

Eco-tourism and Environmental Conservation in Western Flores: Who Benefits?

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Abstract

This paper will examine the local and national governments concern to promote eco-tourism as a means to conserve the forest resources in the Taman Wisata Alam-Ruteng, Western Flores. There are a number of different constructs about the “users” of this national recreation park, the local tourist, the foreign tourist and the villagers who inhabit the margins of the forest. This paper will explore how the local villagers have become dispossessed of their own ancestral land by the discourse of “conservation”, being constructed as “abusers” of the forest, instead of productive users or conservers. The history of the continuing marginalization of the local villagers from their own land, from the colonial period, through to the New Order and Reformation eras will be explored in order to suggest a rethinking of the role of conservation and eco-tourism.

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Gazing at the Environment

“An environmental act..... is a disciplinary move. Environmentalism strategically polices space in order to encircle sites and subjects..... guarding them, standing watch over them,even besieging them.” Timothy Luke 1997: 185.

When we think of “the environment” we tend to think of the spaces in which we live; spacious, wide, expansive. But most particularly the phrase, in the present day, conjures up notions of our relationship with “nature”. The irony, as Timothy Luke points out, is that the word “environ”, coming from Old French, originally meant “enclosing”, “encircling”, “encompassing”, “enveloping”. So that the first use of “environing” suggests, “standing guards, thronging with hostile intent, or standing watch over a place or person. To environ a site or subject is to beset, beleaguer, or besiege it” (1997:185). Though this may sound like it is far removed from the present meaning of the word, in fact, as Luke shows, present uses and acts associated with “the environment”, seem very much to have returned to this original meaning. Or perhaps the original meaning never left the word, but was hidden below the surface all along. It is the object of this paper to show how this connotation of the word “environment” is a particularly apt one, for those people living on the borders of the Taman Wisata Alam, The National Recreation Park, near Ruteng, Manggarai regency, Flores in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur.

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In this paper it will be suggested that this meaning of the word “environment” is the by-product of a particular view of “nature”, that is itself the product of a capitalist, managerial, business world view that sees everything as a “resource” in which to secure “profit”. “Resources” must be protected for proper use, and as the world becomes increasingly under the sway of corporations, all resources increasingly become privately owned and potentially exploitable for profit. This view of “nature” and the “environment” becomes “invisible”, “taken for granted”, even “natural” and “rational”, for those who accept this particular philosophical stance. It becomes “mystified”. It is not recognized that this is also the product of a particular world view, and that the concomitant to seeing nature as “exploitable” is that it must be “protected” in order to be eventually exploited in the “proper” way. Hence most don’t realize that much rhetoric that espouses “environmental protection” is a “mimicry” of the position that sees the relationship between human beings and their surroundings in a different way. In fact, as Luke shows, the reverse is also true, that increasingly even institutions that are “green”, utilize the market idioms and rhetoric of “consumption” to sell their “product”, that is “environmental protection” (ibid:194-204).

To disentangle what has become increasingly obfuscated in much of the “discourse” and “rhetoric” of the “New World Order”, I use here a case of “environmental protection”, as it is experienced by two different sets of people, “consumers”, the “eco-tourists”, and the “subjugated”, those who have been besieged by environmentalism living near the Ruteng Recreation Park. Although these two sets of people rarely interact, they both are affected by global discourses on the environment, by financial institutions that support these discourses and by state policies that operationalize them. In order to discuss the relationship between these various different entities I will use the notion of “the gaze”, as it has been introduced by Michel Foucault, and reworked by John Urry, in particular, within the context of tourism.

Foucault in his work has shown how the history of humanity has been the history of the rise of surveillance and control, which during the period of the industrial revolution was slowly internalized into a form of self-discipline (1979). The metaphor that he uses that is frequently quoted to illustrate this idea of “the gaze” is the Panopticon, Bentham’s architectural invention to allow supervisors to keep an eye on those (madmen, prisoners, workers, or schoolboys), that needed to be observed and controlled (1979:200). Constant surveillance that is invisible ensures order, because

even when subjects are not being watched, they think they are, and hence “become.. the principle of [their] own subjections” (1979:202-203). The gaze therefore is a gaze of great power and control, that becomes internalized in modern society through various institutions, prisons, hospitals, schools, which with a “gentle hand” subjugate and shape modern individuals.

