

THE DISSONANCE OF CONSERVATION: ENVIRONMENTALITIES AND THE ENVIRONMENTALISMS OF THE POOR IN EASTERN INDONESIA

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THE DISSONANCE OF CONSERVATION: SCALES, TEMPORALITIES, AND GOVERNANCE

“.....a conserved world will be increasingly transformed in all of its aspects,” Brockington, Duffy & Igoe, 2008: 10.

Conservation is a prickly affair, often resulting in multi-level conflicts involving governments, conservation organisations, and rural communities. This is a result of the fact that different people in the contemporary world have varying agendas with regard to the environment, what ways it should be productive, what ways it should be preserved, or what ways it might be commoditised. These differing ideas often result in conflict about what conservation should be, how it should work, who should be allowed to or not allowed to benefit from the activities associated with the conserving, as well as how various notions of sustainability and conservation of the natural environment should unfold. All of these have been contested, not just on the ground, in locations of conservation, but in the world of academia, between those who see nature as dead or dying¹—advocating the necessity to protect its remnants from humans—and those who see human beings as an intricate and essential part of what nature has always been².

I suggest that some of the contestations result from differing ways the “global” and the “local” are defined, and how responsibility towards the global and local is conceptualised. For example the notion of a “global public good” (Pannell,

2006: 17) as promoted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in the form of the Convention on World Heritage, encapsulates the idea that places that enter the World Heritage List are “universally significant properties” (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/convention>), that belong to the international community, not to local communities traditionally claiming ownership over them (Sullivan, 2004). Additionally, there is the powerful yet sometimes uncertain position of the “national”, between the global and the local; the way responsibility and styles of governance towards communities and environments are shaped in varying ways in this in-between space can exacerbate conflicts and contestations. So, while World Heritage Sites are globally significant places, the same sites are usually also National Parks, whose meaning to the national community may be different, and whose utilisation is conceived differently by those in power. This unstable position is also due to how national governments, which gain legitimacy from governing and striving to improve the lives of resident populations (Li, 2007), also see affiliations with globally situated actors and institutions of various persuasions as being crucial to their viability. These affiliations, for different reasons, have sometimes led to displacement, marginalisation and “false promises” towards residents (Heynen et al., 2007). Thus what geographers refer to as “scale” can figure prominently in conflict over natural resource use, development, and protection. What issues are considered of “local”, “national”, or “global” interest, are “part of the politics of legitimation that reflect dominant

¹ Terborgh’s (1999) “Requiem for Nature” is a well known example of this, and appears to mirror what Timothy Luke says about one of the big global NGO’s, The Nature Conservancy, which, he argues, sees nature as already dead. They envision their task, he says, as raising memorial sites in the world’s “last great places” (1997: 71–74).

² This contrast is often stated to be between a “biocentric” approach and an “anthropocentric” one. Ramachandra Guha (1989) made an early, useful critique of the radical biocentric view of “deep ecology”, where he showed its inconsistencies, as well as its dangers, with regard to policy towards rural communities of the Third World. Deep ecologists who want to protect “pristine wilderness”, do a grave disservice by seeing the main threat to nature as the “anthropocentric” views of, among others, biologists or social scientists who advocate for justice for rural communities in protected areas. Guha suggests this is a dangerous obfuscation, and that the policies inspired by this approach advocated by international agencies such as World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) tend to support the transfer of resources from the poor to the rich (1989: 2–3). One of the reasons Navjot Sodhi, Alan Tan, Greg Acciaioli, and I held our conference on national parks in 2005 was to try and bridge this anthropocentric/biocentric divide by purposely bringing together different voices both in the academia, across disciplines, conservation biology, law, and social science, and also from the worlds of civil society, and government, to talk about difficulties of communication about goals, and means to achieve those goals, in the world of conservation. It was obvious, however, that bridging this divide was difficult, since there were some radical deep ecologists in our group, who were very dismissive of the views of the local civil society groups and the social scientists, and vice-versa, those in the more “anthropocentric” camp found views of some of the conservation biologists too extreme.

power structures” (Mitchell, 1997: 87). Indeed, it can be argued that efforts to conserve the environment are what Tsing (2000: 119) refers to as “scale-making projects”—ways of imagining or conjuring the global, national, or local—whereby different actors make claims about the significance of preserved places to differently situated communities or populations. While conservation may be advocated because of global concerns over environmental degradation and national concerns over natural resource use and protection, it is often not clear how locally resident communities are factored into these national and global equations³. The question of scale and these scale-making projects that may erase or marginalise the local can thus become a matter of dissonance for local communities, confused by the multiple actors moving in from different scales who make claims as “stake-holders”, presuming equal or greater rights to tenure and use of the land and resources.

