

Sailing to Komodo: Contradictions of Tourism and Development in Eastern Indonesia

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► Erb, M. (2015). Sailing to Komodo: Contradictions of tourism and development in eastern Indonesia. *ASEAS – Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies*, 8(2), 143-164.

Tourism is often pinpointed as a sector of growth for countries in the developing world, and this perspective has been readily accepted in Indonesia. Government officials in poorer sections of the country, such as Nusa Tenggara Timur province (NTT) in eastern Indonesia, have high hopes for the role that tourism can play in developing these poorer regions. This is not surprising, given the increasing renown of the Komodo National Park, just west of the island of Flores, where the world famous Komodo dragons reside. However, how exactly tourism is supposed to raise the standard of living and aid in development in NTT province is often unclear. In this paper I want to critically look at ideas about tourism and development in NTT, by focusing on the 'Sail Komodo' yacht rally, a major tourism event that took place from August to September 2013. Sail Komodo was as a marine tourism event expected to boost tourist numbers, lift the standard of living of people in this province and lower poverty levels. I critically analyze this event within the context of a 'mega event', and show how the contradictory ideas about how the event was meant to lead to prosperity for the poor can indicate the sometimes misguided relationship posited between tourism and development.

Keywords: Development; Indonesia; Mega Events; Sail Komodo; Tourism

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TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT: INTRODUCING A COMMON DILEMMA

Tourists come from the outside to see the exotic: from the inside tourism is viewed as modernization. (Bruner, 1995, p. 224)

Rather than viewing tourism simply as an industry aligned to neo-liberal thinking, tourism [should be] perceived as a powerful social force that needs to be better understood in order to connect it more effectively to development agendas that go beyond purely economic considerations. (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012, p. 301)

The contradictory expectations of tourism in the developing world were summed up succinctly by Edward Bruner (1995), when he articulated the different hopes tourists and locals have of the touristic encounter, particularly in regards to issues of modernization or development. While the tourist desires to meet an unchanging, timeless community, embodying values thought to have disappeared in the modern world, locals see tourism as the opportunity to em-

brace that which embodies the 'modern' and to begin to enjoy the fruits of development. This misfit of desires points to the rather ambiguous associations and expectations of what the relationship between tourism and development should be and may even lead, partially because of these conflicts of expectations, to underdevelopment (Cole, 2008, p. 215; Wood, 1979).

In their book on the ethics of tourism development in the developing world, Smith and Duffy (2003) also underscore the ambiguities associated with modernization and tourism as a form of development. Modernization is supposed to break with tradition, and yet traditional ways of life have increasingly become objects to be viewed and consumed within the expanding tourism industry (Smith & Duffy, 2003, p. 2). Telfer and Sharples (2008) further point out how tourism and development must be increasingly understood as posing a dilemma, for while tourism is widely believed to bring economic benefits for poor communities, such as employment, increased income, and diversification of the economy, the reality is that tourism benefits are very often enjoyed by a local elite and global corporations, rather than by the poor. Meanwhile, this also results in considerable environmental and social costs to the local communities that tourism is supposed to benefit.

In this sense it can be understood why Smith and Duffy (2003) argue that the ambiguity and contradictory relationship between tourism and development is an ethical issue. This results from the way various neo-liberal strategies translate development into a focus on ways of generating capital. The irony, Smith and Duffy (2003) suggest, is that regarding tourism as primarily a form of economic development and pinpointing, therefore, tourism as a way of generating money, negates the kinds of values which a holiday is normally thought to embody (such as appreciating beauty, relaxation, friendship, and so forth) (p. 162). The emphasis on money also means that the benefits to communities can easily be hijacked by others. Financial gain as the main thrust of tourism developments is often at the expense of other types of benefits, other types of values, and other types of development, which might be pursued through tourism (Smith & Duffy, 2003, pp. 8-9). Prioritizing money may also undermine attempts to develop a community sustainably, and reverse the more normal 'means-ends' relationship. Money becomes the end, not the means to an end, and what normally are the ends – relationships with people, places, things – become the means to get money (Smith & Duffy, 2003, p. 162). In this sense, scholars argue that the focus on purely economic concerns must be replaced with deeper understandings of the possibility for tourism to contribute to human development, to "fulfil ... human values and human needs" (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006, p. 1205), and for tourism as "a powerful social force" (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012, p. 301).

In her work on tourism policy-making in Southeast Asia, Richter (1993) suggests that many of the negative results of relying on tourism as a pathway to development in the developing world have been due to a prevailing government attitude that tourism needs simply to be promoted, or "boosted" (p. 184), and there is frequently no thought about its need to be regulated. The impact of tourism in Southeast Asia was not only immense, but often disturbing, while 21st century tourism planning continues to be mostly focused on following tourist tastes (Richter, 2009, p. 140) rather than on how tourism can lead to benefits for communities. There is also a tendency to favor the growth of elite tourism, which results in considerable foreign exchange

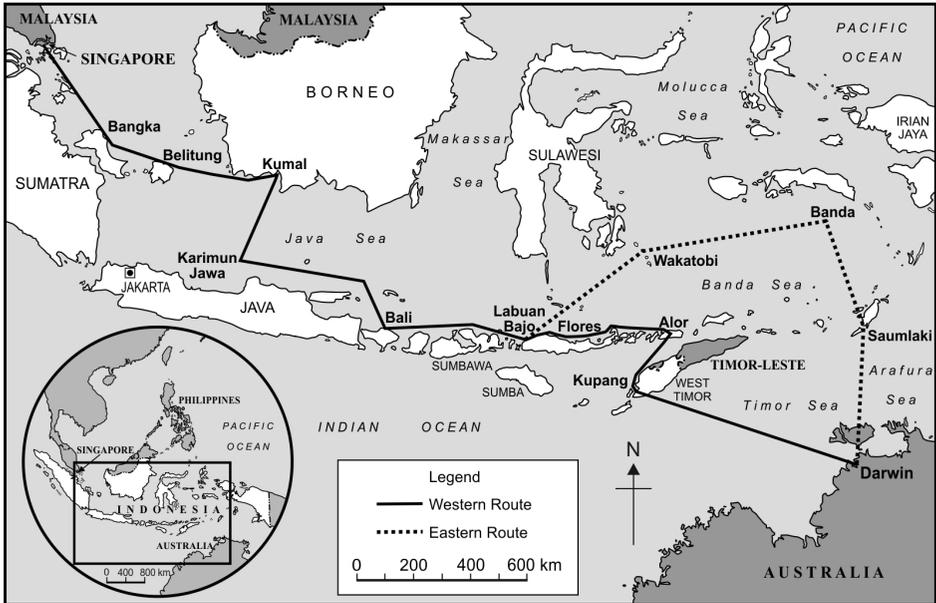


Figure 1. The ‘Sail Komodo’ routes (map redrawn by Mrs. Lee Li Kheng, based on original from Sail Komodo Festival 2013, retrieved from <http://www.travelfoodfashion.com/sail-komodo-2013-festival/#>).