Urry has used this idea of “the gaze” to analyze the development of tourism in modern society. He has suggested that visual consumption has shaped sites of tourism. Through mass travel and photography, the gaze has been “democratized”, allowing many to use this gaze of leisure to shape and transform places in the modern world (1992:176-179). The changes in the environment that result from tourism, lead people to go to ever further places, spreading out the effects of tourism. So that tourism effects lead to an increased environmental consciousness, but at the same time environmental consciousness leads to a further and further spread of tourism, because of the desire to see these places before they become “spoiled” by tourism (1992:180-183). Instead there have been many who have suggested that tourism is a form of imperialism (see for example Nash 1989). As Pratt suggests in her book, the search for knowledge and a “planetary consciousness” led to “imperial eyes” and the spread of colonialism starting already in the 15th century, a situation that is not unlike the modern day travelers’ search for information, knowledge, mementos and experiences.

Honey (1996) in her examination of eco-tourism as a particular type of tourism, talks about the shift from “nature tourism” to “eco-tourism”, a shift that purportedly is sensitive to the needs of species, including people, in the visited environment. There has been a tremendous growth in the 1980’s and 1990’s, of this “gentle gaze”, this type of travel that is supposed to be a “learning experience”, where people come to appreciate the environment and the people within it in a “scientific” way, bringing benefit to both (Honey 1996:7-10). But as Honey shows, right at the beginning of her book, the unique golden toad of Costa Rica became extinct in 1989, four years after eco-tourism began its boom there in 1985. “The history of the golden toad and that of eco-tourism are intertwined”, she says, for what is most ironic, it may have been an eco-tourist, or a scientist who brought the disease or organism into the nature park that wiped out the species (ibid:3).

What I suggest here is that eco-tourism is one in a number of “mimicry” strategies going on right now to disguise the continuing flows of power and wealth

out of the poorest communities and into the hands of a few individuals, in other words the new imperialism of the New World Order. I adapt the idea of mimicry from Bhabha's analysis of the production of "partial imitations" and "mimicry" during the European colonial periods in Africa and India (1997). He shows that colonial authorities did not want a true "diffusion" of European ideas to the "natives", but only a partial one. I am suggesting that this mimicry in the present imperialist world order is also one of disguised power, but in a different direction. "Political correctness" demands that "multi-cultural voices" be heard and that a new development be sensitive to the needs of indigenous peoples and their environments. The flocking of "experts", and tourists into these environments, to help and to be "sensitized" to the real issues, is "mimicking" the ways of life of these people within their environments, and pretending to be concerned with their plight.

As for example Peluso shows in her studies of the state and forest in other places in Indonesia, a "discourse" of protection of the environment has in fact on the one hand criminalized the local communities and given free reign to government and illegal loggers, who rape the environment far more destructively than would ever be dreamed of by the local people (1992, 2000). Local people are blamed for the destruction of the environment, but in fact the worst destruction is performed by foreign investors and the state. Eco-tourism seems to me to be in the same kind of position vis-à-vis locals, foreigners and the state. Local people are characterized as the destroyers of the local environment, and the state and foreigners are presented as protectors; the state through the setting up of the national parks, and the foreigners, as "eco-tourists" through their presence that is "sensitive" to the local ecology. And what is more, it is expected that the money they bring in will go to continued protection of the environment, and local income for villagers so they will not "need" to use the forest lands.

I will suggest that we need to be very careful about believing people who sport the new "buzzwords" of "community participation" and "protecting the environment", since it could well be a case of a wolf in sheep's clothing. It will be suggested in this paper that in order to really "protect the environment", and the people living in these environments, decisions should not be made globally, within considerations of a "free market" as the top priority, but instead locally, with concerns for human-nature relations in a given area as the prime considerations. Whether or not local autonomy

in Indonesia will ensure that decisions are made this way will be addressed at the end of this paper.

