

**The Near becomes Far and the Far Becomes Near: Tourism and the Changing
Socio-Scapes in Labuan Bajo, Western Flores**

Maribeth Erb
Department of Sociology
National University of Singapore

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Maribeth Erb
Department of Sociology
National University of Singapore

Landscapes of Social Interaction in a Global World: the Flows and Distances of Tourism

“...it is quite probable that the last quarter of the current century will go down in history as the Great War of Independence from Space” Zygmunt Bauman 1998a:8, Globalization: The Human Consequences

Geographers have been analyzing the way that space and place is configured and re-configured because of tourism developments for some time now. Many insights have been gained by their studies of how places are shaped and identity constructed within the political and economic landscapes of tourism. Some critical geographers even suggest that a geography of tourism must not emphasize only the static nature of places and positions within tourism (for example ‘hosts’ and ‘guests’ as ‘fixed’ in their meaning and interaction), but recognize the importance of movement and fluidity, the ‘meeting’ of peoples that takes place (McRae 2003). McRae even suggests that the Saidian notion of ‘exile’ is worth exploring for a better understanding of the relations between tourists and locals and the ‘crossing and containment that is embedded in the core practices and politics of the contemporary world’ (2003:246).

Despite the many insightful ideas coming from geography, my feeling is that anthropology and sociology, disciplines which focus more on the ‘people’ in the ‘places’, can offer us the means for a more nuanced understanding of ‘tourism spaces’. Anthropological and sociological studies that have attempted to understand what kind of interaction takes place within these ‘spaces’ penetrate more the dynamics and the subtleties of new configurations that appear because of the tourism encounter. Ideas such as the ‘empty meeting grounds’ of tourism (MacCannell 1992), or the ‘liminal spaces’ of tourism (Graburn 1989), or the ‘tourist borderzones’, (Bruner 1996) or the ‘utopic spaces’ of tourism (Causey 2003), essentially all express an idea of a ‘betwixt and between state’ that is ‘distinct from the normal workaday world’ (Crick 1994:5) ‘out of normal time and



space' (ibid) for both tourists and locals, which results in a distinctive 'touristic culture'. I want to continue these types of explorations here, with the additional use of some spatial metaphors and analyses that I think will give some insights into the analysis of tourism encounters. These spatial analyses are those associated with the '-scapes' of Arjun Appadurai (1996), and the notion of 'space wars' of globalization introduced by Zygmunt Bauman (2001), where commonsensical ideas of 'near' and 'far' get reversed.

In an examination that Peter Metcalfe (2001) claims marked a watershed in anthropological analysis, Arjun Appadurai conceptualizes 'globalization' as varying 'landscapes' that are the 'building blocks' of the 'multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of person and groups spread around the globe', (1996:33), which have in the present era of 'modernity-at-large', become 'deeply disjunctive'. These '-scapes', ethno-, media-, techno-, finance-, and ideo-, he suggests are 'not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision, but rather.....they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors' (ibid). Martin Albrow (1997), while praising this 'perspectival vision', suggests that the 'relative stabilities' through which these -scapes of people, images, technology, money and ideas are flowing, may not be so stable themselves (38). He suggests the missing term in Appadurai's configuration is 'socio-scape', which suggests the 'vision of social formations which are more than the people who occupy them at any one time' (ibid). This 'socio-scape' I suggest is composed of both people and ideas, landscapes of people interacting, composed of flows of social relations, ideas about social etiquette and personal interaction, and how they should be activated, organized, and sustained. The various types of 'disjunctures' as Appadurai mentions, in these flows of ideas, relations and interactions can be deeply disturbing and necessitate major adjustments in the lives of individuals.

What is worth considering, in this idea of 'global flows' however, is how sometimes there are attempts made by people to stop this 'flowing'. Despite the metaphors of globalization that emphasize movement, freedom, and the almost slippery nature of things and people zooming around the globe, tourism, one of the prime examples of globalization, is just as much about stopping the flow, and arresting the -scapes', as it is in promoting this flow. A number of people point out how tourism is just



as much about ‘control’ as it is about ‘freedom’ (for example Wood 1994, Dann 1996). Often the ‘spaces’ of tourism locales are constructed to capture the attention, the money, and the bodies of tourists, so that they will not move on. Edensor, drawing on some earlier ideas about discipline in ‘touristic spaces’ (for example Urry 1990, Opperman 1993) discusses how ‘touristic enclavic spaces’ are often monitored, disciplined and policed (2000:328), disciplining tourist bodies to act in certain ways: that is ‘what to photograph, how to gaze, how to modulate the voice, and what to wear’ (ibid). One of the things I am concerned to look at in this paper is at some of the ways that people attempt to modulate the flow of people, ideas, money, technology and images, that tourism brings; in other words how do they try to stop and control these flows, and increasingly how a particular moral discourse is associated with these attempts at control.

Part of these flows and their disjuncture has to do with the perhaps commonsensical inversion that takes place in ideas about ‘space’ as it unfolds in tourist encounters. The inverted spaces of globalization’s socio-scapes are insightfully discussed by Zygmunt Bauman in his book, *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Bauman’s analysis of globalization gives life to characterizations such as “a shrinking world” and “time-space compression”, by looking at how “globalization” intimately affects the way that people organize their lives. This can be best summed up, I think, in his descriptions that show how globalization leads to an inversion of the experiences of “the near” and “the far” (p.13-14). “Near” as a social distance, or socio-scape, is a place of familiarity, certainty, habit and responsibility; spaces that are intimate, and measured by bodily shapes, sizes and practices (p.28). “Far”, on the other hand is a place of uncertainty, incomprehensibility, and irresponsibility. Near is the sense of responsibility to a community, while far is uncertain, potentially aggressive travel in distant lands. How “globalization” turns this on its head, is illustrated by Bauman’s opening example of Albert J. Dunlap, Wall Street’s favourite CEO, famous for restructuring, downsizing and making investors rich, whose quote “the company belongs to people who invest in it- not to its employees, suppliers, nor the locality in which it is situated” (Bauman 1998a:6), sums up a particular philosophy of economics that underpins globalization, as it is understood by capitalists and policy makers. Capital, always ready to move if there is potential for better profit elsewhere, has no responsibility to any locality. What it does in



“restructuring” these localities, to better suit the needs of business, means that these “near” places, communities, families, have to follow the tune and morality set by the “far” that penetrates into it. Bauman draws some nice illustrations of this from Steven Flusty’s “Building Paranoia” (1997), which shows how the temperament and moral codes of the “far” have penetrated into some “local” places through architectural innovations that make no one welcome (prickly spikes on walls, for example that prohibit people from sitting down and resting), and are designed to protect those distant elites who have expropriated territory from the locals, and are trying to secure these “conquered” spaces (Bauman 1998a:20-21). In this way, in essence, this kind of globalization changes the socio-scapes of places so that no place has the moral character of “the near” any longer; those from “a-far”, who feel threatened by the ‘near’, create fortresses of defence (see also Low 2001). Everything, in terms of geographic space, becomes near, for those with power and capital from a-far, while the morality of the “near” for those in localized places, becomes, replaced by the ethos and morality of the ‘far’. Concerns with ‘security’ that increasingly intrude into every movement that is made across borders of various kinds, underscores this morality of the ‘far’, inscribing it into all of our expectations and making it commonsensical and expected.

Tsing’s discussion of the imaginings and reshaping of the landscape of Kalimantan in Indonesia (2000a), due to the feverish desires for gold during the Bre-X investment debacle in the 1990s also nicely illustrates this intrusion of the far into the near. Tsing refers to this as a “conjuring of scale”, how the local landscape is imagined as a “frontier”, an empty lawless place where resources need to be “discovered” (2000a:133). This imagining, and the powerful agencies who supported it (the Indonesian military, backing transnational capital), obliterated the social landscapes that previously existed, the indigenous peoples and their local land claims.