Apart from this spatial discord, other sources of what I am calling the dissonance of conservation are the differing ideas about temporality in relation to the environment. A recent collection of essays by Rob Nixon (2011) explores the temporal issues to do with what he labels “slow violence”. In an era of “fast” or “turbo” capitalism, slow forms of environmental toxification and degradation are invisible, and responsibility is often difficult to pin down against the backdrop of “swift seasons of electoral change” (ibid: 9). The creeping devastations of toxic drift, radioactivity, climate change, acidifying oceans and other “slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes” (ibid: 2), have a way of becoming invisible in an age where media pays more attention to spectacular disasters with “visceral, eye-catching and page-turning power” (ibid: 3). Nixon focuses on how the slow creep of environmental devastation particularly affects the poor, both those located in rich countries, but often more invisibly, those in the “underdeveloped” world, who “experience environmental threat not as a planetary abstraction, but as a set of inhabited risks” (ibid: 4). These risks are not always those that are as dramatically toxic as some of the examples that Nixon provides⁴, but may be a matter of what he calls “displacement in place” (ibid: 17). This includes those forcibly removed because of “socio-environmental fallout from development agendas” (ibid: 18), including “conservation refugees” from protected areas, as well as those displaced without moving, because “their once sustaining landscapes have been gutted of their capacity to sustain by an externalizing, instrumental logic” (ibid: 19).

Nixon’s (2011) look at slow violence and various forms of displacement helps to expose the different kinds of “environmentalisms” that emerge from these clashes of varying temporalities and scales. In recent decades, those who are sometimes called “resource rebels” (Gedick, 2001) have

forefronted an “environmentalism of the poor” (Martinez-Alier, 2002) that has a different kind of urgency and agenda from what Guha and Martinez-Alier refer to as the “full-stomach” environmentalism (1997: xxi) of the Northern wealthier countries. They point out that many of the social conflicts of the South have an ecological content, focusing on struggles over control of natural resources “threatened by state takeover or by the advance of the generalised market system” (ibid). These resource rebels may conflict with those proponents of other types of environmentalisms, such as international conservation NGOs, when conflicts emerge around use of protected areas; on the other hand, sometimes collaborations emerge between the “full stomach” and “empty belly” environmentalisms, leading to what Tsing (1999: 166) refers to as an “innovative challenge” to development plans led by states that threaten to marginalise and degrade the livelihoods and environments of the poor.

These conflicts at different scales and the variety of environmentalisms point to a further source of dissonance, issues to do with governance over the environment. How governments make decisions about environmental use, how and if local communities are involved in these decisions, and how other powerful actors, such as corporations or international conservation organisations, influence these decisions can be a source of distrust and conflict. Michel Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” (1979, 1991, 2008), the way power is exercised and asserted (often in invisible ways) to direct actions and behaviour, has been embraced by some scholars examining environmental politics, to talk about a particular type of governance, that of “environmentality” (Luke, 1998; Agrawal, 2005)—that is the way “environmental subjects” are created who “care about the environment” (Luke, 1998). Recently Robert Fletcher (2010) has examined various ways that this environmentality might be constructed, claiming that earlier authors often confuse and conflate different issues to do with governance over the environment under this one term. Environmentality may refer to governance via “disciplinary” means, where people become “environmental subjects” through diffusion of ethical norms regarding ideas about conservation (Agrawal, 2005). This is a different type of environmental governance than the more coercive means, or what is often referred to as a “fortress conservation” approach, where conservation areas are protected through patrols and fines (Brockington, 2002; Igwe, 2004). Another type of environmentality is achieved through “neo-liberal” means, where economic growth is prioritised, and economic incentives are seen as enough to encourage people to act in “conservation friendly ways” (Fletcher, 2010: 176). A final type, that of a “truth environmentality”, is predicated upon the claims that human beings have an essential connection with nature, which can be tapped into for the purposes of conservation (ibid:

³ One telling example of this is the Galapagos Islands, one of the more famous natural World Heritage Sites, where in the early 1990s there were several outbreaks of hostility on the part of local residents towards various protected species and the institutions researching and protecting them (Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997: xxvi–xxvii), because residents felt marginalised and their livelihoods threatened by the conservation programmes there.

⁴ Such as the Union Carbide Bhopal Disaster in India, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine, and the decades long toxicity created by the Niger River Delta oil camps.

177). Fletcher suggests that though these different types of “environmentality” may often be combined in practice, in order for us to get a clearer picture of where the conflicts lie, these strategies of governance, and the discourses associated with them, should be clearly distinguished.