The TWAR (Taman Wisata Alam Ruteng) Natural Recreation Park in Ruteng and Eco-tourism Plans

As discussed by Honey, eco-tourism was defined in 1991 by the Eco-tourism Society as “Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (1996:6). Plans to develop eco-tourism have proliferated in the 1990’s and it is the fastest growing tourism sector at the moment. I want to use the case of the Ruteng Natural Recreation Park in Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timur, to query whether the plans that have been made to develop this site as a “eco-tourism” site, which supposedly is promoting the well-being of the local people, are in fact being realized.

The Taman Wisata Alam Ruteng (TWAR), or Natural Recreation Park in Ruteng was established since 1992 in its present form (Kramer 1996, chapter 1). My research associate, Drs. Josep Jelahat and myself visited the TWA office in Ruteng in August 2000. We were told the history of the establishment of this park by the head of the TWA, Bapak Fransisko Moga.

During the Dutch colonial period the mountainous forestlands around the administrative center of Ruteng were closed off for watershed protection. This was referred to as “Hutan Tutupan”. According to the Head of TWA, the boundaries were originally established in 1933, and then finalized in 1953 under the new Republic of Indonesian government. These are, he claimed, the same boundaries that are recognized until the present, the only difference is a meter added between the old boundary stones and the new boundary markers to establish a drain. The original Dutch boundary markers were mounds of rock, now the government uses cement pillars. The rocks were replaced with the pillars in 1979-1981.

From 1933 to 1979 the area was called “Hutan Tutupan” (closed forests), from 1979-1993 it was called “Kawasan Hutan” (forest area), and in 1993 it was renamed “Taman Wisata Alam” (Natural recreation park), when the present TWA started to take shape in Ruteng. There are four villages that have been located within the boundaries of the closed forests since the time of the Dutch colonial period. The Dutch had given special permission for the land to remain in the hands of the villagers, terming these lands, “enclaves”. These four enclaves are: Enclave Ros,

Enclave Careng, Enclave Tangkul, and Enclave Rewas. We had the opportunity to visit villages in only three of these enclaves during our research last year.

The head of TWA told us that they had hopes to promote eco-tourism in these enclaves. What he hoped was that the local people could perform rituals for tourists, so that they would be able to receive money in this way, and not have to cut down the forest and open up more land for agriculture. He admitted that there had been cases of conflict with the government and the local people over the land, but insisted that the local people were in the wrong, because the boundaries had not changed for decades. These boundaries had long been accepted by the villagers, and their parents and grandparents, and therefore those who wanted to re-open forestland for agriculture were encroaching on government land. A number of people had been put in jail because of this. Indeed the TWA officials have had quite a lot of trouble with the villagers living around the National Recreation Park.

The history of the present shape of the TWA, as a national “natural recreation park”, must be put in the context of the history of eco-tourism. As Honey describes in her “search for eco-tourism”, the funding for eco-tourism projects started to take off in the mid-1980’s. The World Bank and other world lending bodies had taken a lot of flack for their insensitive and irresponsible support of earlier tourism that displaced local peoples in Third World countries and had exacerbated poverty, bringing wealth more to foreign investors and elite than to the people who needed it. As she says the shift in the “bank’s rhetoric”..... “to include sustainable development and environment protection” (1996:15), was by way of convincing people in the Third World that the Bank had become socially and environmentally responsible. In the 1990’s the World Bank and various United Nations agencies put increasing emphasis on integrating environmental concerns with developmental needs by setting up the “Global Environment Facility (GEF) (ibid:16). One of their main aims was “protecting biodiversity through, among other means, ‘development of environmentally sustainable nature-based tourism’ and ‘participatory schemes for sustainable natural resource management, including... local communities, indigenous groups, and other sectors of society’” (Honey 1996:16). The UN, USAID, The World Bank and other international funding agencies put a considerable amount of emphasis on eco-tourism projects in the 1990’s. One of these was the TWA in Ruteng.

