Ecotourism and Environmental Conservation in Western Flores: Who Benefits?\(^1\)

Maribeth Erb
(The National University of Singapore)

Abstrak


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’.

\(^1\) The research on which this paper is based was done under the auspices of the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia (Indonesian Council of Sciences) and with the sponsorship of Universitas Nusa Cendana in Kupang, during July–October 2000, and was funded under Research Project R-11-000-022-112/007 from the National University of Singapore. Thanks to those institutions for their support and assistance. Earlier research in Manggarai was conducted in 1983–1986, also with permission of LIPI and sponsorship of Universitas Nusa Cendana, a fellowship from the Social Sciences Research Council and a grant from National Science Foundation from the United States. Many thanks to my research assistants, Ardie Agus, Agus and Jul Jehadut and, Marsel Djeer, and most especially, Drs. Joseph Jelahat, whose inspiration and input into this paper cannot be measured. All conclusions and statements in this paper, however, are my own.
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 mean-
ing. 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 ‘environ-
ment’ 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
East Nusa Tenggara.

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’. ‘Re-
sources’ 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 ex-
ploitable 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 recog-
nized that this is also the product of a particu-
lar world view, and that the concomitant to see-
ing 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 be-
ings 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

To disentangle what has become increas-
ingly 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 ‘ecotourists’, and the ‘subju-
gated’, those who have been besieged by en-
vironmentalism living near the Ruteng Recre-
ation 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 dur-
ing the period of the industrial revolution was
slowly internalized into a form of self-discipline
(1979). The metaphor he uses that is frequently
quoted to illustrate this idea of ‘the gaze’ is the
Panoptican, 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 invis-
ible ensures order, because even when sub-
jects 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, hospi-
tals, schools, which with a ‘gentle hand’ sub-
jugate 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 leads 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). This is not unlike the situation of ‘imperial eyes’, discussed by Pratt in her book of the same name, where the search for knowledge and a ‘planetary consciousness’ led to the spread of colonialism starting in the 15th century. This is replicated in the modern day travelers’ search for information, knowledge, mementos and experiences. And indeed there have been many who have suggested that tourism is a form of imperialism (see for example Nash 1989).

Honey (1996) too takes a critical look at tourism in her examination of ecotourism as a particular type of tourism. She discusses the shift from ‘nature tourism’ to ‘ecotourism’, 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 ecotourism began its boom there in 1985. ‘The history of the golden toad and that of ecotourism are intertwined’, she says, for what is most ironic, it may have been an ecotourist, or a scientist, who brought the disease or organism into the nature park that wiped out the species (Honey 1996:3).

What I suggest here is that ecotourism 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 style imperialism of the New World Order (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). 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. Ecotourism seems to inhabit the same kind of space 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 ‘ecotourists’ 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 forestlands.

I suggest that we need to be slightly sceptical about the use of the currently popular expressions ‘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 regional 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 ecotourism plans

As discussed by Honey, ecotourism was defined in 1991 by the Ecotourism Society as ‘Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people’ (1996:6). Plans to develop ecotourism 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 ‘ecotourism’ site, with the goal of promoting the well-being of the local people, is 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). In August 2000, my counterpart, Drs. Josep Jelahat and myself visited the TWA office in Ruteng. We were told the history of the establishment of this park by the head of the TWA, Bapak Fransisko Moga.2

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 government of the Republic of Indonesia. 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 between 1979–1981.

From 1933 to 1979 the area was called ‘hutan tutupan’ (closed forests), from 1979–1993 it was called ‘kawasan hutan’ (forest

2 Bapak Frans had been head of the TWAR for only a year at the time of our meeting with him in August 2000. Since he was not from western Flores, but from South Sulawesi, he probably had very little knowledge, if any, about the setting up of the TWA project in the early 1990’s and the accusations made by many in Ruteng about the corruption involved in this project discussed later in this paper.
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 the first three of these enclaves during our research in 2000.3

The head of TWA spoke positively about the hopes to promote ecotourism in and around these enclaves. He had plans that the local people would 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, he admitted the TWA officials had 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 ecotourism. As Honey describes in her ‘search for ecotourism’, the funding for ecotourism 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’ (1996:16). 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 ecotourism 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 af-

---

3 Drs. Josep Jelahat is in the process of continuing this research.
fected 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 ecotourism, 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 1995–2000.4

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 Mese, which is now the center of the Natural Recreation Park facilities. The irony is, therefore, that the whole area associated with the entrance of the TWA lands, near Lake Rana Mese, written up as the ecotourism 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 trying to plant or clear land that they considered their own (land that was not pristine forest, but weeds or bush, but within the boundaries of the ‘protected forest’), they were thrown into jail.

