIANYAR REGENCY: IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Sukawati District, Gianyar Regency is one of the tourist attractions and destinations. Sukawati has Sukawati art market and Guwang market, art shops, craftsmen, wood carvers, painters, traditional and contemporary artists. They all complete the atmosphere at Sukawati. As a result, more and more people intend to build houses there for which more and more electric energy is needed. This study was conducted to evaluate the use of electric energy at Sukawati District. The problems are formulated as follows: how electric energy is used; how comodification takes place; how the government and *Perusahaan Listrik Negara*, abbreviated to PLN (the Utility Company) dominates people and how the people resist the government's hegemony, what are the effects and meanings of the electric energy used at Sukawati District.

Qualitative method supported by quantitative data, which characterize Cultural Studies, was adopted in this study. The data were taken from primary resources and secondary resources. Qualitative method was eclectically employed for analyzing the data supported by the theory of consumer behavior, the theory of comodification, the theory of hegemony, the theory of knowledge and power and the theory of deconstruction. The results of the study were formally presented using tables, graphs and pictures and were informally narrated.

The results of the study show that the increase in the number of population has resulted in the increase in the number of traditional houses without/with slight modification and modern houses. The rise in the number of houses has resulted in the rise in electricity needed for illumination, mechanical purposes and so forth. The people living at traditional houses use less and simpler electric utilities than those living at modern houses. The electric utilities used are highly influenced by both internal and external factors. The advertisements of electric utilities also contribute to the use of electric utilities, meaning that electricity has touched what is required by the people at Sukawati District. By referring to the 1945 Constitution, the PLN has dominated the distribution of electricity. This has been used to comodify electric energy by changing its status into a limited liability company, and to increase the basic rate of electricity (*tarif dasar listrik*, abbreviated to TDL) with its various scenarios socialized through mass media. The government and the PLN dominate the community to accelerate their

comodification practices. Such a dominance or hegemony is resisted by the traditional people by strengthening their Balinese identity through the preservation of Bali traditional houses. Electricity has covered all the *banjar/dusun* (neighborhood under a village) resulting in different effects such as giving up bathing in the public bathing place, the extinction of informal communication among the people, renegotiation of sacred values, change in orientation of the *sekas* (the traditional groups established for particular purposes) from being orientated their activities to non economic motivations into economic ones. The different backgrounds of the people at Sukawati District have caused the meaningfulness of the availability of electricity to vary.

Keywords: traditional houses, electricity and efficiency

INTRODUCTION

The upcoming economic development in Bali will be faced with external changes resulting from globalization and internal ones resulting from the implementation of the Regional Autonomy (Erawan, 2004: 1). Globalization taking place on a worldwide scale is identical with the process of spreading cultural influence characterized by science and technology (Supriadi, 1994: 73); in Widja, 2001: 1). Jacob (1987: 15) states that electricity, as one of the results of science, is a system developed by man to adapt himself to his environment and to adapt his environment to himself in the framework of sustaining his life. Electric energy can be changed into other forms of energy by utilizing electric utilities (PUIL, 2000: 13).

Aldin et.al. (2006: 24) states that human life style from eating to having sex is determined by bureaus. The advertisements of electric utilities in the mass media with the exaggerating ways in which they are shown have caused the people to buy them. The shopping life style is a new ideal replacing the classical policies. The consumptive life style has made needs identical with desires. It states: "I am identical with what I consume" (Adian in Aldin (Ed), 2006: 26-27). The only target of modernism is formal rationality which is made up of efficiency, the ability to predict, more emphasis on quantity and mechanism (Ritzer, 2004: 565).

Stevenson (1983: 3) states that the electric energy produced by the electric power station is distributed through transmission channels ending in the consumers' electric installations. This is such a difficult, complex and long process that high costs are needed. The inefficient and nonselective use of electric energy and neglecting the use of renewable natural energy may lead to social, cultural, economic and religious effects as well as environmental damage. Stevenson (1983: 4) states that electricity for illumination is commonly used after the sun sets. Van Harten (1985: 65) states that the bigger a room is, the more lamps and electricity are needed. Most of the worldly tools depend on electricity (Totok, 2007: 3). The ease of obtaining electric utilities and the possibility of installing electricity more than needed have motivated the people to enjoy and have it. Erawan (2004: 1) states that the Bali economy depends on tourism as the leading sector. The development of tourism in Bali which is accompanied by the development of population needs an increase in infrastructure and facilities. It is this

which has been responsible for the increased needs for electric energy. Yudhoyono (2006: 3) states that electricity is needed by everybody nowadays.