The TWA was established in the context of a project, entitled “Biodiversity Conservation” funded by the Asian Development Bank, designed to establish a

number of protected and buffer areas in Indonesian forestland, most particularly in Ruteng on Flores, and Siberut island, near Sumatra (Kramer 1996 chapter 1). Conservation of the forests was importantly to be part of an “Integrated Conservation Management Plan”, which was supposed to include local people who lived on the periphery of the protected forests, so that their livelihoods, which were in various ways interdependent on the forestland, would not be detrimentally affected by the establishment of these restricted forest zones (Kramer 1996 chapter 4). One of the ways that this was to be established was through the promotion of eco-tourism, which was to include the local people, so that in various ways they could continue to benefit from the protected forestland through tourism activities (Asia Development Bank 1992). The initial years of setting up this project were 1993-1995, and then the first five years of the TWA funded by the ADB were 1995-2000².

I had the fortunate coincidence of meeting with one woman last year passing through as a tourist, who had been one of the original consultants hired in 1993 when the project was still being conceived together with ADB, local and national government staff and various other international consultants. She is a British woman, one time married to a Javanese man, who had herself run a small tourism business in the 1980’s from Java that included “adventure tourism” out to Flores, at a time when there was very little tourism activity in Nusa Tenggara Timur. She had been hired to work for three months as a consultant on the TWA project, but lasted only 3 weeks. She said she felt “like a prostitute”, selling not her body, but her “name”, and her “rubberstamping” of the manipulations of the local and national administration to milk money out of the TWA project. She said the talk of “integration” and community participation was a farce. There was no effort to really listen to any one who knew anything about the forests or the indigenous peoples living in them, despite all the rhetoric to the contrary.

Quite a number of people involved in NGOs at the present time in Ruteng told similar stories. Some of them had been involved in the TWA project, some of them

² “Taman Nasional Siberut di Pulau Siberut dan Taman Wisata Alam Ruteng di Pulau Flores merupakan dua kawasan konservasi yang mendapat perhatian serius dari Pemerintah Indonesia dan UNESCO (Loan ADB no. 1187-INO), yakni sebagai wahana pelestarian ekosistem hutan tropis dan keanekaragaman hayati didalamnya. Pendekatan yang dipakai untuk menangani kedua kawasan konservasi tersebut adalah IPAS (Integrated Protected Areas System), yakni system pelindungan kawasan konservasi secara terpadu guna memperbaiki lingkungan hidup demi pembangunan berkelanjutan yang lebih baik”, from *Pertemuan Regional: Pengelolaan Taman Nasional Kawasan Timur Indonesia*, Kelembagaan Pengelolaan Taman Nasional, Manado 24-27 August 1999.

had been approached to be involved, but had quickly extricated themselves when they had seen how it was run. A number of people saw it as a front for a bigger operation in the planning stages. One NGO member said he had been to Kupang and seen satellite maps that indicated that there was a lot of gold in northern Flores. Plans to extend the TWA boundaries to include more of the northeastern forests were specifically to be able to legitimately get this land away from the local people and then invite foreign investors in to mine it for gold. This kind of tactic had been used before in Indonesia, he argued, and it was already being tried in Flores in lands around the northern town of Reo.

Even before the TWA was conceived in the early 1990's there had been quite a lot of accusations of dirty dealings with the "kawasan hutan" in Ruteng. The Bupati of the 1980's, Bapak Frans Burhan had apparently given rights for a Javanese businessman to cut down forest and plant coffee in the protected forest around the lake Rana Meze, which is now the center of the Natural Recreation Park facilities. So the irony is that the whole area associated with the entrance of the TWA lands, near the Rana Meze lake, written up as the eco-tourism highlight of the TWA, is not pristine forest, but weeds, coffee and acacia. Villagers near the lake, who felt that it was their land had protested about this land being given over to a Javanese. Subsequently they stole the coffee growing on the trees. This eventually was a major lawsuit, and one of the cases of corruption that came up against Pak Burhan after his term of office.