So perhaps it should not be so surprising to find out that the subsequent TWA project was also riddled with accusations of corruption, mismanagement of money, and disregard of the aims of conservation. 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 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 adminis-
tation to milk money out of the TWA project. She said that as far as she was concerned the talk of ‘integration’ and community participation was a farce. She saw 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 LSM (Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat, what is often translated as NGO, non-governmental organization) at the present time in Ruteng told similar stories. Some of them had been involved in the TWA project, some of them had been approached to be involved, but had quickly extricated themselves when they had seen how it was run. At the present time a number of people see it as a front for a bigger operation in the planning stages. One LSM 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, he argued, 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 claimed, and it was already being tried in Flores in lands around the northern town of Reo.

Any people had critical things to say about the TWA, and saw it as a waste of government money. One friend brought me a brochure that the TWA had released in 1999. On the brochure were maps of the major tourist towns in western Flores, and a map of the whole island, but nowhere were there maps of the TWA land itself. In addition, he pointed out, the maps were outdated, since the geography of the town of Ruteng, for example, had changed already years earlier. He saw this as just a using up of government funds, since the maps were basically useless. In addition to seeing the TWA as corrupt and wasteful, it was seen as a major obstacle to village communities living on the borderlands. Villagers who were trying to utilize forest resources, and the lands of their ancestors, were put in jail if they were seen as infringing on TWA land. In addition to being a major hindrance to village life, they were also seen by many as being out and out thieves.

The enclaves

When visiting the TWA office in Ruteng, Drs. Josep Jelahat and I were given data about the boundaries of the original Dutch preservation zones 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 Careng, 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 responses divergent from

\footnote{I prefer to use the acronym LSM, rather than NGO, since the meaning of LSM seems far more clearly associated with ‘civil society’, than does NGO. LSM would be translated literally as the People’s self-supporting (self-sufficient) organization. The term \textit{swadaya} implies that a community itself is empowered. Whereas just simply saying that an organization is non-governmental, does not necessarily mean that the community itself is the one involved in the organization, or that any people of the community are so involved. This becomes particularly clear when looking at the case of the TNC, mentioned later in this paper, which is often referred to as a LSM. This is a misnomer, as far as I am concerned; it is an NGO, not an LSM. This will become clear in the later discussion.}
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. Those given by the Head of the TWA 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. 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 information that puts into question the claim that the boundaries had never been changed.

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’, the land that they had been ceded by the Dutch was substantially reduced. Some claim the reduction has been more than 50% of what their land had originally been after the Dutch had closed off some of the mountain top forestland. In Careng, for example, where the land they hold within the boundaries of 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 entirely 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 land was a false claim. His reasoning was that if in fact this land had at one time been agricultural, there would be clear boundaries indicating this. Villagers from Ntaur village, located near enclave Ros, complained that much of their ancestral land had been taken over by the TWA. They brought us up one mountain in search of the original Dutch boundary marker. In fact what we found was that the TWA boundaries are way down the mountainside, whereas the original Dutch boundary was at the top. This marker had apparently been moved, because one of the officers from the Forestry Office had not wanted to climb so high up the mountain, so he placed the new marker at the bottom of the mountain near a fairly well used path. When we climbed up the mountain villagers pointed out to us 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 (cordyline fructosa, called nao, in Manggaraian languages), and various kinds of fruit trees. We saw also the site of the old village where one elderly woman remembered living during the Dutch colonial period. Claims such as this make it 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 different tale.