To some extent all intrusions of the “far” into the “near” carry a certain “lawlessness” and the potential for brutality and aggression because of the inversion of the moral ‘socio-scapes’ associated with this penetration. As both Bauman’s and Tsing’s examples show, as an economic process, ‘globalization’, supports the ‘freeing’ up and de-regulating of some peoples’ actions and movements, at the same time that it restricts, evicts, displaces and constrains others. Some people are ‘free’ to move wherever they



will, but their freedom means the displacement of others; this means, therefore that the so-called 'free' are at risk of being attacked by the displaced, the 'enemies of freedom'. This is a moral inversion that characterizes much of global 'double-speak'¹. The 'far' displacing the 'near' tends to lead to this kind of moral inversion, which hides a certain sleight of hand that characterizes neo-liberal economics. So that, as Tsing queries, 'might deregulation and cronyism sometimes name the same thing- but from different moments of investor confidence?' (2000:115).

The far penetrating the near, also means that the socio-scapes of globalization are increasingly characterized by 'strangers [who] meet in their capacity of strangers, and [are] likely to emerge as strangers from the chance encounter which ends as abruptly as it started' (Bauman 2000:94-95). Bauman calls this meeting a '*mis-meeting*', since it is '*an event without a past* [and] [m]ore often than not, it is also *an event without a future*' (Bauman 2000:95, italics in original). Drawing on Richard Sennet's classic discussions of urban life (1970, 1974), Bauman discusses 'civility', the skills that: 'protect people from each other and yet allow them to enjoy each other's company'. This is a social 'skill' of people who have been socialized to interact in a particular way, in ephemeral, fleeting spaces².

Given Bauman's emphasis on the fleetingness of encounters, the mobility, freedom and the 'de-regulation' of the "global" citizen, it is not surprising that this person is metaphorically characterized by him as a "tourist" (1998:77-102). "Tourist", however, characterizes only the privileged, those who move voluntarily; who travel because they are "constantly greedy for new attractions" (p.84), and to whom mobility expresses their freedom and their ability to choose. In Bauman's scheme, "vagabond" is the "anti-tourist", the person who has been displaced, who has been forced to move, who does not experience the "freedom" of movement, but instead its constraints and constrictions. "Tourists" and "vagabonds", Bauman argues, inhabit the same cultural world (95); the

¹ Another example of this "double-speak" is that "flexibility" in the labour environment tends to refer only to investors and corporations, while "the plight of the 'suppliers of labour'", Bauman shows, "must be as rigid and *inflexible* as possible" (Bauman 1998:105, italics in original).

² One might say that Foster's (1986) discussion of the "short-lived" society and culture of tourists on a cruise ship is a perfect example of this "civility", which is not really a "short-lived" culture, but part of their broader cultural setting, of the urban privileged in the First World.



vagabond is the tourist's nightmare (97), at the same time being the tourist's justification, while the tourist is the vagabond's dream.

The society which they both inhabit, according to Bauman, is the "consumer society". The tourist is the ultimate of consumers, while the vagabond is a flawed consumer. The consumer society revolves around a very different ethic than that of a "producer" society, which happens to have preceded it. While "producers" organized around the "work ethic", the value on work being tied up with the fact that work defined who one was, whom one associated with and how one related with others (Bauman 1998b: 16-17), in a "consumer society" people are engaged not primarily as producers, but as consumers. Bauman suggests that what deeply differentiates the "producer" society from the "consumer" society, is the lifting of the idea of choice to an elevated philosophical principle. Increasingly the questions of choice and flexibility have penetrated into the very identities of consumer society people. Where once people were assured of an occupation virtually for life, in the post-industrial society permanence is no longer a guarantee (1998b:27). Hence individuals in consumer society dally with "identity", seizing and discarding it just as the consumer goods that are bought, used up or thrown away with obsolescence (1998b:28). So that while work used to be the marker of identity and society in the industrial world, it is now consumerism that plays this role. One way of summing up the consumer restlessness, the "desire desiring desire" (1998a:83) that characterizes consumer society is that consumers are "on the move" (ibid). In fact one could say that "...travelling... is in the life of the consumer much more pleasurable than to arrive". (Bauman 1998a:84). The greed for something new, something different, "new attractions", means that travel and being a tourist, best encapsulates what it means to be a consumer in a consumer society.

Appadurai also contrasts the "disciplines" of production and consumption, and how they result in different rhythms of life (1996:82-84). People whose lives are disciplined by consumption, rather than production, organize their time differently, and I suggest that this will also have an effect on their "socio-scapes", how they relate to people. Consumption, as a "discipline", means seeing consumption as *necessary*, intrinsic to one's whole way of life, in fact as a *duty*. People in consumer society are taught to consume in particular ways, and to see consumption as crucial. As Bauman has hinted, tourism is an intimate part of the



discipline of consumption in a number of ways. Firstly the rhythms of the consumer life, as Nelson Graburn (1989) has shown, are organized around “holidays”, “vacations”; not taking these holidays, one becomes a “flawed tourist”, and hence a “flawed consumer” in a way similar to that which Bauman suggests. Secondly these periods of “vacating” ones home, are times to be a “total consumer”, that is ideally one leaves behind all work and production, and becomes a **consumer** and **not** a producer in the places one visits (Cohen 1974:529). Hence one could claim that this is a “training ground” for consumption. As Graburn shows this is a “liminal” time, a kind of rites of passage, that marks the rhythms of the calendrical year. But, also increasingly the time of travel, for those in a consumer society, is a kind of “rites of passage”, when youth vacate their homelands and become liminal travellers, before they return to their home countries to be full fledged adults. Hutnyk has suggested that this kind of travel “engraves the principles of consumption upon even the most ethereal aspects of their lives” (Hutnyk 1996:10). This is because, being “budget” travellers, and travelling for a long time on limited funds, they haggle and bargain over every transaction. This is an interesting example also of learning to participate in “double-speak”. This is because, although they claim to be travelling to learn and create empathy with the Third World, instead they often aggressively search for the cheapest “deals” and bargaining ruthlessly, without empathy. They have been convinced, by the Lonely Planet and many other guidebooks, that if they do not do this in these third world tourist sites, they will be cheated and made a fool of. It is in this way, that, despite their own claims to the contrary, these youthful travellers as Hutnyk suggests, bring “an expanding [consumer] economy” to far-flung places where people still define themselves more as “producers” rather than “consumers”. Hence, I will argue that this is one of the main characteristics of tourist locales, that must be understood in examining the disjunctive socio-scapes located therein, that is that “super-consumers”, as Miller suggests those who are conscious that very little of what they have is of their own creation (1995:1), meet up with those who are still involved, directly or indirectly, in production, sometimes for their own subsistence.

Given this background of the meeting of people from societies with different ethos and different disciplines, the ‘super-consumers’ and the still ‘producers’, in the ‘empty meeting grounds’ of tourism, I would like to extend Bauman’s idea of the ‘mis-



meeting', mentioned above, to describe the kinds of encounters that take place within tourist settings, especially those of the 'third world'. The '*mis*' part of this encounter, however, is not because both sides experience the meeting as having no past and no future, but instead, because the two inter-actors come to the encounter with different expectations. They do not inhabit exactly the same cultural world, as the tourists and the vagabonds do, but instead their worlds are disjunctive. On one side is the 'tourist' who comes to the encounter as a bearer of the socio-scape of moral 'far-ness'. This person expects that all relationships encountered on 'holiday' will not last; therefore they do not need to be characterized by responsibility or accountability. The resident, however, the person who still participates in a society characterized to some extent by an ethos of production, is a person who starts off with an expectation of 'near-ness'. Even those from a-far can be absorbed into the 'near-ness' of their community, giving willingness and a little time. The more the resident absorbs and accepts the tourists' moral socio-scapes, however, the more likely this resident is to become a 'consumer', and therefore either a tourist, or a vagabond.

I suggest that these changes can be seen to some extent in the way actual physical spaces are organized; this is one of the visible features of these 'socio-scapes'. For example, in Indonesia, perhaps universally, an open door represents open-ness to neighbours, that a person is at home and that a person is connected with others. As Krishna Sen shows in his article analyzing Indonesian films, the opening and closing of doors is symbolically meant to represent this. In one film he analyzes there is a specific use of this symbolism; the poor, innocent village folk leave their doors open and are a part of one another, while the rich, exploitative wealthy people live in a large mansion where doors are closed and people are separated and contained (1989:14, 200). In the physical, architectural spaces of Labuan Bajo, I suggest, one can read the changing moral configurations of social interaction in the construction of buildings and other structures. But one can also see this in other place-making strategies and the social encounters there. This process of negotiating, warping and folding the socio-scapes of Labuan Bajo into disjunctive shapes, within the context of changes, a large amount of which are associated with tourism, is what I want to discuss here.