In addition many people had tales to tell about forestry officials in the 1970's and 1980's who had themselves profited tremendously by taking wood from the protected forestlands. Either they had fined the villagers for their reputed illegal use of the forest by forcing them to pay in wood, or they gave concessions to cut the forest to Chinese businessmen in Ruteng who paid them for the privilege. In addition villagers told us how they had been forced to give 60% of the produce of coffee trees located in what was defined as "kawasan hutan". However these trees had been there since the time of the Dutch colonial period. Villagers had many complaints to make about how corrupt officials had themselves destroyed the forests, but villagers were the ones that were always blamed, and for the least infractions (just trying to make a living), were thrown into jail.

The Enclaves

Drs. Josep Jelahat and I were given data about the boundaries of the original Dutch preservation zones by the TWA office in Ruteng, and were assured that the boundaries of the TWA did not deviate from the original Dutch protected forestland. We visited villages associated with 3 out of 4 of the enclaves located within the boundaries of the TWA, Ros, Careng and Tangkul. Some of these enclaves comprised more than one village. In some of them, such as Ros, the land located within the enclave was only agricultural land, in some of them the actual village was located within the boundaries of the TWA. We also spoke to a number of different people living in villages bordering the TWA who have also had disputes with the TWA.

In our discussions with villagers in the enclaves and on the periphery of the TWA land, we were given very divergent responses as to whether or not the TWA boundaries coincided with the original Dutch colonial boundaries. This is one of the reasons for the contestation over the land that has been happening in the past several years in the TWA. Drs. Jelahat is still in the process of attempting to establish a clearer understanding of the original boundaries of the Dutch colonial protected forests, by visiting the original boundary markers, and comparing them with the TWA markers. Last year we had some interviews with various older people who remembered the Dutch officers and the planting of the boundary markers and these have already revealed some divergent information.

So far according to our research, all of the villages in the enclaves claim that in the 1979-1981 rebuilding of the boundary markers of the “kawasan hutan” that the land which they had been ceded by the Dutch was substantially reduced. Some claim the reduction has been more than 50% of what their land had been originally. In Ros, for example, where the land which they have in the TWA is only agricultural, (their village being located right on the boundary of the TWA), the land had been earmarked for “reboisasi”, “re-greening” and was taken away from them. The villagers have so far ignored this governmental claim, and continue to use this land.

The Head of the TWA had told Drs. Jelahat and myself that the villagers claim that more land in the TWA was really their ancestral agricultural was a false claim. His reasoning was that if in fact this land had at one time been agricultural, there were been clear boundaries indicating this. In Careng we climbed one mountain in search of the original Dutch boundary marker. In fact the TWA boundaries are way down the

mountainside, whereas the original Dutch boundary was at the top. Villagers pointed out to me along the way many indications of past village life, trees that are only planted on the borders of household sections of the village communally worked swidden fields (called *nao*, in Manggarai), and various kinds of fruit trees. We saw also the site of the old village where one old woman remembered living during the Dutch colonial period. With divergent claims like this, it is difficult for the people in the villages to trust anything that the national parks officials tell them, since their own experiences and memories tell them a totally different tale.

An additional concern of our research was to determine how much local people have actually been included in the plans of the TWAR. This was one of the main aims of this “integrated conservation plan”. The plan was proposed as only being able to work if local communities were involved. (Despite this mimicry of concern for the environment, what appears to be a basic flaw to this whole project is that the local people were not the ones doing the most damage to the forests to begin with). So far our research has shown that the local people have not benefited at all from the five years of the Asian Development Bank Project, and that, conversely they have been totally excluded from the project. What villagers told us also resonates with irony. “Experts”, various consultants, would come to the villages on the edge of the forest over the years and ask them about the forests. “You are the locals, you know what is in the forest”, they would say. So these “experts” would sit in comfort in the house of the *kepala desa*, and pick the brains of the local people about what plants grew in the forest, and what local uses there were for them. They would never set foot in the forest at all. Then they would return to the town and report about “their research” and how to protect the forest from local abuse! The villagers were actually angry at this. “They call themselves experts, but they come to us for the knowledge”. Of course they were compensated nothing for their time and knowledge, but the “experts” were being paid good money for “their” research.