An additional concern of our research was to determine how much local people have actually been included in the plans of the TWA. This was one of the main aims of this ‘integrated conservation plan’. It was proposed that this project would only be successful if local communities were involved. So far our research has shown that the local people have not benefited from the five years of the Asian Development Bank Project, and that, conversely they have been 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. And of course they would be paid substantially for it. The villagers were quite 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 a lot of 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’, (but with no wage, just the possibility of an honorarium), 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, with their assistance, other locals were being criminalized.

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 (Kramer 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 the closing of land that was traditionally agricultural land. Many people cannot understand why some of the land has been closed to them by the TWA, since this land is not forestland at all, but had

---

7 Referring to the Ruteng and Siberut National Recreation Parks, both funded by the same project.
for many years already been 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 previous 6 years that they were 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 ecosystem 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 TWA, and some plans had been mentioned to Drs. Jelahat and myself. However no concrete programs had yet been put into affect by the TWA, apart from the setting up of a number of points of entry to the park, where visitors must pay. It is true that some locals are used as gatekeepers at the entrance. Tourists who have been to the park complain that there is no information available and that guides that are given to them do not know English. We are concerned that, as the above points indicate, just increasing the numbers of tourists will not increase benefits to local people. However even numbers have not increased in recent years, 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 poor 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, or local businessman, who have abused the forestlands for extensive logging, or planting coffee, who have done the extensive damage, not the immediate residents of the enclaves or other boundary villages.

One of the problems of the conception of the Taman Wisata Alam itself is that it is unclear what the goals are. There is the goal of protecting biodiversity and watershed protection; for this they have received international recognition and funding. But there is also a claim to be ‘regreening’ the forestlands as protection for the global climate. For this they receive national level funds. 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. Any mountains have never been turned into agricultural land, but were sacred forestland. It is the regreening issue that directly conflicts with local interest. This involves land that people have remembered claims to. And indeed lands that are covered with their coffee trees, or sensus weeds cannot be constructed as ‘biodiverse’ forestlands in need of protection. And yet for working this kind of land people are being put in jail.
The ecotourists

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, who are trying to catch the two above-mentioned ‘premiere’ attractions of Flores (Komodo and Kelimutu). For this reason it could very well be a ‘hot’ tourist attraction for international visitors. However it has not succeeded as such.

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 rupiah. Kelimutu by comparison is only 2,500. What is more this fee is in contrast to the 1,000 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 second reason that people do not particularly enjoy their trip to the TWA, for those who have been there, and thus do not recommend it to others (a very major source of creating popularity in the tourism sites of Flores), is, as mentioned before, the poor quality of facilities, information and guiding. The guides do not know English, and perhaps do not even know the local landscape very well (we have yet to research into this aspect). There are no sign postings or other facilities to point out what it is about the park that is unique and worth visiting. Perhaps again, people who work there do not know themselves. Some visitors I spoke to were disappointed that they had not been brought close up to the lake, Rana Mese, by their guide, but instead could only see it from afar.

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, and was not, apparently considered to be illegal. When Drs. Jelahat visited the park on a Sunday, one of the members of the DPR had dug up a rare plant to bring back and plant in his own garden. Quite a number of other urban visitors had picked plants 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 proportionately 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. What seems an even greater irony is that the people who are persecuted for taking forest products are the villagers, who claim this as their ancestral land, whereas the city tourists, who are mostly government elites, get away with extracting forest products with no censure.

All in all, the attempt to tailor the TWA as an international eco-attraction has not been particularly successful. 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 built 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.

Regional autonomy, conservation and ecotourism

Many conservation efforts seem to be organized at a global level. The TWA is managed by the Department of Forestry’s Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation, the PHPA. The PHPA also runs the Komodo National Park, at the extreme western end of Flores, which gets heavy sponsorship and international assistance from The Nature Conservancy. The TWA is not directly managed, but it is thus indirectly associated with the efforts of The Nature Conservancy, TNC, which is a direct sponsor of the National Park grounds in the Komodo National Park, where they patrol the waters and keep an eye out for illegal fishing activities. They have also started fish hatcheries, in conjunction with several international advisors and partners, which are supposed to be steering the local fishermen away from destructive fishing practices (though how this is to benefit the local fisherman is not clear, c.f. Mous n.d.). Another international conservation organization, The World Wildlife Fund also has interests in Flores, in the running of the Riuang 17 Islands National Park. These organizations claim great success.