The PLN has dominated the electric distribution under the name of NV. NIGM (PLN) since 1945. Such domination has been approved of by the fourth amendment of Article 33 Clause 2 of the 1945 Constitution. For the sake of the Indonesian people's welfare, the government is legally obliged to supply electricity to the citizens as needed as easily and inexpensively as possible. However, Danamik (2010) states that the Legislative Assembly approves that what are proposed by the government to increase the TDL and Adnyana (2007: 12) states that since 1994 the PLN has been determined as a limited liability company. It can be stated that the attempt to decrease the citizens' electrification is made by the government by withdrawing more funds from the community (comodification).

Nowadays the people who need electricity should buy it from the government, which, in this case, is the PLN. It only serves those who subscribe to at least 1.300 VA without breaking the technical requirements. This is the form of its hegemony over the people and by all means constitutes a contradictive condition as electric energy resources are highly limited and should be used efficiently and when needed (Ghana, 2006). In another opportunity, that is, on the International World Day commemorated on 22nd April 2006, the President, in his speech, requested that all Indonesian citizens should save electricity.

This research is highly interesting as it attempts to reveal the local genius already owned by the people living at Sukawati District to apply the methods of regulating light and weather, and the method of making use of water in order to support the movement of minimizing electric energy. The uncontrolled excessive use of electric energy will negatively affect the community itself. Jacob (1990: 17) states that the consumers should be made aware that they are faced with the aggressive influx of industrial products.

Now electricity is needed for 24 hours a day at Sukawati District. The people living at traditional houses use little electricity and sometimes none during day time. The houses where the activities are done from in the morning to in the afternoon do not need electricity at all. However, those living at modern houses need electricity in large quantities for almost 24 hours. The high urbanization taking place at Sukawati District

will probably make it a new town. Abdullah (2006: 28) states that the new cities appearing in the 21st century will be full with the inhabitants coming from the middle class characterized by technology and consumerism.

The PLN and the advertising bureaus, which support one another, make the people not critical anymore against the distortions resulting from the influx of electric utility products. As a consequence, artificial energy from electricity is created to match the need for energy. This has been responsible for the increased need for electric energy. On the other side, attempts are made to preserve traditional houses allowing the traditional people to relatively safe energy. This is a resistance (counter-hegemony) to the PLN's hegemony over the people.

Silaban (2004: 1) states that the national and per capita needs for electric energy can be minimized if houses are nationally designed with the saving-energy concepts and if the orientation of the governmental policies is improved by giving priorities to the people's local genius. In this manner, the sociocultural effects resulting from the excessive use of electric energy can be anticipated. The difference in use, especially the greater use of electric energy in modern houses (Jondra, 2007: 19) has resulted in a rise in consumption. This means that the use of electric energy highly deserves being explored from the perspective of cultural studies. The reason is that, according to Admaja (2007: 4), the mission of cultural studies is practical and emancipatory in nature. It is highly possible, although being forced, to save electricity (Kalla, Metro TV News: 25th February 2008 at 05.30).

Four problems are discussed in this study. (a) How electricity is used both in traditional and modern houses at Sukawati District?; (b) what has been done by the government through the PLN to commodify the electric energy used at Sukawati District?; (c) what has been done by the government and the PLN management to dominate the electric energy used for households at Sukawati District, and what has been done by the people to resist such a hegemony; what are the effects and meanings of the use of electric energy to the people's lives at Sukawati District? Based on the problems formulated, this study is designed to specifically aim at (a) analyzing how the electric energy is used in traditional and modern houses at Sukawati District; (b) understanding how the government through the PLN has commodified the electric energy used at Sukawati

District; (c) synthesizing how the government and the PLN have dominated the use of electric energy for households at Sukawati District, and identifying what has been done by the community to resist such a hegemony; (d) analyzing the effects and meanings of the electric energy used in traditional and modern houses to the people's lives at Sukawati District. Therefore, in theory, this study is useful to intellectuals and in practice; it is useful to the community, the PLN and the government.