Touristic Space and Touristic Culture: Empty Meeting Grounds, Borderzones and Utopic Spaces

Part of the way that anthropologists and sociologists have attempted to analyze the moral spaces of tourism, are by, as mentioned above, positing a kind of ‘third space’, a place where a different kind of ‘culture’ has been created. This touristic space is characterized by a ‘liminality’, an ambiguity, and hence the kind of inversion that I have suggested above, where ‘near’ becomes ‘far’ and ‘far’ becomes ‘near’. The kind of ‘miscommunication’ that takes place there is perhaps what was at the root of Dean MacCannell’s designation of tourism as an ‘empty meeting ground’ (1992). People coming from varying different cultural contexts understand things differently, meeting on the grounds of tourism, and hence the ‘emptiness’ is the space of miscommunication between them. However the ‘emptiness’, as MacCannell argues, is not really “empty”. As he states in the opening of his book of that name, ‘tourism is a primary ground for the production of new cultural forms on a global base’ (1992:1). So that, he argues these ‘empty meeting grounds’ are actually ‘vibrant with people and potential and tense with repression’³ (ibid:2), and that there are ‘costs of attempting to go on with the kinds of social relationships, thinking and curriculum we now have’ (ibid:3) . The costs of the kinds of relationships and thinking that are taken for granted within those meeting grounds, which make them, despite their dearth of communication, not empty at all, are, it seems to me, considerable. There is high risk of conflict breaking out in many of these meeting grounds, which could lay the ground for a considerable development of strife and hostility between peoples. It is imperative, therefore, to examine some of the reasons for the lack of communication or miscommunication that exist within the world of tourism, to analyze the ‘touristic culture’ that has emerged, and to ruminate on some of the ways that conflict may be avoided.

The term “touristic culture” has been used by several authors to refer to different things. Crick in his book on Sri Lankan tourism, discusses “touristic culture” from the point of view of tourists. Tourists, as has been commented by many observers, are living

³ Some interesting papers that illustrate this “vibrancy” and “repression” can be found in a special issue edited by MacCannell (1989) in the *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 16, issue 1. Papers that particularly illustrate this are those by Sweet (1989) and Evans Pritchard (1989).



a life that is different when they are on holiday as opposed to the one that they live at home (see for example Graburn 1989). “For if anthropology is normally concerned with people in culture, with international tourists one is dealing with people who are essentially ‘out of’ their normal cultural context; they are out of normal time and space” (Crick 1994:5). What they live, Crick suggests, this betwixt and between state that is “distinct from the normal workaday world” is a “touristic culture” (ibid). This culture has been created also because of a set of relationships different than those that take place at home; it is created within the context of tourism, that is: leisure, fun, adventure, exploration. What is also important to recognize is that this “touristic culture”, shaped by people “on holiday”, can become a prototype, that is a phenomenon to imitate, for people living in tourist spaces. Thus in a number of ways their “touristic culture” leaks out to influence the places and people in which they visit.

The person who extensively explores the idea of a “touristic culture” from the point of view of the local people, whose culture becomes the object of the tourist gaze, is Michel Picard (1992, 1995, 1996, 1997). Picard argues that the culture of Bali has been shaped by tourism over the decades to be something that cannot be divorced from tourism itself. The phenomenon of tourism has made the Balinese aware of their culture in a different way, and this, he refers to as “touristic culture”. The “touristification” of a society, Picard argues, is not about “impacts”, external influences that shape a passive society, but instead it is a process that proceeds from within (1995:46, 1996:198). “Or to be more precise, it blurs the boundaries between the inside and the outside, between what is ‘ours’ and what is ‘theirs’, between that which belongs to ‘culture’ and that which pertains to ‘tourism’” (Picard 1995:46). In this respect we see within the context of this relationship the creation of something new, a third thing one might say, and not a simple question of a preservation of “tradition”, or the degradation of it (1996).

Andrew Causey (2003) analyzes this creation of a ‘touristic culture’ in a somewhat different manner. He suggests that tourism allows for both locals and tourists the opportunity to play around with different kinds of identities. He calls this ‘utopic spaces’, spaces where people can act in fanciful, ludic ways, testing things out. Toba Batak he suggested acted in ways that were ‘atypical’ when they were in tourist spaces (2003:26), and that this liminality of theirs was directly related to the liminality of tourists. He says



it seems as if people are freed from their cultural rules, to act in ways that would never take place outside the realm of tourism. I attempt to show that though the behaviour in Labuan Bajo is also 'atypical' in many ways, there are certainly cultural logics that underlie the way people act, that has been transformed by tourism and the acting within touristic spaces.

My intention in this paper is to look at the "touristic culture" that is emerging in the town of Labuan Bajo on the west coast of Flores. My concern here is not so much to look at the culture that is the object of the tourist gaze, as Picard does (and I have examined elsewhere, Erb 1998, 2000, 2001), but to look at what might be called the "slippage", of social and cultural meanings, that are taking place because of tourism. This partially has to do with the tourism space shaped by and for people on holiday. Within this tourism space, cultural values that are essential to interaction between people at a local level, can end up being, as they are redefined and shaped in tourism encounters, the cause of conflict between people of different cultures. The values that emerge in these "empty meeting grounds" participate in and originate from the various cultures that meet and mix in these places. However from them emerges a "touristic culture", that is "tense with repression"; something that is a mixture of different cultures, of both, and yet not of both. Thus people who believe they are meeting on common ground, end up often miscommunicating. This as time has gone on has resulted in the potential for considerable hostility. I intend to examine these miscommunications by looking at what I see as clashes in cultural values that come into contact within these tourism encounters, and then re-emerge and resurface as something new. This new "culture" is based on certain moral values that are important within local society. However in the context of tourism these moral values, which have many positive and beneficial effects in local social contexts, can end up shifting into something that can cause conflict between peoples of differing cultural understandings.

Socio-Scapes of Labuan Bajo Tourism



Labuan Bajo, a town of approximately 6000 (and growing) sprawling along the coast of western Flores, in the regency of Manggarai, was at one time a fishing village⁴, occupied by descendents of immigrants from other islands. To this day the town is one of the most “ethnically” diverse places on the island of Flores, partially due to the history of colonialism of various sorts on Flores over the centuries, partially due to the plans and realizations of tourism developments over the past several decades. Since the late 1970’s Labuan Bajo was earmarked as a site for tourism development because of its status as a “gateway” to the island of Komodo, where are located the unique and endangered giant lizards, called Komodo “dragons” (*Varanus komodensis*). The area was marked out as a National Park in 1980, and since 1986 the Komodo National Park has been a World Heritage Site.

Tourism arrivals to the National Park have been monitored since the late 1980’s when the numbers started to increase dramatically. The first statistics that were gathered systematically in 1989, show that over 12,000 people visited the Park that year, while by the mid-1990’s when the tourist arrivals reached their peak, just before various political and economic crises hit Indonesia, there were over 30,000 visitors (see figure 1). Most of these visitors were foreigners⁵. These high number of visitors registered at the National Park did not necessarily set foot in the town of Labuan Bajo, since a significant number of them were cruise ship passengers, who only alighted on the islands of Komodo and/or Rinca, the two biggest islands in the Park. In the late 1980s and mid 1990s an increasing number of tourist arrivals were part of “package” tour groups, who traveled together to and away from Flores, led by their own “tour leader”, someone often of their own nationality, and aided by a local “guide”. Perhaps the largest number of visitors who actually visited Labuan Bajo, however, were those “free and easy”, independent travelers, many of whom were “back-packer” type tourists on their way around the world, and traveling for many months, a year or more. These types of tourists were the ones who had a significant influence on the growth of the tourism sectors in Labuan Bajo, since they

⁴ Though the social history of Labuan Bajo is yet to be written, some recent investigations I made there have led me to re-assess this idea. Labuan Bajo in the early 20th century, was quite possibly a fairly cosmopolitan place already, with Filipino, Japanese and many people coming from other islands in Indonesia resident there.