A growing body of literature has been critical of the type of environmentality that Fletcher defines as “neo-liberal” (Goldman, 2005; Heynen et al., 2007). “Neoliberalisation”, according to Heynen et al., is a process of expanding “opportunities for capital investment and accumulation by reworking state–market–civil society relations to allow for the stretching and deepening of commodity production, circulation and exchange” (2007: 10). As they say, this necessarily affects the way human beings relate to the non-human world. Privatisation of the management of protected areas, such as strategies of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to buy valuable land as a means of biodiversity conservation, is one example of neo-liberalisation, which helps to expand the idea of exclusive property rights over nature (ibid: 12). Similarly Wolfgang Sachs argues that ideas of “sustainability” and “conservation” have gradually shifted in meaning from concerns over the “conservation of nature” to concerns over the “conservation of growth”, and hence actual environmental objectives “fall by the wayside” (1999: 32). In fact, according to Sachs, the idea of “conservation of growth” was behind the concept of “sustainable development”, where nature gets redefined from a “treasure to be preserved” to a “resource whose yield had to be sustained” (ibid: 33). Thus a range of social scientists in recent years have pointed out how conservation policies and agendas have increasingly been tied to capitalism and corporate power in the “neo-liberal world” order (Brockington et al., 2008; Castree, 2008a, 2008b; Fletcher, 2010; Igoe et al., 2010; Brockington & Duffy, 2011). This has seen a shift in the way conservation of the environment gets presented in some arenas, and some critics say that by tying their business aims to conservation agendas and promoting consumption as a means of “saving the planet”, corporations hide the fact that “environmental problems lay in the consumption of the kinds of commodities that helped produce them in the first place” (Igoe et al., 2010: 504). By sponsoring and aligning themselves with environmental organisations that appear to be conserving biodiversity, not only do corporations attempt to greenwash their names and their activities, but also gain the right to influence the decision-making to do with conservation (MacDonald, 2011).

My purpose in this paper is to examine some of these different types of “environmentality” (that is, governance and attempts to control behaviour and attitudes towards the environment on the part of powerful state and global actors), and how these means of governance have been influential in generating different environmentalisms (that is, philosophies and social movements concerned with the conservation and human

relationships with the natural world). The primary location for my examination is the district of West Manggarai⁵ located in the western part of the island of Flores in eastern Indonesia. In Indonesia movements concerned with the environment began during Suharto’s New Order (1966–1998), despite the fact that civil society activism was severely restricted during that time. The Indonesian Environmental Forum (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia [WALHI]) was born from an environmental conference in 1980 and allowed to flourish because of pressure on environmental issues placed on Indonesia from western aid agencies (Mayer, 1996; Sinanu, 2006). WALHI and affiliates became increasingly critical of many destructive government environmental practices, an environmentalism that eventually aided in the mass protests that led to the downfall of Suharto in 1998 (Sinanu, 2006) and the beginning of a period of “reformasi” or reform. The closing of the New Order has, however, not ended the concerns and conflicts that have emerged due to the excessive exploitation of Indonesia’s natural resources. Increasing numbers of international conservation organisations have been actively involved in efforts to conserve Indonesia’s biodiversity (for some examples see Sodhi et al., 2008), but the changing governance structures that have been implemented across Indonesia in the era of reform, regional autonomy, and democratisation have contributed to the uncertainty of who has control over the wealth of nature (McCarthy, 2007; Erb & Jelahun, 2008; Moeliono, 2008; McCarthy & Zen, 2008; Patlis, 2008). In many areas this has led to an increased exploitation of natural resources and the considerable growth of corruption (Erb et al., 2005; Schulte-Nordholt & van Klinken, 2007; Erb, 2011). This has also become the context for rising social movements of local communities claiming “indigenous rights” to land and resources (Li, 2000, 2001; Davidson & Henley, 2007). Sometimes this has been in alliance with international organisations against the state, sometimes in conflict with both the state and transnational entities, be they global corporations or conservation organisations. Thus the styles of governance over the environment in Indonesia have led to a proliferation of environmentalisms such as movements and conflicts about resource use, exploitation, and social justice. Due to different scales (where conflicting ideas exist over responsibility and rights at different levels) and different temporalities (the varying ideas about how the environment should be exploited for different communities at different scales across time), a considerable dissonance over the use and conservation of the environment in Indonesia has ensued.