A similar kind of irony occurred when Drs. Jelahat and I were visiting a *kepala desa* in one of the villages. Unexpectedly two TWA officials appeared at the *kepala desa*’s house, asking for his “assistance”. They wanted to “employ” (with no real wage, **perhaps** a very minimal honorarium would be given) a few local people to police the forest against other locals. Again the phrase was used, “you know the forests best, so you know how best to protect them”. And yet at the same time the

local people are peculiarly being criminalized. It seemed the state discourse was tying itself in knots.

This peculiar “inclusion”, but in fact actual exclusion of local people does not resonate with the original aims of the project. We are concerned that further developments in this new era of “local autonomy” will continue to exclude local people, and worsen their situation. Already Randall Kramer and the Duke University team that did a pilot study for the Ministry of Forestry in 1995-1996 warned that:

“1) The establishment of both parks will impose large costs and constraints on local residents who are no longer able to practice their traditional forest extraction activities.

2) Effective management and implementation of planned buffer zone and traditional use activities could yield important new sources of income. Residents expressed an interest in participating in such development activities.

3) Ecosystem services, an often overlooked benefit of protected areas, could directly improve agricultural profits of local residents

4) Ecotourism promotion could attract additional visitors and provide a significant source of income and employment.

5) Simply increasing the number of tourists, without changing the structure of the tourist industry, will likely provide few benefits that remain in the local area.

6) Local people are generally supportive of the park management plans, although the support is lower among groups directly dependent on resources within the parks (hunters and loggers)

7) Long term success of the parks depends on giving local people a direct economic stake in park outcomes

8) Biodiversity protection can only succeed beyond the length of the ADB project, if there is a combination of economic incentives and active enforcement.” (Randall et al. 2000)

So far, according to our observations and data, point 1, that great constraints are being placed on the local population is true. This is true not only in terms of forest extraction activities, but especially in terms of closing of land that was traditionally agricultural land. Many people cannot understand why some of the land has been closed to them by the TWAR, since this land is not forestland at all, but has for many

years been already planted with coffee, even since the time of the Dutch, or is now just covered with “sensus” weeds (*Eupatorium inulifolium* or *Eupatorium odoratum*), and not biodiverse forests. As to point 2, residents still remain interested in taking an active role, but they have seen over the past 6 years that they are only tapped for information about the contents of the forest, without being credited with having actually supplied this knowledge, and then just repeatedly scolded for misusing the forest, as if they didn’t understand its contents, or how to use them in a sustainable, ecological way. There have been no eco-system services as suggested in point 3, that have benefited agricultural output of local people. They are precisely concerned with the continuation of their livelihood with the decreasing amount of available land, and the increasing population.

Ecotourism, discussed in points 4 and 5, and the focus of the present concern, has been mooted by the TWAR, and some plans had been mentioned to Drs. Jelajah and myself. However no concrete programs had yet been put into affect. We are concerned that, as the above points indicate, just increasing the numbers of tourists will not increase benefits to local people. However even increasing the numbers has so far not been successful, partially because of the political and economic uncertainties in Indonesia, and partially because of, as far as we can assess, mismanagement of the park facilities and promotion.

Point 6, 7, and 8 raise concerns with the involvement of the local people, the long term preservation of the Ruteng National Recreation Park and its role in protecting the forests. But our concern is also that these points overlook the fact that the abusers of the forest over the past decades have not primarily been locals living near the forest. Indeed people do hunt in the forestlands, and do cut down trees to build houses. But the abusive practices of stripping the forest of its resources cannot possibly come from local use, when local people only take what they need for their immediate needs. It has been people who have been in collusion with the government itself, who have abused the forestlands for extensive logging, or planting coffee, who have done the extensive damage, not the local people.

It appears that the TWA does not really know what its own goals are. There is the goal of protecting biodiversity and watershed protection. But there is also a claim to be “regreening” the forest lands as protection for the global climate. The issue of biodiversity itself is not one that actually comes into direct conflict with local people. They only want to be able to use the lands in which they have ancestral claims. Their

ancestors never cut down all of the forests in the mountains surrounding Ruteng. Many, many mountains have never been turned into agricultural land. It is the greening issue that directly conflicts with local interest. Land that people have remembered claims to, land which is covered with their coffee trees, or sensus weeds cannot be constructed as “biodiverse” forest land in need of protection. And yet for working this kind of land people are being put in jail.