⁵ Interestingly this is unlike in many other famous tourist spots in Indonesia, where domestic tourists outnumber the foreign ones. See for example Adams 1998.



were the ones who often relied upon the services provided directly by entrepreneurs in the town. The package tours were increasingly handled by offshore companies based on other islands, who whisked tourists in and out with often minimum interaction with locals or local businesses.

Apart from accommodation and food, the sector most significantly affected by these travelers' presence, was that of "transportation". The ferry service that brought

Figure 1 Tourist Arrivals, based on Information received from Komodo National Park

Year	Int'l	Domestic	Total
1989	7,870	991	8861
1990	11,840	1,080	12,920
1991	15,071	969	16,040
1992	16,553	678	17,231
1993	15,338	1,090	16,428
1994	20,421	2,000	22,421
1995	26,034	2,241	28,275
1996	29,040	1,790	30,830
1997	29,841	2,477	32,318
1998	21,547	2,977	24,524
1999	15,806	2,049	17,855
2000	11,137	1,313	12,450
2001	12,342	1,272	13,614
2002	12,838	2,320	15,258
2003	11,084	1,402	12,486
2004	16,648	10,707	27,355

people to Labuan Bajo has on and off over the years had a service that dropped people at Komodo Island, but this has not been reliable, and because of unpredictable schedules, many people are forced to, or even prefer to, rent fishing boats to travel to Komodo and other islands in the Park. Fishing folk have therefore found that this has been a significant



addition to their livelihood, and many of them have come to specialize in ferrying tourists. As for land transportation across the island of Flores, to the attractions further east (especially the tri-colored volcanic lakes of Kelimutu, another World Heritage site), local buses are not very comfortable and take a long time and considerable patience, which many “travelers” do not have. A significant proportion of them look into alternative transportation, and for that reason people with motorized transportation, such as passenger cars or vans, have come also to seize the opportunity for making money by renting their car and driver⁶ to take those who want to travel overland to the towns and “attractions” further east.

The boom years of the early 1990’s saw a considerable change in the social and spatial landscape of Labuan Bajo. Small “hotels”, (more appropriately perhaps labeled “guest houses”, or home stays) popped up around the town, adding to the initial few that had existed from the 1970s. A number of these “hotels” were opened by Chinese traders who had long had business interests in Labuan Bajo; others by ex-civil servants who had moved to Labuan Bajo in earlier years in the line of service. They had bought or been allocated land because of close relations with the leaders of the community, and later used this land to build these small establishments. The descendants of the local fishing population opened home stays as well, but many of these were aimed at the increasingly mobile local population, who traveled to Java and Bali over land and sea, and exited Flores via Labuan Bajo. The social landscape of Labuan Bajo was also significantly changed by the influx of mostly young men, but also young women, to Labuan Bajo who sought employment in tourism. These young people came mostly from all over the regency of Manggarai, in which the town of Labuan Bajo is located⁷, but also some came from further away, from other places in Flores, or from other islands. This influx of people from the highland areas of Manggarai looking for work either directly, or indirectly because of Labuan Bajo’s development as a tourist town, meant that the town changed quite dramatically from originally being a place of predominantly coastal fishing

⁶ It is not possible to rent cars in Flores without a driver. The condition of the roads is such that only experienced drivers should drive on them. No car owner would rent a car to a tourist to drive on their own. This has been a cause of annoyance for some tourists.

⁷ In July 2003, the regency of Manggarai was officially divided into two separate regencies. Labuan Bajo is now the capital of Western Manggarai.



folk, descendent from Bimanese on Sumbawa Island, Bajau, a far flung fishing folk in Indonesia, or Bugis, from Sulawesi, all Muslim, to a population at least half comprised of mountain bred, Catholics, descendent of farmers and not at all proficient in matters of the sea. A certain uneasy division of labour ensued within these tourism developments. Fishing folk who had the boats to rent to tourists, were dependent on the land folk who worked in the “hotels”, to get customers. Also the people who owned automobiles were mostly not involved directly in tourism businesses themselves, so they also were dependent on hotel, or freelance staff to bring them customers who wanted to rent their land transportation.

In more recent years there has been a small, but growing European ‘ex-patriate’ population in Labuan Bajo. They have settled in Labuan Bajo mainly because of the opportunities that have become available in tourism. The first accredited dive master to settle in Labuan Bajo in around 1992, was a German fellow, who initially worked for other people, operating out of hotels, but has more recently contracted a hotel on his own. Several other Western ‘dive masters’ have taken up work in the dive industry that expanded in the 90s (there are about 5 or 6 dive shops in Labuan Bajo), but most of them have not stayed for more than a year. Most of them had established relationships with local people for a period of time. This is true with a number of other young westerners, who entered Labuan Bajo as tourists. After establishing a relationship with a local, some of these relationships ended in marriage, some did not. Two Dutch women who had the idea to open up an internet café in Labuan Bajo, but had to stop because of the prohibitive cost of the telephone charges, eventually also contracted a hotel and opened up a bar, and have marriage local men. Some older westerners have opened up businesses in Labuan Bajo as well. An Australian couple who have several “Eco-Lodges” in Indonesia, opened one in Labuan in 2001, while in around 2000 a Englishman who ran a turtle sanctuary and a dive shop in Lombok, also opened a dive shop in Labuan Bajo. One interesting example is the case of a Dutch man who sold his apartment in Amsterdam and has retired to Labuan Bajo. The ‘retirement visa’ scheme initiated by the Indonesian government (perhaps in imitation of the same scheme found in other Southeast Asian countries), has allowed for people like him, with a pension, to get a long term resident visa, with, however a local sponsor. One Chinese businessman in Labuan Bajo expects this to be a



growing trend, and plans to build a type of 'retirement community' on the north coast of Labuan Bajo. These 'Western' residents of Labuan Bajo, no matter what their occupation or their relationship to local people, are almost invariably placed in the category 'turis' by local people. 'Turis' in this sense has taken on a kind of an ethnic designation (see also Erb 2000), and is not understood as a temporary activity that people are engaged in. So that local people who travel, as they increasingly do, for enjoyment, 'libur', also to places like Labuan Bajo from the inland towns, would not be considered to be 'turis'.

The increasing numbers of foreigners of different kinds therefore in Labuan Bajo, both from other places in Indonesia, as well as from abroad, both visiting, resident or semi-resident, has had a profound effect on the social landscapes of interaction in the town. The following sections will attempt to grapple with these shifting socio-scapes, the inverted moral basis for increasing numbers of interactions, and the miscommunications that these entail.

Struggles in the Moral Space of 'Near-Far': Tourists, Guests and Friends (Social Disjunctures of Far and Near)

This designation of foreigners as fundamentally different types of persons associated with this category 'turis', colours the content of this category in a number of ways. Being thought of as tourists, even though they may not be 'tourists', points to the meaning of tourism as somehow essential to their being in the minds of Labuan Bajo people. One of the characteristics of tourists as transient, as moving on and not remaining in place or in most probably in contact, characterizes the way that Labuan Bajoans see western visitors. They are also fundamentally seen as 'consumers', not 'producers', and therefore their major duty is to 'consume'. Since they are temporary, it is therefore quite necessary to get what benefit one can from them, while they are around. The fleeting nature of the tourist visit, means that tourists have no social positioning. They are not anchored in the community, and hence are not locked in to continuing relationships of give and take. For this reason as well, it is necessary to engage in a 'give and take' within the short period of time that the 'tourist' is located in Labuan Bajo. This is also true for the resident foreigner. One Australian man who married a Manggaraian woman and runs



a sailing boat that takes people on trips around the National Park, bought with his wife, some land in a village about 20 kilometres from Labuan Bajo. In that village there are two ‘cultural groups’ that often put on displays of the famous Manggaraian whip games for tourists (see Erb 2000, 2001), and have thus come to depend on tourist money. They notified this “tourist” that he and his wife would have to pay for water that they drew from the village spring. For residents of the village, who hold land there, this is an unheard of request. Within this ‘tourism space’ therefore, this individual was not being accepted as a bona fide “resident” of the village with particular rights and duties in the village. This is a clear departure from traditional Manggaraian ways of welcoming guests and incorporating strangers and incomers into their village. In this sense, although this person and his wife were ‘near’, resident normally expected to participate in the rights and duties of the village, they were being treated in an inverted manner as those from ‘afar’.