ANALYSIS

As a research of cultural studies, qualitative method is adopted in this study. Qualitative data supported by quantitative data are used in this study. The data from primary sources were obtained by interviews, observation and documentation, and the data from secondary sources were obtained by documentary study. The data were qualitatively analyzed through the theories of eclecticism such as the theory of consumer, the theory of comodification, the theory of hegemony, the theory of knowledge and power and the theory of deconstruction. The results of analysis are informally presented with inductive-analytic description completed with formal presentation.

The results of the study show that the more the population the more houses were built. The houses built were made up of traditional houses, slightly modified traditional houses and modern houses. The more houses built, the more electric energy was needed, meaning that the more illumination and electric utilities were needed. While the people living in traditional houses needed utilities such as lamps for illumination, water pumps, electric irons, rice cookers, magic jars, refrigerators, television sets and tape recorders, those living in modern houses needed air conditioners, fans, exhaust fans, air purifiers, hair dryers, water heaters, treadmills, computers, water pumps, aquariums, facsimiles and the like. Such electric utilities are continually, periodically and incidentally depending on when needed or desired.

Internal and external factors contribute to the use of such utilities. The advertisements of electric tools highly affect their use and; as a consequence, electricity has touched what is needed by the people living in Sukawati District. By referring to the 1945 Constitution, the PLN has dominated the distribution and sale of electricity. Such a monopoly has been used to comodify electric energy by reducing the funding and

increasing the basic rate of electricity (*Tarif Dasar Listrik*; abbreviated to TDL) with its various scenarios. Mass media has been used to socialize the rationalization of commodification.

The government and PLN have accelerated the practices of commodification by imposing hegemony. While the government has imposed hegemony by collecting retribution from the building permits (*Izin Mendirikan Bangunan*, abbreviated to IMB) issued, the PLN has imposed it by determining the technical requirements which should be fulfilled by the people, and deciding that 1,300 VA is the minimum which is installed although only either 450 VA or 900 VA is needed by the people. The hegemony imposed by the government and PLN has been resisted by the traditional community at Sukawati District by involving the priests, the palace figures and the community leaders. Such a resistance has been shown by preserving the Balinese traditional houses as a Balinese identity. The existence of traditional houses allows the people to save electricity; as a result, they have not been made confused by the rise in the TDL or the minimum installment which exceeds their need.

The availability of electricity at Sukawati District, which has touched all the *banjar/dusun* has led to their giving up bathing in the public bathing place, the extinction of informal communication among the people, renegotiation of the sacred values and the change in orientation of the local *seka* (groups established for particular purposes), from being oriented to non economic objectives into economic ones. The various backgrounds of the community have caused the meanings of electricity at Sukawati District to vary.

FINDINGS

As far as this study is concerned, there are five findings. They are (1) identity has caused the people to either waste or save electricity; (2) degradation in the government's commitment to supporting the community and no attempts have been made by the government to motive the people to supply their electric energy by themselves by creating renewable electric generators, although, on one hand, they have the potentials; (3) redefinition of space made by the government; (4) electric saving behavior has been

motivated by the community leaders; (5) electricity has motivated the cultural development at Sukawati District.

CLOSING

It can be concluded that the use of electric energy at Sukawati District has been highly influenced by identity and life style of the community, although it is believed that electricity is everybody's vital need. Knowing that the community highly needs electricity, the government and PLN have undertaken the practices of comodification by imposing hegemony; however, the people living in Balinese traditional houses have shown their resistance to it in the form of contra-hegemony. The availability of electricity has provided various effects and meanings to the life of the people living at Sukawati District.

Based on the findings described above, it is suggested that (1) the government of Sukawati District in particular and the government of Gianyar Regency in general should not only collect retribution from the building permits issued, but should also strictly regulate what types buildings which may support the electricity-saving behavior of the people are built; (2) the PLN should increase the education-related programs for the community as an attempt to use electric energy wisely; (3) the people living at Sukawati District should continuously preserve the traditional houses, apply the values of traditional houses in every building they may build.

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