West Manggarai is an interesting place to examine this dissonance of conservation because of the complexity and diversity of interest in the natural environment unfolding there particularly over the past two decades. The western part of Flores and the neighbouring islands have long been known for the unique lizards found there. These lizards (*Varanus Komodensis*), gain their popular appellation,

⁵ Before 2003, West Manggarai had been part of the district of Manggarai. The division (called pemekaran or “blossoming”) of these districts took place after the introduction of decentralisation in Indonesia after 2001. Manggarai “blossomed” into a third district, East Manggarai, in 2007. The issues raised in this paper affect all these three districts, however space prohibits my dealing with them all here.

“komodo dragon” from one of these islands, Komodo Island, located about 60 miles west of Flores⁶. Created as the 75,000 ha Komodo National Park in 1980, covering the islands of Komodo, Rinca, Padar and Gili Motong, and the surrounding waters, it was expanded in 1984 to include 219,322 ha of marine and terrestrial area which included the Mbeliling Forest Preserves in the mountains in western Flores (UNEP WCMC, 2011). The Komodo National Park was later nominated by the Indonesian government and accepted as a World Heritage Site in 1991, based on two criteria: its “superlative natural features” and it being the “habitat of a threatened species” (Pannell, 2006: 20). Since the Indonesian government recommendation had mentioned the growing tourism focused on the Komodo dragon, the IUCN proposed broadening the park’s attractions to the marine environment, and in 1995 The Nature Conservancy did an assessment of the park, recommending the expansion of the park’s boundaries to include marine areas with high biological diversity (ibid: 21). Before the park was established, there were communities living inside or near the protected areas, who had supplemented their livelihoods by utilising natural resources from these vicinities. The strategy of park formation was to gradually move the residents away from exploiting resources in the park, to relying upon ecotourism (Hitchcock, 1993; Erb, 2000, 2005; Ho, 2006; Borchers, 2008).

In the early 21st century, with the implementations of reform after the end of the New Order government of Suharto (1966–1998), local governments and local communities in western Flores increasingly began to clash over the use of natural resources in these protected areas, fostering an alternative “environmentalism” to the dominant global discourse on biodiversity protection. Growing interest in ecotourism to the Komodo National Park increased the international attention from not just ecotourists and ecotourism businesses, but also from international organisations interested in both protecting the environment as well as seeing profit drawn from it. Additionally, increasing the dissonance associated with natural resource use and protection, between 2005 and 2009, the local district head of West Manggarai district⁷, who had hitherto been supportive (and his predecessor even militant) about efforts to conserve the natural environment, began to take advantage of new regional autonomy legislation of the post-New Order era that gave district heads the right to directly seek international investment, and allocated several open pit mining contracts in West Flores for manganese and gold to national and international mining companies, some of them located within protected areas (Jebadu et al., 2009, Erb, 2011).

In the following sections I try to pull out from the details of the West Manggarai case the characteristics of different

environmentalities that Fletcher delineated, in order to theorise about the ways governance over the environment has shaped different kinds of subjects. At the same time these forms of governmentality have been resisted in various ways, leading to alternative environmentalisms. Actors from the global, the national, and the local arenas have found conjunctures, but also disjunctures in the ways environmental protection and natural resource use should proceed. The questions of how these natural resources should be valued and utilised, and who has the rights to manage and exploit them, continue to create conflict and collaboration, but also considerable dissonance for local residents, and consequently are resulting in transformations of both the natural and social environments of western Flores.

CONFLICTS OVER THE ENVIRONMENT: FORTRESS CONSERVATION IN WESTERN FLORES

Although Komodo National Park, including the later Mbeliling Nature Reserve, was a creation of the post-colonial state, its origins can be traced to the time of Dutch colonialism and the efforts of the colonial state to technically manage the environment. As Richard Grove (1995) mentions in his look at environmentalism during the colonial era, concerns about environmental degradation far predate the 20th and 21st centuries. Absolutist colonial rule allowed certain programmes to be imposed in ways that would have been difficult in Europe, creating the background upon which “fortress” type conservation could develop. The urgency to understand the new and strange environments of the expanding colonial world gave scientists considerable influence, while their increased knowledge of these new environments allowed them to develop critiques of the detrimental effects of western economic forces on tropical regions, which resulted in programmes to ameliorate climate change, deforestation, and species extinction (Grove, 1995). It is this type of technical expertise that continues to shape some understandings of nature and views of protected areas that are influential in Flores today. Tania Li (2007) characterises this type of governance as “rendering technical”, a set of practices which create a particular problem, and help to define the field in which that problem is located. Problems and solutions, “coemerge with a governmental assemblage in which certain sorts of diagnoses, prescriptions and techniques are available to the expert who is properly trained”, creating a boundary between those “with the capacity to diagnose deficiencies in others, and those who are subject to expert direction” (ibid: 7). In her look at the creation of Komodo National Park as a World Heritage Site, Sandra Pannell (2006) traces a history of how this technical, scientific