The competition for getting access to these visitors and benefits associated with a relationship with them, whether truly transient or more long term, can be quite fierce. This is particularly true in relationships with another ambiguous category of individuals in Labuan Bajo, those referred to as ‘guides’. As mentioned above, many young people entered into tourism jobs in Labuan Bajo over the past decade, particularly the early 1990s, when the numbers of tourists boomed, and many jobs of a formal and informal nature were available. In the earlier years, when there were fewer opportunities in tourism, the people who worked in tourism were mostly “professionals”; but later due to lack of available skilled labor, the tourism sector becoming increasingly “informal”. The word “guide” has become in more recent years a highly ambiguous category, no longer really associated with the actual ‘profession’, but more also as a moral category of those who deal with foreigners- ‘turis’. In the town of Ruteng in Central Manggarai, which used to be a main tourist entry point to western Flores, the term “guide” seems to be used more clearly to refer to people who serve the function of “pathfinders” (Cohen 1985). They take people to places which normally would be more difficult to access if it wasn’t for their aid. In Labuan Bajo, however, the term seems to be used ubiquitously for anyone



associated with tourism, except for females⁸. For example “guide” is used for all male staff of hotels, though female staff are not called “guides”. This is not necessarily because their tasks are any different, since both men and women for example will wait on tables in the hotel restaurants, and receive guests, checking them in and the like. Even though the male staff do not necessarily “guide” tourists anywhere, they are still referred to as “guides”⁹. Others who are referred to as “guides” are those who have “information centers”. The people who run these “information centers”, claim to be providing “information”, but in fact their real role is mostly that of middlemen, connecting the tourists with the people who have the facilities to serve them. Somewhat like travel agencies, they are not officially so, and in fact provide services which are redundant in Labuan Bajo. They contact the owners of automobiles or boats and get a commission on this. The owners of these information centres normally have links to other ‘guides’ who can go along if the tourists so wish. Another type of “guide”, a very numerous and nebulous group of people, are those who search the streets, restaurants, hotels, dock and airport for “guests”. Most of them came to Labuan Bajo with dreams of making lots of money from tourists and some of them have actually done so. In general most of them are drop-outs of one sort or another, who found their way to Labuan Bajo usually in the early to mid 1990s. They search for tourists to “guide”, but what entails their ‘guiding’ is often bringing them to a bona fide business, like a dive shop, or a hotel, which can serve their needs, or finding them a boat or a car for a trip. For this ‘guiding service’ they attempt to collect a commission from the owner of the operation or transportation, and also perhaps from the tourist. The term that some outside of Labuan Bajo use to describe these kinds of activities is ‘*calo*’ - ‘tout’, not ‘guide’. But in Labuan Bajo this is considered to be a legitimate activity for those referred to as ‘guides’.

Once a tourist has been identified as ‘belonging’ to a particular guide who has promised to provide them services, others are not supposed to interfere in that relationship. A lot of conflict arises in Labuan Bajo precisely because of this competition.

⁸ It is true that there are few females that actually take on the activity of “guiding” in its “pathfinder” sense. There is one woman who runs an “information centre” in Labuan Bajo, and she would technically fall into the category “guide”, as it is used there. However the term primarily has a masculine flavor to it.

⁹ There are a number of fundamental differences between male and female labor in hotels. Females are more often “sleep-in” help, while males go home to their own families. Women who are married will not normally continue to work.



The 'guides' talk about their most fundamental problem as that of competition, and see their 'brotherhood' as a most important social relationship for them. This is most concretely encapsulated in the 'Guides Association' branch that is active in Labuan Bajo, *Himpunan Pramuwisata Indonesia*. A meeting of that association that I attended in December 2001 made their particular philosophy of relationships to 'turis' clear to me. The Tourism Board had asked them to hold this meeting, in their attempts to "professionalize" the guides and tourism in Labuan Bajo, since there had been a number of incidents of tourists being highly overcharged by 'guides', that had caused some concern (See Erb 2004). This meeting had been suggested by the Tourism Board to discuss putting into effect a fee structure that the "guides" could agree upon and that would guard the good name of Labuan Bajo as a tourist destination. As the discussion went on I realized that the guides themselves were not concerned about the tourists at all or about the reputation of Labuan Bajo. Their intentions behind 'standardizing' a fee were motivated by different concerns than the Tourism Board; they wanted to ensure that they would not undercut each other's prices and steal each other's guests. Asking a **higher** price than that which was to be set by the regulations did not seem to them to be an issue, in fact this was considered to be that guide's 'good fortune' (*rejecki*), if he could get away with it.

With the Western residents or visitors who are semi-resident, it appears that the dynamic of these relationships is essentially the same. Attempts to 'position' or 'lock' these people into more permanent relationships, is still built on the same principle; one tries to get as much out of this individual as possible, and that person ends up being sometimes so closely associated with a particular 'guide' in Labuan Bajo, who may afterwards consider themselves to be the 'owner' of that individual. What this means, in the case of both types of 'turis' (the temporary and more permanent ones), is that the moral basis of the relationships, is understood differently by the parties involved. For the tourist, the relationship with a 'guide' is thought to be one characterized by 'service', while for the resident there may be a sense that a relationship of 'friendship' has been initiated. For the guides in both of these relationships, however, the service or friendship is very differently understood. The guide attempts to position this person in relation to himself, and monopolize the social encounters, bringing as much 'rezeki' to himself from



the relationship as possible. The ultimate success of the guide in this is almost certain to be thwarted, since the varied understanding of their relationship and the assessment of the guides actions are so multiple. A few examples will serve to illustrate how I see this as an example of a moral-spatial inversion and an example of a disjunctive socio-scape.

A group of tourists who had arrived by boat from Lombok were seeking out information about various ways to get to Bajawa, the capital of the next regency east. Over a space of two days, they discussed various means and asked advice from various people. They had been considering renting a car, and had negotiated for a period of time with one guide. They finally decided to go by bus. They had been told that the one bus that was sure to leave early, and on time, would leave at around 7:00 am and that they should wait down in the street for this bus to go by. The next morning they were down in the street, and I happened to descend from the hotel myself. These tourists were very agitated, and were having a quarrel with one ‘guide’, who was sitting in the street waiting for the bus. He claimed that he was “helping” them, insisting that they were *his* ‘guests’, since they when they had arrived in Labuan Bajo two days earlier it was on a boat from a company that he had a share in. He had been the first person to greet them when they got off the boat, after asking them where they wanted to go they had told him. He seemed to have been oblivious to the fact that in the meantime that they had been discussing with other guides about possible alternative transportation, and when they were ready to leave for Bajawa, coincidentally his shop being across the street from the hotel, he was aware of their movements. Therefore he was giving his ‘services’ to them, claiming that he was their “guide” and they his “guests”. When the bus came, he told the driver that they were his “guests”, and that they would have to pay a higher price for their bus ticket so that he could get his commission. Eventually they did, but the incident left a bad feeling in them about “guides” and the idea of being a “guest” in Labuan Bajo. This ‘guide’ had the idea that somehow, over a space of time, his ‘claim’ on them had remained, and that he had the right to profit from the encounter.

Two other incidents illustrate these points in relation to ‘ex-patriate’ Europeans in Labuan Bajo. The German dive-master mentioned earlier decided to purchase land for his business, but needed to have an intermediary to aide him in the land transaction. He had operating out of one hotel, one of the ones coincidentally owned by a Manggaraiian



family (as opposed to Chinese, Bugis or Bajau), and asked for the assistance of the owner. The son of the owner facilitated the transaction, but without thinking of the any consequences to his family's relationship with this German, or how the original owner of the land would view him, he transacted the deal at a profit that was greater than the price that was actually paid to the owner. I spoke to the owner of the land, who had sold land to other foreigners, through other mediators, and he found this particular transaction particularly objectionable. The German had visited him on other occasions, during the land deal, and himself eventually found out that he had paid an excessive price and cut off his ties and his business relationship with the family. Subsequently the son of the hotel owner claimed the land, since indeed the certificate of ownership was registered in his name, since foreigners cannot own land. There was another similar case of a Manggaraian 'guide', a relation of another aspiring hotel owner (who eventually contracted his hotel for other purposes), who helped a New Zealander negotiate a contract to have a small sailing boat constructed. The 'guide' inflated the price that was relayed to the New Zealander to twice the actual price of the boat. When this New Zealander found out he was furious with the 'guide', who ran away in fear of retribution. In both these cases there was an implicit trust on the part of the foreigner, that they felt had been betrayed by the "guides'" actions. The 'guides' however did not feel as if they had done anything wrong in these transactions, and thought that the idea of 'profiting' from their relationship with these foreigners was not only acceptable, but laudable (more on this in Manggaraian notions).