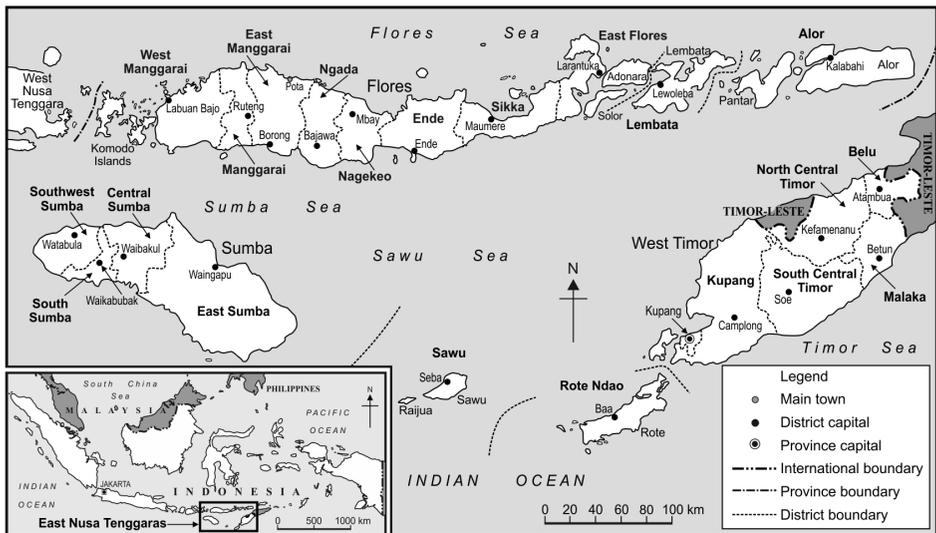


Figure 2. NTT province (map drawn by Mrs Lee Li Kheng).

leakage and encourages high economic dependency (Richter, 2009; Wood, 1979). This has meant that the type of tourism that could potentially benefit the development needs of poorer communities, such as budget or backpacker tourism, is neither promoted nor encouraged (Cole, 2008; Erb, 2000; Hampton, 1998; Richter, 1993;

Scheyvens, 2002). Additionally, non-decisions in regards to regulating tourism have led to serious problems such as exploitative sex tourism, human trafficking, and the uncontrolled spread of diseases (Richter, 2009, pp. 139, 141-144).

These earlier studies of tourism and development in the developing world, and specifically in Southeast Asia, indicate that the promised benefits of tourism as a development strategy often do not emerge. This is because the way tourism is meant to result in development is often poorly planned and misconceptualized. In this paper, I attempt to cast a closer look into such misconceptions by revisiting a recent event in eastern Indonesia initially touted as an example of how tourism would lead to development for poorer and relatively neglected regions.

This major event, covering three months in the summer of 2013 (from July to September) was called ‘Sail Komodo’ (Figure 1), and was the 13th in the ‘Sail Indonesia’ series – an annual yacht rally starting from Darwin, Australia, on the fourth Saturday of July and entering eastern Indonesia via Kupang, the capital of East Nusa Tenggara province (*Nusa Tenggara Timur*, NTT).¹ Sail Komodo reached its climax in the town of Labuan Bajo, on the western end of Flores Island – the major gateway to the Komodo National Park, which is the main tourist attraction in NTT province (Figure 2). The Komodo National Park has been increasing in popularity internationally, partly due to the frequent featuring of its star attraction – the huge lizard known as the ‘Komodo dragon’ – in documentaries and horror films.² In recent years the park has also become a sought out destination among domestic tourists in Indonesia, mainly because of its choice in 2011 as one of the New Seven Wonders of the natural world.³ I will examine the Sail Komodo event within the context of its promotion as a ‘mega-event’ in the eastern province of NTT, and as an event that was not only expected to result in a significant rise in tourist arrivals for this rather remote part of Indonesia, but that was also promised to be a way to bring economic benefits to the local communities of a province known as one of the poorest in Indonesia. I use this case study to highlight a number of issues about tourism development in NTT province, more specifically in the western part of Flores: (1) the lack of proper understanding about how tourism can benefit local communities, (2) the lack of planning and regulations in regards to tourism developments, and (3) the contradictory results that misconceptualizations about tourism and development can bring. Although my focus is on a specific remote place in Indonesia, the issues raised in this case are more broadly part of the “imaginaries” of tourism. The concept of imaginaries has shown that ideas about what tourism might be for tourists, communities, businesses, and nation states, is circulated and adapted in different places in different ways (Salazar, 2012; Salazar & Graburn, 2014). The suggestion here is that imaginaries are not necessarily

1 For more information on Sail Indonesia, visit the organisation’s website: <http://www.sailindonesia.net/rally/organisers.php>.

2 As Timothy Barnard (2009) suggests, the exoticizing of the Komodo dragon has happened continuously since colonial times.

3 The New Seven Wonders were set up by the Swiss Canadian Bernard Weber to stimulate conservation of cultural and natural sites across the world in the new millennium (World of New Seven Wonders, n.d.). Voting happened through websites and short cell phone messages over a period of 4 years. A lot of social media attention was given to the voting process in Indonesia, stirring a lot of national attention to visit the site, which had previously been of little interest to domestic tourists.

always connected to images of people and places, but also to hoped-for-dreams of what tourism might bring: prosperity, greater understanding of the world, positive relations with foreigners, and so forth (Cole, 2008). Thus, through an examination of Sail Komodo, I intend to highlight some of the ambiguities associated with tourism and development, focusing on the various ways that people imagine tourism to lead to development, as opposed to what the realities of tourism as a form of development actually are.