---

8 Granted there were more local urban tourists, than foreign ones, but this comparison of the destructive role played by the two types of tourists was independent of the numbers, but had to do with comparing what individual tourists did. The foreign tourists, even if there were many more of them, would still not have, according to the observations of Drs. Jelahat and the attendant, caused as much damage, because they did not dig out or pick plants to bring home with them.

9 And they often try to enter without paying. On that Sunday Drs. Jelahat observed that the member of the DPR who visited the park did not want to pay an entrance fee, because he was ‘government’. The attendant cleverly responded, ‘You people make the rules, if you do not want to follow them, who will?’ The attendant subsequently told Drs. Jelahat that he often had to respond this way to government elites who tried to enter the park without paying.
in the reduction of destructive fishing practices and the saving of the reefs. One of their claims also, is that they work closely with the local people, to promote ‘sustainable’ and true ‘ecotourism’ efforts that benefit locals and help them to live in ecofriendly ways within their own environments. Though the successes in saving the reefs cannot be denied, the methods are rather controversial, and are supported by only a minority of the local people. Patrol boats, apparently donated by the US Embassy in Jakarta, have been used to police the waters of Komodo National Park, and have stopped fishing peoples from gaining their traditional livelihood through fishing. Many fishermen claim that it is not just the bombing and the poisoning that is being restricted, but all kinds of fishing activities. At the same time some LSMs based in Ruteng, along with some professional divers operating in Labuan Bajo, intimate that the TNC itself is involved in making a profit from fishing in the Komodo National Park. Complaints also have been registered by local fisherman at the way that the TNC has attempted to promote ‘community participation’, in ways that do not work sensitively with the local communities. It needs to be queried whether international based organization can work with communities when they dictate what is to be done, and decide the conservation policies that appear irrelevant and economically harmful to local people, while they, themselves appear to be rich, and getting richer. The TNC clearly works together with local level and central government officials, who themselves are accused of being corrupt, elitist, and not concerned with the needs of the average village communities. In an era of regional autonomy, it becomes very crucial to create policies at the local level. However the definition of what ‘local’ is, becomes increasingly problematic.

In the TWA project started in 1992, according to the ADB guidelines, ‘local’ consultants were hired and ‘local’ people worked together with the international consultants to advise on the project. However informants in Ruteng were very critical of what was meant by the term ‘local’ in this case. The British consultant, mentioned above, was herself an international advisor, but her Javanese husband, also one of the consultants, was counted as ‘local’. Local people also involved in the project were government officials, many of whom were involved in skimming off money from the project. However it is unlikely that these were the ‘local’ people, originally mentioned in the project, who were supposed to benefit. Those ‘locals’ were presumably the villagers, the ones reputedly endangering the forest resources and earmarked to benefit from the ‘integrated project’ so that they would not need to depend on the forest. As it turned out, that particular category of ‘local people’, as discussed above, benefitted not at all from the project. And yet, they were the real ‘local experts’, acknowledged by the other category of ‘locals’, that is the local elites who were being paid as consultants, but getting their information from the non-paid local villagers.

The whole issue of the relative levels of locality needs to be addressed in the discussions about ‘local autonomy’. What we have observed so far is that the ‘local’ in ‘local autonomy’ means the regency, or *kabupaten* level. This is the level of government that has been empowered by UU No. 22/1999. Although there have been a number of initiatives, such as the village councils, which have addressed a lower level of the ‘local’, decisions to do with the allocation of resources is at the level of the regency. What continues to be problematic about this, to those people, who for example are involved in LSMs, is that though the DPR members, are supposed to be representative of various lower level localities, in reality, they have received their positions because of the
parties that they affiliate with, and their connections to the Bupati. Hence decisions can be made by the Bupati and the DPR without needing to consult with other ‘locals’ apart from themselves. This appears to have happened on a number of occasions in Manggarai over the past two years, and protests have arisen, because various people do not feel as if their positions have been represented. What I suggest here is that if local autonomy only means the rule of the kabupaten, together with global organizations that advise, and ultimately make decisions, than the pretense to ‘decentralization’ is actually a far greater centralization effort that goes beyond national boundaries. What is really needed is the initiative of real local communities deciding their own fate, based on as much information as possible about what their choices are. Unfortunately there seem to be very few people willing to give that information, or to consult at the truly ‘local’ level.