A final case emphasizes the notion of 'ownership', as it is associated with 'turis' residents in Labuan Bajo. The Dutch retiree that I mentioned earlier, bought land with, and received sponsorship through one 'guide' in Labuan Bajo. One night, when this 'guide', Y., was very drunk, I sat chatting with him about his relationship with this Dutch man. It appeared that he was very disappointed in the outcome of that relationship. He had helped him buy the land, and he still claimed to pay taxes on that land (since he held the certificate). In appreciation for his help, this Dutch man had built him a boat. However subsequently this Dutch man began to contract relationships with other people, and started forming plans to start a business with another Labuan Bajo 'guide'. Y., his original 'friend', was so incensed at this, that for three days he refused to sign the papers



to renew his visa. He only did so after his wife threatened him with a knife. Y. couldn't understand the actions of this Dutch man. How could he become involved with someone else in Labuan Bajo. He, Y. was responsible for him, not anyone else. It was to his mind a totally immoral act to enter into a relationship with someone else, and he blamed the other guide for 'stealing' him away. In his tales of woe he tried to make comparisons between his relationship with the Dutch man and my relationship with one close friend in Labuan Bajo. 'You wouldn't do anything without first asking A. would you?', he asked me. I told him that I did not see our relationship that way, and that I knew a lot of people in Manggarai. There was no way that I interpreted my relationship with anyone in Labuan Bajo or Manggarai as being monopolized in this way. It was also clear to me that the Dutch man, a very gentle and accommodating individual, did not interpret his actions in the way Y. did. There was an essential misfit of understanding between these individuals. If anything, from other stories that I have heard, this Dutch man felt in some ways that he had been cheated by Y. and hence was seeking a new business partner. Notions of honesty, friendship, expectations of profit from a relationship were all very different in their interactions with one another. Essentially this characterizes the 'empty meeting ground' of interactions in the tourism space of Labuan Bajo.

Traditional Manggaraian concepts of hospitality/profit

I have already written elsewhere about traditional notions of Manggaraian hospitality and how these are shifting within the tourism context. I want to summarize some of these ideas here so that I can push this analysis of a disjuncture of moral spaces somewhat further. Since there is indeed much of what is done by Manggaraians in the tourism context that can be understood against the background of traditional social relationships, it is necessary to get some sense of what is considered to be the basis of morality in the Manggaraian social world.

Notions of 'profit', 'good fortune' and monopolizing a relationship that emerge in the meeting grounds of tourism in Labuan Bajo have some basis in the relationships that are found in Manggaraian villages. Firstly, in Manggarai money is only imperfectly part of the economy and social relationships. Almost everyone has a piece of land and a field somewhere from which they can access food. People will always have a place to shelter,



a place to get a next meal. Extended family relations are wide and freely accessed. One always has the option of going to stay with a more well-to-do relative (wherever they may happen to be throughout the archipelago) becoming an appendage to that household, and working for them for room and board. Indeed many local run businesses on Flores¹⁰ work in this manner, as do the hotels that are run by Manggaraian people. So that what one actually gets paid for something, in some ways doesn't really matter. Money is not a matter of life or death; it is in many ways a luxury. And based on the values mentioned above, that those who have wealth, should spread it around, it is not at all unusual, and in fact it is expected, that people with status and wealth will pay more for something than those without. It is a sign of generosity and big-heartedness, all the qualities expected of people with status, and deserving of respect, that they give more than they need to. Manggaraians, therefore, when they say that "tourists" have "lots of money", do not mean this in a negative way; it is not necessarily a sign of greed on their part, or envy, or trickery, to try and get it. If "tourists" are people to be respected and people of high status, as local people (originally) thought, then they would gladly give some of what they have to others. It is against this idea of 'money' as a specific type of resource, that should be freely used within social relationships, that explains to some extent the notion of 'profit' and 'good fortune' that is sought from tourists/foreigners. But in addition to this, I want to suggest that there are notions of profit and struggle/fortune, that can be found within the traditional marriage alliance relationships which are the prototype of host/guest relationships in the Manggaraian social world, can also explain somewhat the interactions that Manggaraians have with tourists.

The relationship between host and guest in the Manggaraian social world is one that is filled with multiple referents that gives this relationship a rich, sometimes contradictory flavour. Guests are honoured, respected, and shown a great deal of deference, at the same time there is an element of dependency that is created by the debt incurred in being a guest.

¹⁰ I understand that in Bajawa this is particularly true. One "professional guide", a close acquaintance of mine who lives in Ruteng, tells me that there are very few, if any, hotels in Flores that are run by indigenous Florenese, as opposed to Florenese Chinese, that have any kind of professional accounting system. They are all "family businesses", where the workers are family members who are not actually paid for their work. Labuan Bajo has a small minority of Manggaraian run businesses. One other "guide" that I know worked many years for his "aunt" in one of the only hotels run by a Manggaraian in Labuan Bajo, and was never actually paid anything, though it was promised that they would "take care of his future".



Being eligible to become a "host" is part of the aim of Manggaraian ritual, since "hosting" is a symbol and referent of adulthood, and in some ways the epitome of what it means to be human. Hosts, by being hosts, have an element of power over their guests. Hosting, and rituals that are associated with hospitality, are ways to domesticate and control the unknown "other" who has penetrated into the circle of one's home, hearth and social world. Guests are always received with honour in Manggaraian ritual contexts, typically with a white chicken at the entrance to the village, or in the front room of their host's house. Guests would also typically be presented with: a bottle of *tuak* (palm wine), also a symbol of sociality, coolness and hospitality; betel nut to chew, a symbol of sociality and unity; and tobacco. Other ritualized aspects of the reception of guests would be "showing" them various parts of the village and home landscape. This might entail receiving them at multiple places: the village entrance, the village centre, the main house of that village, and perhaps making their presence known to spirits of that house at key points of communication, such as the "mother house post" and the hearth. "Showing" is usually represented by giving a gift (more often than not nowadays this is money), and would also be reciprocated with a gift (again often money). Exchange is thus a very important part of the host-guest relationship.

Despite the offerings that show respect and honour, being a "guest" automatically puts a person into a relationship of dependence and debt to their "host", and the prototype of this relationship, as I mention above, is that of marriage alliance. This relationship is an inherited one, and continues over the generations (see Fox 1980). Until the wife-taking family have fulfilled a substantial amount of bridewealth payments for a woman, they continue to remain "guests". They are forbidden to receive as hosts, the family of the bride in their home, most particularly on ritual occasions, instead they are obliged to be guests to all of their wife-giving kin, paying them a formal visit on ritual occasions. When visiting their most important wife-givers, people must always bring gifts. Although these gifts are reciprocated, it is always expected that the more substantial amounts must be given by the guests (the wife-takers), to their hosts (the wife-givers). So first and foremost "host" and "guest" refer to ongoing relationships that are created and sustained through an integrating system of marriage, that involves continual acts of giving and receiving.

The occasion when the groom's family is most at the mercy of their wife-giving relatives is when they are carving out a relationship for the first time, and it was said in the



past that only 'wealthy' people would marry with strangers and not continue an alliance that was already forged. It may be in these kinds of contexts that friends nowadays talk about the aggressive 'selling' that wife-giving families participate in when they are visited for the first time by the groom's family to discuss a marriage. The bride's family not only extracts money, as mentioned before in 'showing' the groom's relatives all of the locations of their village, but they also ask highly inflated prices for sirih pinang, tuak and cigarettes, and they are not allowed to reject or negotiate these prices. This is to symbolize their inferior position, but also as a sign of their generosity towards the family that is giving them a bride. It is in this context, therefore, that 'hosts' end up 'profiting' from their 'guests', most significantly.