⁶ Komodo and all islands to the east of it belong to the district of West Manggarai, in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (East Nusa Tenggara), although the human inhabitants of this island traditionally recognised closer cultural and linguistic ties to the island of Sumbawa further west, in the neighbouring province of Nusa Tenggara Barat (West Nusa Tenggara). Komodo was administratively part of Manggarai district until 2003, when the western third of it was split off to form West Manggarai district. The tourism potential for these western parts of Manggarai district, in large part because of the presence of the Komodo dragons, was one of the reasons for the initiative to seek separation from the mother district.

⁷ This was true in other districts across the province of East Nusa Tenggara, not just in western Flores. The plans to move all the inhabitants off of the island of Lembata, so as to be able to exploit the gold and copper deposits there that were said to be one of the largest in the world (Tambang Online, 2009), was one of the things that set off a massive movement to protest mining across the province (see Erb, 2011).

expertise has fashioned Komodo as a protected site since the colonial era, and argues an international community of experts continues today to “shape the contours of nature and culture” (ibid: 19). This history, as she shows, almost from the beginning negated the human presence on these remote islands, while valorising the unique non-human life found in these protected areas.

The Komodo dragon became an object of protection in 1915, due to a petition from the Netherlands Indies Society for the Protection of Nature to the Sultan of Bima, who had control over the islands at that time. He issued a decree prohibiting the hunting and capturing of the dragon (Hitchcock, 1993; Pannell, 2006, citing Aufenberg, 1981). Subsequently, increasing legislation was implemented by the Dutch colonial government to protect these animals, but it was not until 1928, again on the recommendation of scientific societies, that Komodo island was declared an official wilderness research area. And in 1938, the “Self Government of Manggarai” (of which Komodo island and the surrounding islands had become a part) declared these islands “nature reserves” (Hitchcock, 1993: 304; Pannell, 2006: 20), beginning the process of enclosure of land as protected places which was to continue into the post-colonial era.

Pannell suggests that the ministerial decree of 1980 creating Komodo as a national park did more than any protective measures beforehand to dramatically change the lives of the Komodo residents, criminalising many of their everyday livelihood practices (2006: 20). It became even more acute when new conservation laws were passed in 1990, and TNC began monitoring activities in 1995. The human inhabitants of the park were constructed by generations of scientists as not being indigenous to the island like the dragons, but instead migrants, convicts, or exiles from the earlier pre-colonial Sultanate of Bima (Pannell, 2006). Ethnographic research has shown, however, that human habitation has been longer, and more extensive, than these accounts portrayed (Verheijen, 1982; Pannell, 2006). Over time the notion that human occupants were in some sense “squatters” led to various plans to resettle them⁸, or in other ways minimise human impact on the dragon population⁹ and increasingly the broader natural surroundings.

The boundary between nature and culture was drawn much more sharply when TNC began collaboration with the park authorities to eliminate destructive fishing practices. According to Luke, TNC environmental strategy for conservation relies upon “making rigid divisions between nature and society or humanity and ecology” (1997: xix), and this was apparent in much of their *modus operandi* in the Komodo park. I suggest that TNC’s history of involvement in the Komodo National Park continues the environmentality of the “fortress conservation” kind. This is illustrated in the design of a 25-year management plan that revised the zoning and resource use regulations in the park (Gustave & Borchers, 2007; Borchers, 2008), creating what some observers describe as a “state within a state” (Ho, 2006; Gustave & Borchers, 2007). Their monitoring was successful in curtailing dynamite and cyanide fishing practices blamed mostly on communities outside the park, but the new stricter zoning and restrictions on fishing in the park introduced by TNC ended up hurting the livelihoods of the park residents, especially those on Komodo. Alternative livelihoods, which TNC promoted through its programmes, benefited only a few communities located outside the park¹⁰, and hence resentment towards the TNC grew among fishing communities within and surrounding the park affected by the new zoning and regulations. I witnessed this resentment myself in December 2001 when I attended a meeting organised by TNC on the occasion of a visit by UNESCO to address community concerns about the management of the park. A number of community members shouted and swore at TNC officials, accused them of being monsters, and of waging war on the fishing populations surrounding the park. The relationship between communities near the park and the TNC deteriorated rapidly after their patrol boats shot and killed several fisherman from Sumbawa island to the west of Flores in 2002, who had been fishing for lobsters in the park (Gaung NTB, 12 Nov.2002; Fajar Bali, 2 Dec.2002; Flores Pos, 3 Dec.2002; DTE Down to Earth, 2003; Ho, 2006; Gustave & Borchers, 2007). Considerable outrage followed, and national level environmental organisations such as WALHI and Skephi were contacted by local activists to investigate TNC’s work in the park¹¹ and subsequently charges of human rights violations were brought against the TNC (DTE Down to Earth, 2003). Despite growing resistance