It is these issues of the diverse claims, and diverse goals that Drs. Jelahat and myself plan to reappraise with more intensive collection of data from the villages surrounding the Recreation Park this year. As stated in the points of the Duke University Project, unless the local people are involved, and receive economic incentives, this biodiversity conservation project cannot be a success. It is our goal to assess what the concerns of the local people are, and how best to address them, within the aims of preserving the forests and the ecological balance, both for the local residents, and the wider global community.

The Eco-tourists

There are two “types” of tourists that visit the Ruteng Nature Recreation Park: domestic and international. Unlike many other sites of natural or ecological interest on the island of Flores, the TWA has substantially fewer international tourists than domestic. For example the Komodo National Park in the extreme west of the Manggarai regency has many times more international visitors than Indonesian. Mostly this is because a substantial number of the international visitors to the island of Komodo (where they sign in the guest book) come off of cruise ships (this could be as many as half of the visitors, if one compares these figures with the Kelimutu National Park figures). Kelimutu, the tri-colored volcanic lakes in Eastern Central Flores, which must be reached by truck or jeep, also receives more international tourists than local, but not by as wide a margin. The 17 Island national Park in Riung (Western Central Flores), receives far fewer guests, figures more comparable to the TWA, and there too, the last time I visited in 1997, the figures were higher for domestic visitors. However the Riung park is far off of the main Flores highway, unlike the TWA, which is located directly on it, and is a very easy stop to make for travelers going from West to East, or vice versa, to catch the two above-mentioned “premiere” attractions of Flores (Komodo and Kelimutu).

There are two reasons that I can suggest that the TWA does not receive many foreign tourists. First it is not considered a particularly spectacular site, unlike Komodo and Kelimutu people do not travel half the world to see it. There isn't anything particularly unique that a foreign tourist would go there to see (though I was told that in fact it is a unique ecological environment for its altitude). But even so there would be many more visitors except that foreigners seemed to be turned off by the comparatively steep entrance fee of 10,000 rupiahs. Kelimutu by comparison is only 2500. What is more this fee is in contrast to the 1000 rupiah admission charged to locals at both of these attractions. The difference in this case is felt to be too great, and the attraction too little to warrant paying it. The ticket attendant told Drs. Jelahat that quite a number of people passing by on the Trans-Flores road who were brought to the TWA by their guides, decided to give the TWA a miss, once they found out the price of admission.

The largest group of visitors, therefore, are the "urban" tourists of the local town of Ruteng (about 40 minutes drive), who visit the TWA on Sundays. Villagers who reside near or within the enclaves of the park enter through other means than the main entrance. Strictly speaking this is illegal and would be considered trespassing, but as far as I know the only thing the villagers do that is considered illegal is taking products from the forest, especially the felling of trees.

Interestingly the removal of forest products by the urban Sunday visitors was an unregulated matter. When Drs. Jelahat visited the park on a Sunday, one of the Bupati's assistants had dug up a rare plant to bring back and plant in his own garden. Quite a number of other visitors had picked things to bring out of the park with them. Drs. Jelahat mused with the entrance attendant that the destruction caused by the local tourists seemed to be far greater than that caused by the foreign ones, who were far more respectful of the ecology of the nature park. The attendant agreed, and it seemed an irony to them that precisely the foreigners were paying the higher fee.

All in all the attempt to tailor the TWA as an international eco-attraction has not been particularly successful either. There have been some negotiations with a Swiss tour leader who wants to bring a group to stay in the park this year or the next. However the facilities have to be build to house them, so it is uncertain how far this will progress in the coming year. So far the "local tourists" seem to be just as, if not more destructive of the forests as the local residents living near the park, but they are

never blamed for the destruction, since being the middle class and upper class power holders in the town, they tailor the laws and policies to suit themselves.