These 'new' relationships of alliance where overcharging is sanctioned and expected, can be likened to the inflated prices asked of the 'newcomers', the new guests who enter the Manggaraian social world as tourists. Instead of interpreting the requests of guides for inflated prices as necessarily objectionable, there is a certain Manggaraian logic that can be glimpsed behind their relationship with 'newcomer guests', and their idea of 'good fortune'. New alliances are there to be exploited, and the new guests are expected to accept this fact, especially since they are so evidently 'wealthy'. It is interesting to reflect that these ideas might in fact be gendered ones. For it seems to me that the male guides in Labuan Bajo are particularly prone to seeing tourists as a source of 'good fortune' and as 'profit', whereas a number of females associated with the tourism sphere in Labuan Bajo seem to have a different perception of tourists and hospitality.

Two of these women who I want to discuss here are long term residents of Labuan Bajo and have been associated with tourism for a long time. Both are wives of men who were civil servants and posted to Labuan Bajo in the 1960s, and they live across the road from one another. Since they owned land and had homes in a strategic location in Labuan Bajo, it was a fairly easy step for these families to become involved in tourism. Their journeys to tourism business associations were somewhat different however. One of the women was the wife of the health officer in Labuan Bajo who died in 1974. The priest who used to be resident in Labuan Bajo was an American, and she related that he often had visitors from America. Back in the 70s, when her husband was still alive, he



asked them to take in some of his guests. She related how they would always come and call out to her youngest son, who was very small at the time, “Sony, Sony”, when ever they returned to the house. So after a time they started to call the place, Wisma Sony. Then in the late 80s when Labuan Bajo started to receive more tourists during the summer months, and there were only two hotels in the town. The two hotel owners, rivals for many years, would send their extra guests to her, instead of sending them to one another. Afterwards in the early 90s, when tourist arrivals increased further, when she had too many guests she would then send them over to her neighbour the other Manggaraian civil servant, who worked in the livestock office. She said she had never purposely applied for any permission to be an official home-stay, but somehow in the early 90s, the tourism office in Kupang gave her the title of ‘home-stay’ and rated her accommodation as a “melati”, just like the other two hotels. Initially she wanted to reject the opening of an official business, but eventually she said she could no longer reject what she considered a sign of approbation. So she accepted it. To her, though, it was always not really a business, but instead a real extension of her relationship with the mission and the feeling of family with western priests, who had helped her and her family so much over the years (see Erb 2003b).

This was very evident to me when I met her in 1997. I had known her sister who lived in Ruteng, for a number of years previous to this, but had never known her. When I returned to Ruteng, after meeting her there, she insisted that I stay in her Homestay. It was still a fairly thriving accommodation place at the time, and it was full of tourists, but she squeezed me into a room that she had set aside for family guests, and refused to take any money from me for the time I was there. The place was bustling and people clearly enjoyed her hospitality. Everyone called her, “Mama”, and the open air dining room was full of photos, that people had sent over the years, as well as comments about their enjoyable stay there. Later she told me how she had been written up in Lonely Planet, how ‘Mother F.’ was so nice, and they recommended tourists to stay there.

The next time I returned to Labuan Bajo, after my initial stay at her place, I was surprised, therefore to find that she was no longer in operation. Her thriving business collapsed for several reasons. One was apparently her lack of ‘business’ sense, and the other was the very different ‘business sense’ of her children. Her children, brought up in



a house often full of visitors, had developed a different way of imagining and relating to foreigners than she had. One of her sons worked in the hotel with her, and acted as a 'guide'. Like other young men described above, his relations with tourists was very different from his mother. His relation with money was also quite different. Whereas he saw tourists as a source of money, she saw them as deserving of the most welcoming Manggaraian hospitality without thought of money. She would often help people who had no money, who she felt sorry for giving them free accommodation or even lending them money. To her tourists, western people, were always family and she treated them as such.

The livestock officer's wife is a woman who more clearly struggles with a sense of business hospitality which keeps its eye on profit, and the same generous open-ness of her neighbour. Staying in their home-stay on several occasions it was clear that she desired to receive people also in an open generous manner as guests who deserved great respect and attention, but knew that if she did this too regularly she too would go bankrupt. Possibly because she is not a widow like Mama F. she is restrained by the greater business sense of her husband. Their journey into an official home stay was done in 1992, after one of the guests, a French couple, who had been sent to them by Mama F, suggested a name for their place, Chez Felix, and that they should go into the hotel business professionally. "Felix" himself told me that he had received a lot of advice from his guests over the years about how to run a business, and indeed their business has flourished, despite having sons of the exact nature as Mama F, who have squandered a great deal of money, and often soured relationships that their parents had forged (as with the German dive-master as related above).

The suggestion here, therefore is that the way that people interpret Manggaraian notions of hospitality, may very well vary according to their social position, which is to an important extent in the Manggaraian world determined by gender. Males in the patrilineal setting, playing the role of 'inside persons', who do not change their place of residence, are the 'anak rona', children of men, who stay and receive guests, 'anak wina'- children of women. Anak rona is also the name for the bride's family, who receive and demand the homage due to them by their visitor's who come to take from them a source of life. In this sense the male perspective in tourism encounters taps into one aspect of the



Manggarai aspect of hospitality, looking for ‘good fortune’ from their relations with other men who traditional would come to take their daughters and sisters. Women on the other hand, as those who themselves travel, are perhaps the guardians of the other aspect of Manggarai hospitality which sees guests as highly honourable and deserving of all the respect and material comfort that can be offered. In their relationships with tourists, therefore, ideas of ‘profit’ do not sit easily with their ideas of how a respected visitor should be treated. They struggle to make a ‘business’ out of hospitality, which to them is not a matter of business, but of sociality; sometimes they fail.

Moral Spaces of Tourism: The Morality of Money

“Money is evil. Money should not be our first priority. I can live without money”, a Manggarai woman who runs a tourist information bureau in Sanur Bali, December 2004.

I return now to the encounters with tourists which often do focus on struggles over money. Tourists come to Flores with the idea that “bargaining” is a way of life, and that one must bargain down a price, or you will be cheated (see Bruner 1989 on the “tourist discourse” that locals are always trying to cheat tourists); this is in many ways a misinformed and malformed concept. The idea, also, that locals pay less than tourists, and that this is “unfair”, is also a misinformed idea. This concept of “injustice” is based on the idea that “everyone is equal”, and therefore everyone should pay equally. But there is no “equality” in Manggarai social relationships. As has been suggested above, given the network of reciprocity that exists in Manggarai, and beyond in the social landscape of Indonesia, people pay not for what they are getting, but according to the relationships they have with others. A person’s status, therefore, is everything. People are therefore not “equal”, and therefore, it is not surprising that they do not, therefore necessarily pay, or expect to pay, the same price for something¹¹.

I am suggesting here that the meeting of a number of different contradictory ideas about money, on the meeting grounds of tourism in Labuan Bajo, have helped to create

¹¹ This is especially so in the world of “bridewealth”, where different women have different “prices”, depending on their education, and etc., and different people contribute different shares of this obligation, depending on their relationship to the groom’s family.



this “touristic culture” where money becomes an almost constant bone of contention between “tourists” and people who work in the tourism sector in Labuan Bajo, that is primarily “guides”. As has already been touched on “guides” see it as their fair due to get “commissions” from either tourists or owners for providing what they see as a service. Lots of money is considered a sign of “good fortune”, and is avidly sought by “guides” in particular, but of course is a main concern of everyone working within tourism. Tourism is considered to be a particularly benign way that local people will be able to improve their economic conditions by the Tourism Board and the government in general, with only passing concern for how an obsession with money may end up actually being a detriment to tourism development within Labuan Bajo. Many within the tourism sector, especially “guides”, have found it particularly easy to adopt a very “touristic” attitude towards money. That is when they get it, they spend it just as tourists do, on leisure, fun and pleasure. They drink, and gamble and throw around their money, in the very easy-come-easy-go manner in which they witness tourists using their money, in other words as ‘pure consumers’. This manner of using money may seem profligate, however to them, it solidifies their community, creating and nurturing their social relationships with one another, just as exchanges of things in the villages creates and sustains relationships there.