EXAMINING INDONESIAN TOURISM: MEGA EVENTS AND SAIL INDONESIA

Tourism must be the leading sector and the engine of economic development in NTT ... Our target for the number of tourist arrivals to NTT ... in 2013 ... can increase to 1 million because of Sail Komodo. (Abraham Klakik, Chief of Tourism and Creative Development, Nusa Tenggara Timur province, "NTT Natural Wonders to Boost Economic Development", 2012)

Like many other developing countries, Indonesia has been pursuing a policy to develop the tourism industry over the past five decades as a means to earn foreign exchange and create employment. However, despite its many attractions, both natural and cultural, Indonesia has never been particularly successful in fulfilling its potential of attracting large numbers of foreign tourists, particularly in comparison to neighboring countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand. While Singapore had 15 million visitors in 2013, and Thailand and Malaysia over 25 million each, Indonesia's foreign visitor numbers totaled only 8.8 million (ASEAN, 2015). Promoting tourism had actually been a consideration as early as colonial times (Picard, 1993, p. 75). After independence, however, the political regime – at that time rather anti-West – did not seek tourism as an economic growth strategy until the time of the New Order regime (1965-1998), headed by Suharto. The New Order was extremely anti-communist, though still initially wary of the contaminating values of the West, which might be brought in through tourism (Henderson, 2010, p. 8). With World Bank encouragement (Wood, 1979, p. 277), tourism was made an object of development planning in the late 1960s. Tourism arrivals increased from roughly 6,000 visitors in 1960, to almost 130,000 in 1970 (Wood, 1979, p. 276), and then to over half a million in 1980 (Booth, 1990, p. 47; Gunawan, 1997, p. 149). In the mid-1980s "diminishing endowments of natural resources, especially oil and gas" (Gunawan, 1999, p. 148) led the government of Indonesia to begin to rely more on tourism as a source of foreign exchange earnings (Booth, 1990; Picard, 1993, p. 80) and hence certain policy decisions were made to encourage tourism, including visa-free travel for key tourist markets, and landing rights for foreign airlines in several major points of entry (Booth, 1990, p. 48). In the 1990s, tourism was identified as a "prime mover" of regional economic development (Sofield, 1995, p. 691), and the target of 4.5 million foreign visitors by 1998, was easily reached before 1996, when Indonesia enjoyed over 5 million visitors (Hampton, 1998, p. 643). This was just before the economic crisis hit Asia in 1997, significantly impacting tourism throughout Asia (Cochrane, 2009, p. 256; Gunawan, 1999, p. 149). Indonesia was particularly affected given that the economic crisis in the country was quickly followed by multiple political crises: protests that led to the fall

of the Suharto regime, violence targeted against Chinese Indonesians, and religious and ethnic conflicts that spread to various regions of Indonesia up to the early 21st century. The attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001, the terrorist bombings in Bali and Jakarta in 2002, 2003, and 2005, the spread and fear of SARS in 2003, and the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 continued to affect tourist arrivals negatively. Nevertheless, Cole (2008) reminds us that the overall impact at the national level was minimal, since visitor arrival figures remained stable during that time at between 4.75 and 5 million (p. 56).

The relative stability in visitor numbers for the nation as a whole, however, needs to be compared with the more devastating effect of these various disasters on the more remote areas of Indonesia, such as NTT province, which easily saw a decline of over 50% in visitor numbers over that same time period (Cole, 2008, p. 56). It was not until 2009 that the visitor figures for the Komodo National Park, the premiere destination in NTT, and to some extent a benchmark of the tourism recovery of the province, exceeded those of 1996 (see Figure 3). As Cole (2008) points out, generalizations made by some observers about tourism to Indonesia cannot be applied to NTT, which has had a very different profile of visitors than many other parts of Indonesia (p. 43). For example, in other places, domestic tourists may contribute the largest share of visitors (such as to Toraja in Sulawesi, see Adams, 1998), and generally, visitors from other countries in Asia make up a large percentage of foreign visitors to Indonesia. Neither of these is true for Flores, where Europeans and Australians are by far the largest percentage of visitors (Cole, 2008, p. 43; Erb, 2009). One of the reasons why the recovery in tourism numbers took so long in eastern Indonesia was the change to the visa policy in 2003, in which the free two month tourist pass introduced in the 1980s was replaced by a one month non-renewable visa on arrival (VOA) at the cost of USD 25. The policy affected non-Southeast Asian foreign tourists most dramatically.⁴ Cole (2008) argues that the policy was perceived as a “dramatic u-turn” in the country’s tourism history, and a clear indicator of misconception of the ways that tourism, particularly backpacker tourism, can benefit poorer communities (p. 45). Backpackers were the most common visitors to NTT in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, but the amount of time necessary to travel to provinces where air travel was limited and the quality of roads poor meant that once the visa time was cut, visits were cut dramatically as well.

The annual Sail Indonesia yacht rally is an event worth investigating against the background of the government’s concerns over tourism decline and the desire to find triggers for tourism growth. It is also an event that is interesting to examine against the perceived class issue that underlies the prejudice against backpacker/budget tourism. The sailors who own the yachts that enter eastern Indonesia every year from Darwin are perceived by the government to be an ‘elite’ class of tourist. As such, they are desirable, despite the fact that their numbers are exceptionally small, particularly in comparison to the young backpacker travelers who make up the bulk of visitors to the more remote regions of Indonesia.

Starting in 2001, the Sail Indonesia annual event has grown from less than 20 yachts in 2001 to more than 100 yachts per year, in more recent years. The Sail In-

4 Most members of ASEAN still received short stay visa free visits.

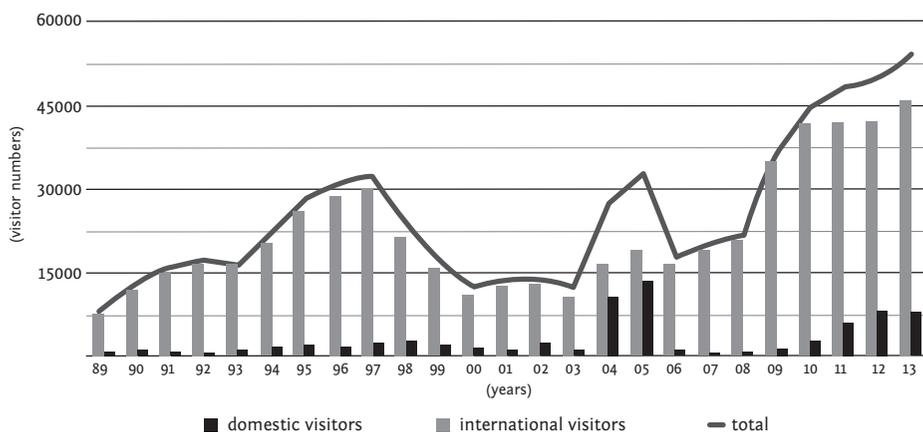


Figure 3. International and domestic visitors to Komodo National Park (1989-2013)
(Labuan Bajo Tourism Board, 2014).