Conclusion

Although we are rather skeptical about the benefits of eco-tourism for the local people around the Ruteng Nature Recreation Park, we draw no conclusions yet, since the research is still in progress and this is a very sensitive topic. It is hoped that we will be able to have some influence on the continuing development of plans to build eco-tourism programs in TWAR, and in the contestation over land on the periphery of the Natural Recreation Park reserves. What we observe so far is that eco-tourism seems to be a strategy used to enclose off the lands from the local people who have always used them, and in some cases is a strategy for disenfranchising them of their ancestral land rights. We would suggest that a number of agents are involved in this strategizing. The World Bank and other development agencies are supportive of “free trade”, and capital intensive industry. They have never been sympathetic to swidden farmers, living in small scale communities, considered to be “backward” and “primitive”. Though discourses of “eco-tourism” seem to be sympathetic and sensitive to alternative ways of living, there is as yet no evidence that the eco-tourism project in Ruteng represented by the TWA has been sympathetic to the local villagers on the boundaries of the park. Instead this project appears to support the disenfranchisement of indigenous land rights that are themselves rather hidden in the mists of colonial history. We have hopes that continued research will be able to uncover the truth of the land boundaries and foster a true “eco-tourism” that benefits all people concerned.

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Introduction

This study proposes to assess how eco-tourism might best be developed in Manggarai, so as to benefit the local inhabitants as well as the wider regency and nation of Indonesia as a whole. Some preliminary work on assessing the present state of eco-tourism was started during July and August 2000 by two researchers, Drs. Josep Jelahat of the Department of Sociology, Universitas Nusa Cendana and myself, Dr. Maribeth Erb of the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, under the auspices of LIPI and the sponsorship of Universitas Nusa Cendana. The two of us visited the Taman Wisata Alam Ruteng (TWAR), The National Recreation Park office in Ruteng, spoke to the Head of the office and received access to some of the documents available on the Recreation Park boundaries as they have been formulated since the time of Dutch colonialism. We visited the park, to assess the numbers and kinds of visits that are made by local and foreign tourists. We also visited several villages near the boundaries of the park to try and understand the issues that have been emerging over the past several years where several villages have been contesting and attempting to re-appropriate the land that is part of the National Recreation Park. This research is a reappraisal of the aims of the TWAR, as they were first stated in a project funded by the Asian Development Bank from 1995-2000 and studied by a team from Duke University during the same period (Kramer 1996, Kramer et al. 1999, 2000). The continuation of this reappraisal will be conducted primarily by Drs. Josep Jelahat over the proposed period of May-September 2001, with funding support from a grant given to Dr. Maribeth Erb from the National University of Singapore to study tourism developments in Manggarai. This research to reappraise the National Recreation Park, plans to further document the land contestations and concerns of the local villagers by thoroughly visiting all of the villages that border the TWAR. Through this research we hope to suggest an amicable solution to the problems of land shortage and land contestation in the vicinity of the TWA and also make suggestions as to how best to make programs for the development of eco-tourism that will benefit the local villagers.

Sustainable Tourism

There has been growing awareness that tourism can be very destructive to local people if allowed to develop unchecked, to the extent of even being referred to as a form of imperialism (Nash 1989). Observations are that much of the benefit often leaks out of the local economy if the developments of tourism are primarily in the hands of big companies, and non-local people (Oppermann 1993). Hence there has been a growing sense that tourism must develop in an alternative way, and be therefore, “sustainable” within the context of the local culture and the local economy (Coccosis and Nijkamp 1995, Nelson, Butler, and Wall 1993, Eber 1992). At the same time there has been growing interest in “eco-tourism” as a sustainable type of tourism that pays attention to the preservation of indigenous cultures and environments (Wearing and Neil 1999, Whelan 1991). However some have questioned that ecotourism necessarily is “alternative”, and that it really preserves local control or the environment (Cater, and Lowman 1994, Honey 1999). Preserving the natural environment for the sake of an abstracted notion of “conservation”, may in fact be dis-empowering local people whose land it originally was. Local people may be defined as those who are destructive of the environment, in order to legitimize taking control of the land away from them. Hence we advocate a cautious approach

towards an understanding of the ideas of “sustainable tourism” and “eco-tourism”, with the understanding that tourism concerns are simultaneously economic and political, having to do with benefiting from local resources, be they natural or cultural, but also controlling them.