Guides obsession with money is balanced by many tourists’ equal obsession with it. I remember one encounter with an American tourist who had just gotten off a boat from Lombok. I was with a number of ‘guides’ were inviting tourists wandering in the street to a barbecue café to watch the live football matches, and he came up to me and asked quite aggressively, “ I heard that costs \$10 for ten minutes of internet access in Labuan Bajo. Tell me the truth!! Is that true?? That can’t be the real price!! That’s as much money as I spend in one day!!”. We tried to explain to him the prohibitive cost of the telephone in Flores, but he refused to believe it and was sure that people were going to cheat him. Many other Manggaraians have complained about how tourists sometimes obsessively want to bargain for things that are in fact at fixed price. There seems to be a constant fear that people will be ripping them off, so they have to counter this with sometimes aggressive displays. What seems rather surprising about this is that many tourists also, sometimes at the same time, have a sense that they want to do something to help people that they consider poor, and want to see places that are ‘untainted’ by money.



This could be attributed to, what Bloch and Parry show in their collection on the morality of money, is a very ambiguous morality associated with money in western history and philosophy. Money is considered the “root of all evil”, and there is a considerable suspicion associated with those who try to acquire it (1989:2-3); this suspicion is held in relation to money as it “multiplies” and can be made and invested in business capacities. On the other hand, there is the philanthropical donation of money, supposedly done without any gain whatsoever, and most preferably done anonymously, or with no strings attached (so that no prestige or power can be gained from it, see for example Kopytoff 1986:77). Tourists go to Third World countries with a combination of these ideas that makes their attitude towards the locals there highly ambiguous. They long to see a simple life, untainted by money, still organized by commitment to community and acts of generosity. They also long to be helpful to those who are living in the Third World and in conditions of relative poverty in relation to themselves. Yet at the same time they want to be able to get the most “value” for their “hard earned” money while they are on “holiday” which often leads them to bargain ruthlessly for a cheaper price than the already low prices that are offered (see for example some of the contradictory behaviour illustrated and discussed in Bruner 1989 and Gewertz and Errington 1989).

One of the ways that ‘guides’ in particular, and others trafficking in tourist services in Labuan Bajo, ensure their ‘good fortune’ when it comes to encounters with tourists, is to block flows of information. If people knew all of their choices, they may very well not use the service of a particular individual. The question of ‘monopoly’ that I discussed earlier has to do with this. Keeping people in control means keeping them in the dark. I found it particular interesting in an encounter recently with a Manggaraian woman who runs a tourism information service in Bali, to find that her ‘information centre’, unlike those in Labuan Bajo, really does provide information. She will tell people all of the alternatives that they have to choose from, the cheapest, to the most expensive, and lets them choose. Often the cheapest alternative will provide no benefit for her whatsoever, but she feels that it is more important to sell her services than to make money in a way that entails blocking information and possibly tricking people.

This was a major contrast to the encounter that I witnessed in an information centre in Labuan Bajo a few days before I met her. I was in the information centre,



looking at their photos, when a group came in. They had been expected, and it seemed that there was a problem that was in progress. This group had been trying to find a boat trip to Lombok. They had been earlier comparing prices from several different agencies. They kept getting the same price, 4.2 million rupiah, so eventually they went and talked directly to the captain of a boat, which they knew went to Lombok. He was willing to give them a much cheaper price, 3 million, the price in fact that he got from the agencies who hired him to take customers to Lombok. It turned out however, that this captain was under contract with the information centre's owner L., and so when word got back to him, that the captain wanted to leave with this group, a big fuss was made. Since the captain had made an agreement without them, L. and his associates would be getting no cut in the trip. This was obviously not what they wanted, so they had asked the group to come and talk with them, and proceeded to try and negotiate with them to pay a higher price, to pay for additional fees which would have to be paid to the harbour master, and a small amount for themselves. This group adamantly refused and there was much discussion. The woman who was the spokesperson for the group kept insisting, we have made a contract with the captain. They had paid 1.5 million rupiah as a deposit. She said this is an agreement and we insist on the right to have it honoured. L and his associates kept insisting that the captain had not known what he was doing, and that there were other fees that would have to be paid, and that they would have to be paid by the captain himself, because he had agreed to accept their offer. The tourists were very even tempered in their discussion, and kept saying, yes, we understand, but we have made an agreement. One of L.'s associates was quite angry, and kept saying, "we have the right to stop this captain from leaving, the trip will be cancelled. How do you feel about that?" They responded, "We don't want it, but if so we will find another way. But we must get our deposit back." The problem with that was the captain had already bought solar with the money that they gave him. What was interesting was that L. and associates tried to convince this group that they were wrong and take the moral high ground. They warned them about being led astray by young men in the street. They shouldn't be talking with just anyone since not everyone who speaks English is a guide. They said they knew that, but had had recommendations from other friends who had travelled on the same boat. The information centre owner wanted to force them to pay by making them feel as if they had



done something wrong. “You should follow the rules when you are in someone else’s country”. And the woman countered, “We didn’t know that we weren’t allowed to talk to this man, that he was your employee.” But they kept trying to make them feel as if they were not following the customs and etiquette that was found in other countries, and thus they were being ‘insensitive’ and ‘bad’ tourists.

The interesting thing about this encounter, that I have described at length, is the way the ‘moral high ground’ is inverted. The ‘information centres’ of Labuan Bajo, instead of giving information on alternative means to get to Lombok, not only give only one alternative, but they all give the same information, and are feeding the customers into the same trip. Customers think there is a choice, but there isn’t. Boat captains, who actually own the means of transportation, are pleased to be able to directly take passengers, since they sometimes get more from the passengers than they would be paid by the agencies who act as mediators to fill their boats. When tourists go searching for alternatives, and find them, they are by-passing some of the established networks, that in fact increasingly act to monopolize the various services available to tourists often at the expense of the uneducated fishing folk who provide the service. So instead of giving information, they are in fact monopolizing and blocking it. But L. and his associates, since they have long worked in tourism and know some of the moral discourses of tourism, encoded in tourist codes of ethics, such as acting appropriately when you are in other people’s countries, tried to blame the tourist group for being the one’s who were doing the exploiting. As much as they tried to convince the tourists that they were acting unethically, their arguments were ultimately unconvincing and the tourists refused to budge. Subsequently the tourist information people tried to convince me that their real concern was that their should be someone to take responsibility if anything went wrong. If the captain just took them on his own, and not via a connection with an agency, who would ultimately be responsible?

The Near and the Far revisited

Responsibility, has indeed been one of the moral spaces that is often hidden within the tourism encounter. As I have argued, when relationships of ‘the near’ collapse into interactions of ‘the far’, responsibility disappears, and people act in ways that they



know no one will hold them accountable for. This is often said to characterize the characteristics of the tourist. What I have attempted to argue here is that various kinds of relationships encountered in the Manggaraian social landscape have been affected by the intrusion of 'the far'. Calculative relationships, that often seem irresponsible, were encapsulated within particular, specific encounters, associated with new marriage alliances, and were eventually domesticated and became the basic for continuing contact and the eventual positioning of the actors in relation to one another. The problem with certain tourist encounters, often those 'gendered' and initiated by males- 'guides', is that the positioning of the actors is very uni-dimensional. The 'guides' attempt to keep the relationships as they were, forcing the interaction to always be to their benefit, and controlling the movements and information that their 'guests', even 'friends' can make and have. This often leads to a disjunctive relationship between tourists and locals wherein each side is misunderstanding and misreading the intent of the other. The irony is that the tourist, as the original bearer of moral 'far-ness', who seeks the 'near' and the pristine 'authenticity' of social encounters, becomes the victim of the moral inversion. Tourists in introducing 'the far', have set the scene for the disjunctive socio-scapes to take place. The seek the 'near', but in some respects expecting the 'far' (in suspecting what locals will do), they help to instigate and exacerbate the encounters that are often more 'mis-meetings' characterized by misunderstandings and suspicion. It is of some interest to me to see whether in the years to come, Bauman's division of the world into 'tourists' and 'vagabonds', both who move freely without any social constraints of 'nearness' will indeed characterize the social landscapes of Labuan Bajo.



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