Indonesia organization proudly proclaimed that since 2001 there have been almost 1000 yachts that have participated in this event (“Links to Stories”, 2015). One of the organization’s aims is the exploration of remote places in Indonesia that lie off the beaten tourist track (“Sail Indonesia History”, 2015). Over the years, local governments throughout eastern Indonesia have enthusiastically given their support, seeing this event as an opportunity to showcase their cultural and natural resources to this mobile tourist population. After 2009, the central government became actively involved in organizing these annual marine events in eastern Indonesia, as a way of siphoning money into the selected provinces for various infrastructural development projects to support tourism.

The governor of NTT proposed to host a Sail Indonesia event in February 2011 (“Menangkap Peluang Emas”, 2014). At the time the Komodo National Park – considered the ‘jewel’ of NTT tourism – was a finalist in the competition to be one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, which it eventually won in November 2011. The central government agreed to this proposal and promised IDR 3.7 trillion (approximately USD 250 million) to the province of NTT for various infrastructural improvements in order to prepare for the event. As noted above, the hopes of the provincial tourism board were that the numbers of visitors to the province would increase substantially because of the Sail Komodo event, and that the event would raise the prospects for tourism to become a leading sector in NTT, and at the same time lifting the living standard and lowering poverty levels.

It is an interesting puzzle why Sail Komodo, and Sail Indonesia in general, was designated as an important catalyst for tourism developments, given the extremely small numbers of foreign sailors actually entering Indonesia for this event. Why should this annual event, which over 14 years had seen less than 1000 participants, be the focus of such attention and hope for the development of Indonesian tourism? What does the attention this event has received from the central government tell us about the Indonesian government’s understanding of tourism, and the role of tour-

ism for local development? What does it tell us about the perceived role the government should play in this regard?

One way of framing an answer to these questions is to look at the event as a mega event. Mega events are a type of special events that are appealing because of their “innate uniqueness ..., which differentiates them from fixed attractions, and their ‘ambience’, which elevates them above ordinary life” (Getz, 1989, p. 125). Mega events are special events of international renown that are expected to raise the profile of the host city and thus are considered a significant tourism asset (Bramwell, 1997, p. 168). In his speech at the conference on *The Impact of Mega events* in Östersund, Donald Getz gave a detailed description of mega events as:

planned occurrences of limited duration which have an extraordinary impact on the host area in terms of one or more of the following: tourist volumes; visitor expenditures; publicity leading to a heightened awareness and a more positive image; related infrastructural and organizational developments which substantially increase the destination’s capacity and attractiveness. (Fayos-Sola, 1997, p. 242)

This definition of mega events appears to be part of the imaginary of the meaning a huge event would have for an area. Although mega events are widely perceived and promoted as a means of urban regeneration and development, job creation, and a major boost to the host economy, many critics have questioned these promised impacts (among others Baade & Mathiesen, 2004; Lee & Taylor, 2005; Pillay & Bass, 2008). Various issues have been assessed, including the huge expenses that are incurred, which may ultimately result in losses for the host cities; the substitution of gains in the event location for losses to other locations in the region; and the question of public expenditure reductions in other areas, taking away government spending on matters that might be more beneficial to the region overall (Baade & Mathiesen, 2004, pp. 345-346). These are issues that also surfaced in the assessment of the impact of Sail Komodo on the NTT province. Although the event was miniscule in comparison to the mega events analyzed in the literature, it was clearly framed by the central and provincial government promoters as having the kind of potential benefits outlined above by Getz. It was imagined that Sail Komodo would bring many tourists to NTT who would spend a lot of money and boost the incomes of local communities. It was imagined that the legacy of the event would be both a “heightened awareness” (to repeat Getz’ words) of the beauty and potential of the province’s attractions, as well as improved infrastructure that would support the imagined future increase in tourists, stimulated by the event.

METHODOLOGY: A BRIEF NOTE

My analysis in this paper is informed by many years of familiarity with western Flores, starting first in the 1980s during my PhD research on ritual and myth, and continuing in the 1990s on history and the revival of tradition. This research eventually led me to take an interest in tourism. I have been following tourism developments in western Flores since the mid 1990s, with almost annual visits of a month or so. However, I

did not have the opportunity to be present in NTT for the opening ceremony of Sail Komodo in the provincial capital Kupang in July, 2013, or the closing ceremony in Labuan Bajo, in September, 2013. My understanding of the events of Sail Komodo are based on interviews and conversations that I had with people before the event in July and September, 2012, May-June 2013, and after the event in April-May 2014. I also accessed multiple postings either from online newspapers (such as *Kompas*, *Flores Bangkit*, *Flores Pos*, *Pos Kupang*), or from Youtube and Facebook sites, from both event visitors and governmental sources, in order to get an idea of the (changing) assessments of observers and key policy makers as to the meaning and impact of the event, as well as a visual account of the events associated with Sail Komodo. My analysis consists of interpretations of the material derived from my own interviews, as well as interviews published in newspapers and internet sources. This analysis is informed by experiences of other tourism events that I have attended in western Flores over the years, as well as numerous interviews and conversations with local community members, people in the tourist industry, NGO representatives, and government officials. Therefore, before analyzing the Sail Komodo event, I will provide some more background on tourism developments in western Flores, and examine how tourism events have been incorporated in tourism promotion in western Flores and how they have been understood within the local context. A look at some of these earlier events will shed some light on the underlying contradictory ideas and misconceptions that I believe are held in western Flores about tourism as a source of profit and development.