⁸ The people of Komodo Island, however, believe that they are related to the dragons, and have an important symbiotic relationship with them. The villagers have in fact threatened the park authorities that if they are removed from the island (which was originally the plan back in the 1970s), the dragons would leave as well, and this, according to one acquaintance who used to work for the local government in the town of Labuan Bajo, was why the people in the end were not moved off of the island (see Ellis, 1998: 76 for a similar account, cited also in Pannell, 2006: 37).

⁹ This included the eradication of the goat feedings which were done to attract dragons to a particular site so that tourist groups would readily be able to view the dragons. Scientific ideas about “wild” nature rejected this practice as destroying the balance of nature. Conversely Komodo islanders, who always believed that they had a kinship relation with the dragons, and offered them always a part of their catch, claimed the eradication of this practice destroyed the balance of nature, and hence attributed the subsequent decline in the dragon population to its removal (Pannell, 2006: 37).

¹⁰ Apparently directed to those known to use destructive fishing methods, and seen to pose the most threat to the environment (Borchers, 2008: 278)

¹¹ Collaborations of west Flores local civil society organisations and the national level environmental organisations of WALHI and Skephi, as well as legal aide societies and other NGOs at the national level concerned with human rights abuses, proliferated in 2002 and 2003 because of several violent clashes between the local government and villagers due to environmental issues. The TNC case was one of these which gained national and international notoriety (Afiff & Lowe, 2008), but the case that gained more national NGO attention was the eviction of villagers from Meler Kuwus and Colol from their coffee plantations, which the district head of Manggarai claimed were state land. The district head ordered the cutting down of the villagers’ coffee trees, and violent incidences ensued where dozens of villagers were shot. This incident, done in the name of protecting the environment, is an example of a particularly militaristic type of fortress conservation in western Flore, but space does not permit elaboration of the details here. See Erb & Jelahun, 2008.

against the presence of TNC in the Komodo National Park, a management concession to a joint venture company, “P.T. Putri Naga Komodo” [= The Dragon Princess of Komodo Private Limited], a collaboration between TNC and a private tourism operator from Bali, was approved by the newly elected district head of West Manggarai in 2005.

The idea of a feeling of “dissonance” towards tourism and conservation efforts in western Flores was first expressed to me in a discussion about TNC’s work in the Komodo National Park in 2010 with a Master’s student writing a thesis on community participation and empowerment in tourism at Gadjadara University (Asri, 2010). When I asked this student why he had left his job as a teacher in a West Manggarai village to pursue the study of tourism management, he related his own feelings of “dissonance”, *kejanggalan*, in observing the work of TNC in the Komodo National Park. He felt there was a strong misfit between the promises of the TNC to bring prosperity through eco-tourism and conservation, and the increasing poverty of the Komodo island villagers (see also Borchers, 2008). The dissonance was particularly stark in his observation of growing numbers of wealthy tourists visiting the park, while villagers’ livelihood prospects appeared to be increasingly limited. I had my own feelings of dissonance when being given a tour of a TNC alternative livelihood programme, designed to help the fishing communities move from being “hunters” to “cultivators” of fish in 2003. The TNC director highlighted how the fish hatchery facilities were giving work to “locals”, but upon introducing his workers, they all originated from other parts of Flores Island. Not one was from West Manggarai, or any of the fishing communities whose lives were being affected by ecotourism developments and TNC conservation management initiatives. As a global organisation, they had a different perspective of what was “local”, compared to that of the communities who lived in the vicinity of the park.

NEOLIBERAL ENVIRONMENTALITY: FEELINGS OF DISSONANCE IN WESTERN FLORES

I suggest, following Fletcher’s differentiation of different types of environmentality, that the primary form of environmentality up to around 2005 in western Flores had been that of “fortress conservation” (Fletcher, 2010). Communities surrounding protected areas in western Flores were increasingly defined as poachers and encroachers, and regulations were designed to limit their access to resource use within those areas¹². In 2005, when the first definitive district head of West Manggarai district was elected into office, his approval of the TNC collaborative management initiative, despite strong community opposition, appeared

to indicate his agreement with their conservation efforts. His support for tourism as a livelihood was underscored by inviting another international NGO, Swiss Contact, to aid in the development of eco-tourism in the same year.