One local LSM that emerged from a local community on the outskirts of Ruteng gives a good example of the kinds of conservation decisions and efforts that could and should be made in an era of ‘local autonomy’. This LSM was organized by a few members of the village of Robo. The men who developed this LSM were concerned with the diminishing forestlands above their village, which they knew would eventually affect their water, as well as having potentially other destructive effects on their village life. So they decided to organize a number of their fellow villagers, including those who have themselves made money selling the timber from the protected forests of the TWA, to plant hardwood trees in their own fields. They are eliciting donations from the villagers in their community so that they can buy the seedlings to then distribute to villagers who want to be involved in this project. Another facet that they hope to develop is ecotourism. The office that they have built for their LSM, doubles as a homestay. There are cabins behind their office that they have built to house visitors to Poco Ranaka the highest mountain in Manggarai, the entrance to which is located only a short distance from their buildings. Poco Ranaka is located within the boundaries of the TWA nature recreation park.

Unlike many other LSMs in western Flores, they are not looking for foreign aid sponsorship, but instead want this to be a totally local community effort. They are very wary of the fact that if they accept foreign donations, they may be restricted in what they can do, and may at some time be subject to the dictates of the foreign donors. They therefore prefer to remain independent. The thing they are most sensitive about is maintaining their own self-sufficiency in terms of the resources that they utilize, and their plans for the future. They truly want to uphold the idea of ‘swadaya’.

This attitude of the local people in Robo is consonant with the kind of ideas about community participation and ‘sustainable economic development’ that are proposed by Ted Trainer (1996), who argues that only at the real level of a community can economic life be sustained. If a community is too closely tied up with the economy of the global market coming from the outside, it cannot be in a situation of sustainability, but instead dependency. As argued also by Gowdy (1998), where elites are the ones making decisions, the real concerns about the environment will always be ignored.

---

10 One case was what appeared to be the unilateral decision of the Bupati to lease out a very popular island, Bidadari, not far from the town of Labuan Bajo, which was a very popular diving spot for local residents, both from Labuan Bajo and Ruteng, as well as a place guides took foreign tourists. The island has been leased to a foreign businessman, who is, apparently in the process of enclosing the island, so that only those who stay at his resort will be able to use the beaches.
He uses the example of Easter Island, where despite the obvious disintegration of the environment, the powerful kept having stone heads constructed to represent their power and status, to the point where the society totally died out (75–77). So in the present age, despite the ‘mimicry’ involved, despite the lip-service given to concerns about the environment, great doubt is thrown on the real motives behind global elites and even the conservation agencies that they support (Luke 1997).

**Conclusion**

This paper wants to raise some skepticism about the benefits of ecotourism for the local people around the Ruteng Nature Recreation Park. I have suggested that where the ecotourism projects are in the hands of people outside of the local communities who depend on the environment that is being promoted, either the government or international agencies, that the benefits are questionable. Not only does it seem to be the case that the residents lose out from these kinds of projects, but it also appears that the environment itself, by being classified as a ‘resource’ to be ‘exploited’, ends up in the long run also being more degraded by those who manage it from a distance, than by those who utilize it locally. What we have observed so far is that ecotourism seems to be a strategy used to enclose the lands from the local residents 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, the Asia Development 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’. Although dis-
Bibliography

Asia Development Bank

Bhabha, H.

Eber, S. (ed.)

Foucault, M.

Gowdy, J.M.

Honey, M.

Kramer, R.A.


Kramer, R.A., S. Pattanayak, E. Sills, S. Simanjuntak and J. Eisen-Hecht

Luke, T.

Nelson, J.G., R. Butler, and G. Wall (eds)
1993 *Tourism and Sustainable Development: Monitoring, Planning, Managing*. Waterloo, Ont.: University of Waterloo, Department of Geography.

Mous, P.
Nash, D.

National Resource Management (EPIQ)

Peluso, N.L.

Petras, J. and H. Veltmeyer

Pratt, M.L.

Trainer, T.

Urry, J.