TOURISM EVENTS, TOURISM PROMOTION, AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF TOURISM IN WESTERN FLORES

Let us hope that every cent that drops from the hands of tourists will fall into the pockets of people here in Labuan Bajo. (Provincial Head of Tourism Board in a speech at a tourism festival held in Labuan Bajo, July 16, 2004)

In the 1990s, the booming tourism in Indonesia was particularly obvious in the town of Labuan Bajo, in the district of Manggarai on the west coast of Flores – still a small town when I first visited in 1983. By 1996, when I visited the government tourism board to ask about tourism developments, the town had a hustle and bustle that was very different from the previous decade. The tourism officials recounted that tourism had taken off in 1989, when unprecedented numbers began to visit, and in the next several years the few small hotels and homestays available could not handle the numbers that began swamping the town. Investors from other islands in Indonesia were beginning to see the tourism potential of Labuan Bajo and land was becoming an attractive commodity. For example, one savvy hotel owner from Bali, who was also head of the tourism association of eastern Indonesia at that time, had bought numerous parcels of land from anyone who was willing to sell throughout the town and surrounding coastal areas. From 1990 to 1995, according to the tourist board calculations, there was an 18% increase of visitors on average every year (see Figure 3). Most tourists that passed through Labuan Bajo at that time were there to visit the Komodo National Park; they would later go east and visit “traditional” villages in cen-

tral Flores (Cole, 2008) and from there to eastern Flores to see the three colored lakes of Kelimutu. They were, as mentioned earlier, mostly backpackers or young budget travelers, though there were a few small guided tour groups shepherded by bus across Flores, and also some small cruise ships that held up to 20 passengers and stopped in several places in Flores.

Komodo Island and other islands known to be habitats for the giant lizards had been already a nature reserve during the colonial era. In 1980, Komodo and some of the neighboring islands were designated as a national park, and in 1991, the park became a World Heritage site. In 1995, *The Nature Conservancy* (TNC) – a large international environmental organization – began to assist the park authorities in monitoring the park, and recommended the expansion of the park's boundaries to include marine areas and promote eco and dive tourism as a means of conservation. TNC designed a 25-year management plan that revised the zoning and resource use regulations in the park (Borchers, 2008, p. 276; Gustave & Borchers, 2007). Their monitoring was successful in curtailing dynamite and cyanide fishing practices blamed mostly on communities outside the park, but also produced resentment among local communities, especially when a number of fishermen on several occasions were shot for purportedly fishing illegally (Erb, 2012).

This tourism boom of the 1990s was cut short not only by the dramatic events mentioned above, but also by the already mentioned Asian financial crisis and the fall of Suharto, which led to violent conflicts and major political changes in Indonesia in the late 1990s (Kingsbury & Aveling, 2003; Kingsbury & Budiman, 2001). The tumultuousness of this 'reform' era, and the other catastrophic events mentioned above, led to drastic drops in tourism numbers in Labuan Bajo, the Komodo National Park, and throughout the province of NTT. Major plans were formulated for political decentralization and regional autonomy, which were to be the major motors for democratization and political transition, as well as economic transformations in the regions outside of Java (Aspinall & Fealy, 2003; Erb, Sulistiyanto, & Faucher, 2005; Schulte-Nordholt & Abdullah, 2002). In the beginning of the 21st century, with the hope for major changes and a revival of the devastated economy, the word 'investor' had taken on a 'golden glow'. It was at this time that Sail Indonesia was inaugurated and was seen as a means of attracting foreign investment to Indonesia. In this sense, it is possible to see the blurring of the categories of 'tourist' and 'investor' taking shape in the Indonesian imagination. Tourist has usually meant 'foreigner' (Erb, 2000), and foreigners as investors were increasingly seen and promoted as the way out of the crisis situations that were plaguing the Indonesian economy at the time.

In 2000, I was present in Labuan Bajo when tourism board officials from the province called a meeting with the district tourism board to discuss ways to better promote tourism in western Flores. They suggested creating a permanent calendar of tourism events to be published on their website so that tourists could plan their journeys around these events. Were there no traditional ritual events, they asked, which could be scheduled every year at the same time among the Manggaraian people, the majority ethnic group living in the district? This suggestion to standardize cultural events for tourism promotion was a new idea for the local tourism board, and the staff pondered the difficulties associated with doing this.⁵ While in Bali standardized

5 See Yamashita (1994) on the inclusion of Toraja funerals in the Indonesian calendar of events as a form

cultural performance schedules and calendars of events were regularly publicized, in NTT this was not yet a common way of planning tourism promotion. If tourists happened to be around when the new agricultural year's ritual events were taking place, for example, where the famous Manggaraian whip games called *caci* were played, then they were welcome to attend. There were also some cultural groups that would perform these whip games for a price if a tour group desired to see a display, but a regular calendar of events was still unimaginable in the context of Flores.

However, the idea of staging a big tourist event in order to bring more tourists to Flores was an idea that began to stir among government planners out of necessity. With tourist visits so low, the head of the Manggarai district asked for ideas to attract the tourists back to Flores. One entrepreneur, a *hajji* originally from the island of Lombok, suggested a multiple day event with sporting and cultural activities, called 'Komodo Flores Big Promo Year 2000'. The big draw would be a prize of IDR 100 million (at the time around USD 10,000) for the winner of a cross-country race. Since the government did not have that much money for a prize, the *hajji* devised a scheme whereby no one could actually win the prize.⁶ However, despite advertisements in Lombok and Bali, the cross-country race with its grand prize only attracted two tourists, and the low level of tourist attendance for the whole three-day event led to the government officials not taking the affair seriously. Programs had been distributed, but locations kept changing, and everything started late because they hoped more tourists would attend. Even though the event was promoted specifically to boost tourism, no one involved in most of the organization or announcing of various activities, spoke English. When the rules were read for the race, or the prizes distributed at the last days' gala dinner, no one was designated to tell the two tourists involved what was going on. It appeared that though the local government really wanted to do something to attract tourists, they were not so sure how to go about it (Erb, 2005).

In 2003, the district of Manggarai split into two – a move that was fuelled by the belief that a separate district of West Manggarai, with Labuan Bajo as its capital, would have great potential to develop through tourism. Subsequently, every year a cultural festival was held to celebrate the anniversary of the new district as one attempt to fulfill the wishes of the provincial government to have a regularly scheduled event. On the first anniversary in 2004, the head of the provincial tourism board attended and gave his motivational speech (partially quoted above), encouraging locals in Labuan Bajo to go forward with tourism as a development strategy. However, how locals were to persuade tourists to let money 'drop' from their pockets was not well identified. The festival itself was seen as a tourism promotion strategy where local cultural or art groups would showcase various traditional ritual performances, yet the audiences over the first several years were almost exclusively locals. Information about the festivals was never successfully conveyed to tourists who were in town. The festivals were located at places not easily accessible to them, and information promoting the events at hotels was always written in Indonesian. So these tourism

of "manipulating tradition" (p. 80); and Cole (2008) who notes that "fixing dates" is a form of commodification of ceremonies (p. 205), and also may cause social conflict (pp. 236-238).