Swiss Contact, as can be seen from their website (<http://www.swisscontact.or.id/index.php>), has been working in Indonesia for at least 30 years. Their mission is to help develop small and medium enterprises in ecologically sensitive ways, but with a “strong private sector orientation”. The first phase of their programme operated in western Flores from July 2006 to December 2008, with funding from AusAid to promote pro-poor initiatives in eco-tourism¹³. When I met the Swiss Contact managers and director when they first arrived in Flores in 2006, they were aware of the controversy surrounding TNC in the National Park, and knew they needed to tread carefully in their community relations. The strategy of the director of Swiss Contact, consistent with the organisation’s “private sector orientation”, was that the best way to develop ecotourism was to encourage one entrepreneur to take the lead, and later others would follow. He argued that as long as the structures were in place to allow people to profit from their relationship with conservation initiatives, people would become involved. In the years they worked in western Flores, they focused their attention away from the fishing communities in the park which were under the purview of TNC, and instead directed their efforts to professionalising tourism businesses in the town of Labuan Bajo on the coast of western Flores, the capital of West Manggarai and a major gateway to the National Park¹⁴. Additionally they sought opportunities to bring ecotourism into the village communities in the mountains of west Flores, those surrounding the Mbeliling Forest Reserve, included within the Komodo National Park’s boundaries in 1984 (Pannell, 2006). As the director related to me, in December 2008, they had tasked themselves with creating western Flores as a total “destination” for eco-tourists, not just a series of “attractions”. To this end they developed a marketing slogan “West Flores: Komodo and So Much More” that they mounted on a website which all tourism operators could use to advertise their services, and set about to create the “so much more” part of this “destination”. It was thus with this entrance of Swiss Contact, and their charismatic and hardworking director, that a neo-liberal form of environmentality began to emerge in conservation efforts in Flores.

Several sites that had been earlier identified by the Tourism Board as “natural attractions” in West Manggarai district, were chosen by Swiss contact personnel as sites worth developing for eco-tourism. I visited three of these sites in December 2008 and July 2011 to explore the impact of their ecotourism developments on those village communities: Roe village in the forests of Mbeliling, chosen to be developed

¹² This is true more widely in western Flores than just the Komodo park case. See footnote 11.

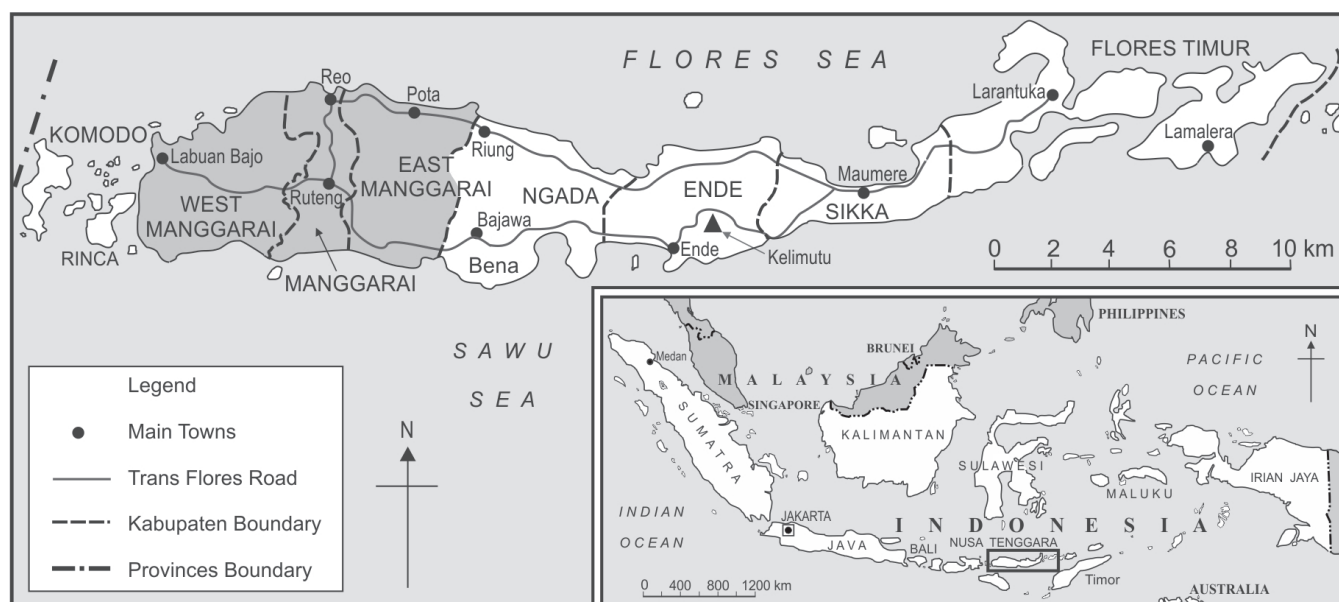
¹³ After 2008, their main office moved to Bali, the funding came from a greater variety of government sources, and the programme on Flores shifted to a more ambitious one, to develop Flores as a distinct destination.