6 The prize was not given to the person who finished first, but would only be given to the person who finished the race in the exact amount of time, to the second, which was determined beforehand and sealed up in a coconut.

cultural festivals ended up being mostly cultural festivals put on by Florenese for themselves. In 2005, West Manggaraians elected their first definitive head of the new district. His support for uplifting tourism as the leading sector of the West Manggarai economy was ostensibly evident in his signing of the agreement for a Collaborative Management of the Komodo National Park, set up to test out new strategies for privatization of tourism and for funding the management of the park (Cochrane, 2013, p. 134). The collaboration was between the Komodo National Park Authority, the local government, and a Joint Venture company, Putri Naga Komodo. It was run by TNC and the Bali based businessman who had bought up so much land in the area in the early 1990s (Cochrane, 2013; Erb, 2012). There was considerable resentment at the forming of this joint venture. Many locals in the tourism industry wondered why outsiders were the ones awarded the concession to manage the park. There were also many who had protested against the TNC presence in the park, and had hoped for their withdrawal in co-management of the park after human rights abuse charges were brought up against them (see Erb, 2012). In 2006, the same district head also invited another international NGO, Swiss Contact, into Labuan Bajo to aid in planning for the better management of tourism in the region. Although ostensibly supporting pro-poor tourism⁷, Swiss Contact's approach was very much pro-business, and after a few years of their assessments and recommendations for the improvement of tourism management in Labuan Bajo, big investors from Bali and Jakarta felt more confident to begin operations in western Flores and the first starred hotels started to appear outside of town (Erb, 2012). Not long after this, foreign investors also began to move into the town and the neighboring islands in much greater numbers (Erb, 2013).

Although the district head appeared to support tourism developments, in 2008, he allocated a concession for gold exploration to a Chinese mining company, just outside of Labuan Bajo, right next to a small hotel resort and not far from the borders of the national park. The company began to drill for gold, and the drilling disturbed several small hotels in the vicinity. Those working in tourism and conservation staged massive protests against the gold exploration, and fears grew about what kind of contamination and toxicity would seep into the park waters, if the company subsequently expanded their operations and actually began to mine for gold. Within the following year and a half, this first district head was voted out of office, due to the massive unpopularity of his policies that appeared to not only misunderstand how to support community based tourism, but also appeared to be against the development of tourism and conservation in the national park (Erb, 2011, 2012).

Subsequent years continued to see more and more foreign investors moving into the tourism arena of Labuan Bajo and local communities uncertain of how to profit from tourism. Local NGOs have attempted to start programs to engage people in production activities that would help them to benefit from tourism. The failure of these projects was especially acute in the area of agricultural produce; at least 80%

7 Pro-poor tourism is an idea that is supported by many development agencies, governments, and tourism organizations, as the use of tourism to reduce poverty in the developing world. It has come under much criticism, since though pro-poor tourism is considered to be any tourism that benefits the poor, it is often the wealthy who benefit (see for example Scheyvens, 2009, p. 193). This appears to be the case with the Swiss Contact's programs as well.

of Florenese are farmers, but the produce to support the hotels and restaurants in Labuan Bajo have been continuously brought in from neighboring islands. Local residents in Labuan Bajo, some of whom had land to farm, repeatedly complain about their inability to raise vegetables and fruit trees for produce. Livestock, particularly cows, allocated by a central government program to support livestock raising for export, roam unchecked into farmers' fields. Since most of the cows are the property not of poor farmers, but government civil servants who refuse to pen them in, their rummaging for fodder keeps destroying the kitchen gardens and other plots of land dedicated to fruits and vegetables. For the farmers located further away from Labuan Bajo, where livestock destruction is not a problem, the cost of transporting fruits and vegetables from some of these more distant villages into Labuan Bajo is much higher than the cost of bringing them over by ferry from other islands. Buses charge the price of one passenger for every large sack of produce conveyed to the town. Conversely, farmers on neighboring islands can transport their produce free of charge on the ferry. Sunspirit, a local NGO, showed through their study (Dale, 2013, p. 139) that the failure of local agricultural production for tourism is a structural problem, not a problem of the unwillingness of farmers to produce for the markets of Labuan Bajo. However, the local government has not attended to either of these constraining conditions that keep local farmers from benefitting from selling their produce to the tourist market in Labuan Bajo.

Indeed, the continued misunderstanding of this problem is well encapsulated by the comment reputedly made by the governor of NTT in late April 2014: "Now that Sail Komodo is over, I am hoping that I will not hear any more about vegetables being imported from Bima, eggs being imported from Bima, meat being imported from Bima". The governor believed that Sail Komodo itself would somehow make imported produce no longer necessary, when in fact nothing done during Sail Komodo had focused on the underlying structural problems.

SAIL KOMODO: DEVELOPING TOURISM THROUGH A NATIONAL LEVEL EVENT

Is it possible that NTT will lose its title as a poor province after the prestigious Sail Komodo 2013 event? Let's wait and see. (Rahalaka, 2013)

As I have shown in the previous section, people in western Flores have had different ideas over the years about how to profit from tourism and how to 'attract' tourists through various events. The events, successful or not, however, never seemed to solve the problem of how local communities could actually develop through tourism. What was true at the local level in Flores seemed to be also true at the national level. In 2009, when the central government started to coordinate national level marine events with the Sail Indonesia yacht rallies, they imagined and promoted these events as catalysts of tourism development. Through these marine events the central government began to inject funds into the poorer eastern Indonesian provinces for infrastructural developments that would support tourism.

When I first heard about Sail Komodo in 2012, I was very perplexed over how people in Labuan Bajo perceived this event as contributing to development and to tourism in western Flores. People talked about a number of sailing boats that were

to travel around the region, and this was imagined as a huge tourism event. Plans appeared to be all focused on the reception of the president in Labuan Bajo in the middle of September, but it was unclear to me how the travels of these sailing boats and the plans for a gala closing ceremony were supposed to develop tourism, or lead to benefits for the local economy. The large budget allocated for the closing event was accompanied by money to prepare the infrastructure in West Manggarai: the construction of an international quality hospital, the building of good roads to all of the tourist destinations in the district, and the rebuilding of the airport terminal.

Despite the central government's apparent emphasis on Sail Indonesia as a means to make infrastructural improvements to support tourism, at the provincial and district levels it was not entirely understood this way. Since the event was depicted as a tourist event, the hopes were built up that it would be the tourist visits during Sail Komodo that would launch economic improvement and become evidence of the positive effect of tourism on development. In this respect, the build up by the government of what Sail Komodo would actually mean, and what its effect on tourism in NTT was likely to be, was way out of proportion to the reality. To me, as in the cases of tourism events discussed in the previous section, this indicates the lack of understanding, particularly on the part of local government officials both at the provincial and district level, as to what role a tourism event plays in local development and in the creation of benefits from tourism for local communities. For example, the head of the provincial tourism board enthusiastically announced in July 2013, at the time of the Sail Komodo preparations, that "130 countries had already signed up to join the Sail Komodo" ("Sail Komodo: Sudah 130 Negara", 2013). By announcing the number of countries, instead of the number of the participants, the tourism head gave the impression that a massive amount of participants was likely to come. At the same time, the notion that the participants were 'countries', instead of individuals, gave a highly inflated idea of what the scale of the event actually would be, or ever had been. One month later, the tourism board head corrected this information and reported that the number of participants were only 73, and that they originated from 18 different countries, a much more modest statement about the likely size of the event ("Peserta Sail Komodo, 2013").⁸

The expectation that Sail Komodo would somehow directly benefit local communities was expressed in April 2013 by the district secretary of East Manggarai, who announced to *Flores Bangkit* reporters that "we welcome Sail Komodo as an event that will bring profit to our people" ("Sekda Matim", 2013), suggesting the local villagers would be able to sell their agricultural products, as well as their handicrafts, to the visiting sailors. The same view was expressed by the head of the tourism board in Central Manggarai district, but rather reversed. He expressed his disappointment that the schedule of places which participants were due to visit did not include any of the tourist sites in his district. "This means", he told reporters, "there will be no direct benefit to the people of Manggarai from the Sail Komodo event. Since they are

8 The actual figures of participants fluctuated depending on who was reporting and when the report was made. The numbers provided by Sail Indonesia for the event were those I mentioned earlier: 106 participants from 26 countries. The discrepancy may have been due to the numbers of boats arriving at various locations, and especially the numbers that actually entered Indonesia via Kupang for the opening ceremony.

not coming to Manggarai, there will be no effect on the hotels, restaurants, souvenir sellers or tourism sites that are in this district" ("Sail Komodo Tak Ada Untungnya", 2013). Later in August 2013, after Sail Komodo was already underway and quite a few places in NTT had already been visited by some sailors from the rally, the expectations of how the event was supposed to benefit local communities began to be dashed. The head of the destination section of the Provincial Tourism Board in Kupang proclaimed that "the economic impact of Sail Komodo towards the communities in the regions has been very small" ("Kecil Dampak", 2013). The few sailors that appeared at the local ports were only buying food and drinks; very few were buying locally made products, even though at every location where the different boats pulled into port locals presented their crafts in expectation of a sale. However, the destination head qualified his disappointment by the hope that "someday" the local people would benefit from tourism; these sailors would return to their countries reporting about the potential of tourism in NTT, and more tourists would come later. Thus, the impressions of how Sail Komodo would benefit local communities in NTT, as opposed to the reality, points to the misconceptualization of how tourism would bring development to local communities.

After the event, in the following year when I visited Labuan Bajo, the cynicism about Sail Komodo had grown palpable. Tales circulated of disorganization and the total lack of attention to those who were supposed to be the focus of the event – the Sail Indonesia yachtsmen and other tourists visiting Labuan Bajo. According to critics, ambassadors from various nations had been added at the last minute to the government guest list, while all of the rooms in the starred hotels in Labuan Bajo had already been booked for months. In order to make room for the ambassadors, all bookings were cancelled, and other visitors shifted to smaller places way out of town. The town was full of government officials and military, and any tourists who arrived in Labuan Bajo during the event could find no rooms and were forced to sleep at hotel reception areas, if they chose to stay in the town. At the Swiss Contact office, I was told that the government paid no attention to the sailors, who were the ostensible focus of the Sail Indonesia rally, and only the Swiss Contact staff went out to greet them when they arrived. As the major ceremony approached, the harbor was so full of navy ships and so noisy and intimidating, that the sailors left for Bali before the arrival of the president and the grand closing ceremony.

Other more serious reasons for peoples' negative assessments of the event surfaced. They referred to Sail Komodo as an "event to steal public funds", or "a ceremony to use up money", and there were many accusations of corruption, especially towards the central government elite. Right after the final ceremony in mid-September 2013, a group of civil society organizations in Labuan Bajo demanded an immediate audit of the budget for Sail Komodo ("Koalisi Masyarakat", 2013), since none of the programs funded by Sail Komodo money had actually been finished and much of the IDR 3 trillion were yet to be accounted for. In Labuan Bajo, not only was the hospital still not built, but accusations were being made of the misappropriation of funds on various projects, such as water treatment and storage networks, and the money to renovate the houses of local residents (Mammilianus, 2013; "Mantan Kadis", 2014). Local government office heads were being accused of misusing funds for the various programs they were supposed to facilitate during Sail Komodo. Some people said it

was the central government's unrealistic demand to fulfill targets that forced these officials to finish the projects, even if they were not in the allocated places or for the designated people.⁹ Some contractors were also not paid back the money that they used for projects, leaving one man, for example, no alternative but to run from his creditors. People interpreted this as evidence that the central government elite were using Sail Komodo to steal money for themselves, and setting up others to take the blame for the corruption. In this way, for many at the local level, Sail Komodo had become *Sial Komodo* (in English "unfortunate Komodo").

One conversation I had with a hotel owner brought into focus the disorganized way the local West Manggarai government had handled Sail Komodo, but also, in his opinion, some surprising benefits of the event. He owns one of the most popular hotels in Labuan Bajo and has often been the target of envy from local competitors, as well as government officials. His hotel consists of bungalows built on the side of a hill. His difficulties with the government began about five years ago, when they refused to let him build a small café at the top of the hill where his bungalows were located, arguing it would impede the view of the passing vehicles. Since they forbade him to build a café (which would need a different building license), he built more bungalows instead and had apparently angered the government. His tussle with the government continued until 2013, when he received a notification from the local government that he would have to close his hotel, on a date that was two months before the final ceremony of Sail Komodo. This was despite the fact that the government had been worried for well over a year about accommodating the numerous visitors expected for the final ceremony. The hotel owner pointed out this flawed logic to the tourism board officials, and they intervened on his behalf with the appropriate government offices. However, despite the reprieve granted, he told me in May 2013 that he was fed up with being constantly harassed by the government and that right after Sail Komodo, in September, he would close his hotel. In May 2014, however, I found his hotel still open. Sail Komodo itself, he told me, had made him change his mind. It was evident to him that it was not the government or the foreign investors that kept things running during Sail Komodo, but instead the local people of western Flores. Hundreds of *nasi bungkus* (packets of rice with meat and vegetables) were prepared each day by the *rakyat kecil* (the little people) to feed all the different visitors who were staying in Labuan Bajo at the time. It was not the big restaurants run by foreigners, but the local, poor residents who had done their part to show their hospitality and make the event a 'success'. The hotel owner thus said he had come to realize that it was these average people that made up the economy of Labuan Bajo, not the big investors. Sail Komodo had made him realize that he need no longer be afraid of the government and their threats; they actually did not have much power, he said, instead the power was with the people. As a local he had decided that he still wanted to remain part of the tourism industry, having faith that it was the locals who were the basis of the economy and that locals would eventually find their way to participate in tourism developments that would benefit them.

9 This was the case for the head of the department of social welfare, who could not find enough houses to renovate in the designated area, and so used the money to renovate houses elsewhere. He was accused of misappropriating funds and died of a heart attack before he could be brought up on charges.

CONCLUSION: TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT

How is tourism expected to lead to development? Mega events like Sail Komodo, are imagined as catalysts for employment, investment, tourist expenditure, and a way to put a particular place 'on the map', so that a 'legacy' is formed, and tourists will be attracted in greater numbers. This certainly was part of the imaginary of the Sail Komodo event in East Nusa Tenggara province. Arrivals to the province were expected to substantially increase and poor communities were expected to directly benefit from these visitors. However, Sail Komodo, as so many other mega events, did not fulfill the expected imaginings. Some of the issues raised by Baade and Mathiesen (2004, pp. 345-346) can be discerned, with some adjustment for the context, in what happened during and after Sail Komodo. Particularly in Labuan Bajo, tourists themselves were actually displaced by the Sail Komodo final ceremony (the pinnacle of the mega-event) because of the numbers of central and provincial government politicians and officials who attended the ceremony, resulting in a type of "substitution of gains" (Baade and Mathiesen 2004, p. 345). The hotels were full, but not with foreign tourists. The government spending on tourist infrastructure for Sail Komodo, and public expenditure reduction on other matters, was another critical issue. Apart from accusations of corruption (and incompleteness of projects), people queried why only infrastructure that would be used by tourists was prioritized – a new airport, which only the wealthy would use, and roads to designated tourist attractions, instead of much needed roads into more remote villages.

In this paper I have illustrated that there has long been a misconception about how tourism can lead to benefit for local communities in western Flores. Is simply the presence of tourists enough to guarantee that "money will fall from their pockets"? Cole (2008, p. 106) talks of how the NTT provincial government provided several homestays in one traditional village in Central Flores, to act as a model for other villages to follow, so that they could profit from tourism. However, she also argues that no discussion was held with the people in the village to explain what the homestays were, no training given as to how to manage them, and no linkages made with tour operators so guests would be directed there. Ultimately, the villagers ended up using the houses themselves, and they were never used as tourist accommodation. Interacting and communicating with tourists, and hence benefiting from tourism, is a far more complex matter than simply dropping infrastructure into a village or a town. In the case of Sail Komodo, and Sail Indonesia in general, it similarly appears that the Indonesian government has conceptualized tourism as the reason to offer development programs, instead of seeing tourism itself as a pathway to development. This is one reading of the Sail Indonesia endeavors – a way to channel money into the more remote regions to build infrastructure for tourists, but without actually showing the people how to benefit from tourism.

The emphasis of these types of government programs – allocating huge amounts of money for development – appears to emphasize that tourism developments are simply receiving financial gain. Money is needed to develop, so that money can be regained. Returning to Smith and Duffy's (2003) argument, money becomes the 'end', not the means to an end (p. 162). The actual dynamics of working with tourists, of communicating with them, and of understanding what they are looking for, seems to

be lost in all of the tourism events that have been planned in the province of NTT. In the crudest way, the idea that “money will fall from the pockets of tourists” appears to encourage people to imagine it as an easy way to make money, without clearly thinking through what needs to be done to ‘make’ this money. Investors have thus been sought by local governments, sometimes without consideration as to how different investments – a tourism concession in a national park and a gold mine on its periphery – might clash with one another. Money is the sole aim, without much thought on how to regulate these investments. Money also has become the main end for local residents in western Flores, who have increasingly sold their land, which had multiplied in value, especially since Komodo became one of the New Seven Wonders. This has become a concern of many NGOs, although the government does not yet see this as a potential problem, nor has there been any move to regulate land sales. Thus, in NTT the same critical remarks hold true that were made about tourism developments more generally in Indonesia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia several decades ago by Wood (1979) and Richter (1993), as a type of “dilemma” (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. xiii), benefiting more the elite and outside players, with considerable leakage of economic benefits and the growth of dependency. Since 2008, outside actors have started to swarm into western Flores and use the open arms of the western Flores local governments towards tourism investment to open businesses and buy up land. What appears, in the long run, to be the only direct way that people in western Flores have been able to profit from tourism development is through selling their land – a problem that has emerged globally with the liberalization of land markets intended to support efficiency and investment (Zoomers, 2010). With this “foreignisation of space” (Zoomers, 2010, p. 430), it can be argued that people in western Flores are compromising their future and the likelihood that tourism will ever lead to development; unless, perhaps, more people can see tourism development the way the local hotel owner does – as a force for empowering the local community to make choices about their own future.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first formal research on tourism was started in 2000-2001 under the auspices of the Indonesian Council of Sciences (LIPI) and the University of Nusa Cendana in Kupang. Many subsequent visits have been made over the past 15 years, with occasional affiliation to the University of Indonesia in Jakarta and Gadjah Mada University in Jogjakarta. Funding for this research was provided by the National University of Singapore. I express my gratitude for the institutions that have supported my research over the years. I would also like to thank Wilhelmus Anggal, Lasarus Jehamat, Julia Jetia, and Agustinus Jehadut for many conversations that helped to sharpen my understanding of tourism and politics over the years.