¹⁴ As can be seen from their website, Swiss Contact specialises in matters to do with “ecologically sensitive practice in the urban environment” <http://www.swisscontact.or.id/index.php>. Their efforts towards tourism developments in Labuan Bajo were very much appreciated by businesses there, and this may be because of this traditional niche. Their programmes in the villages, as I will detail, were less successful, and less appreciated.

as the starting point for trekking to the top of Mt. Mbeliling; Warsawe village about a half hour trek away from the Cunca Wulan waterfall; and Weto village, the “owners” of a cave named Istana Ular (palace of snakes), where hundreds of snakes were in residence. At the time that I visited these villages, tourism visits were very minimal, almost non-existent, and it appeared that the strategy to develop an entrepreneurial spirit in west Flores villages had been less than successful. Consistently I found in all the villages a feeling that tourism developments as had been introduced by Swiss Contact had caused problems in the communities. Villagers in Warsawe were unhappy about tourists’ inappropriate attire as they trekked through their village to go swimming in the waterfall. A controversy had developed around the Snake Palace site because of the great distance between the cave site and the village of Weto, owners of the cave, who claimed spiritual kinship with the snakes. Tour guides had repeatedly brought tourists to the cave without Weto villagers’ permission, and had asked villagers from another village to do the rituals associated with propitiating the snakes before entrance. It appeared that the neoliberalisation strategy of Swiss Contact to expand “opportunities for capital investment and accumulation” (Heynen et al., 2007: 10) had indeed reworked society relations, but not in a way that appeared to be congenial to local villagers. This was most evident in Roe, where a more extensive project was crafted by Swiss Contact to organise the community into a trekking association and to learn to be porters and guides to bring eco-trekkers into the forests. Differences in their approach towards environmentality between the director and the volunteer assigned to the project contributed to the eventual demise of the project. A considerable amount of effort was put in by the volunteer to include the entire community in the discussions and the organisations of their various ecotourism initiatives, arguably an effort to create environmental subjects through nurturing certain norms and values of community cooperation in regards to the environment. The director, however, lost patience with the protracted time frame, and tried to expedite the project, taking over the guidance of

efforts to build shelters and toilets on Mt. Mbeliling which would make the site more visit-worthy. Ultimately factions that began to form in the community over who should be involved in these various endeavours, as well as who should profit, contributed to the abandonment of the ecotourism project. A neoliberal form of environmentality, then, appears to have had limited success in these western Flores villages, because it was in discord with values that they held about how a community should work, and what their relationship was with their natural surroundings.

Other developments in West Manggarai during the 2005–2010 period of the first elected regent underscored a more neoliberal approach to environmental use, which contradicted the conservation initiatives already implemented and contributed to a growing dissonance in the local communities. Despite the apparent support by the district head for ecotourism as the best strategy for conservation and natural resource use in West Manggarai district, in 2008 the head issued exploration licenses for gold mining in two areas: one on the Batu Gosok peninsula, directly adjacent to the Komodo National Park (Jebadu et al., 2009: 63–64). This act of the district head was consistent with moves globally to expand mining into areas considered inaccessible or of little value, primarily because of certain neoliberal reforms that swept away regulations that protected labour, local communities, and the environment (Kirsch, 2007: 305). It was also consonant with a national emphasis to prioritise mining in Indonesia as an important sector of investment, but under conditions that would benefit the local and national coffers. In 2009 a new mining law was implemented, reflecting this new political climate (Law 4/2009 on Mineral and Coal Mining), which changed the conditions for investment in mining, especially for foreign investors (Boulant Smit, 2002; Bachriardi, 2004; Haymon, 2008; Resosudarmo et al., 2009; Kirana & Habriansyah, 2010). This law appears to have had the effect of making mining more attractive for provincial and district heads as a means of attracting investment and generating local revenue, but the expansion



of mining has also generated massive resistance nationally and locally that appears to be growing. Since 2007, not only the district head of West Manggarai, but many other district heads throughout the eastern Indonesian province of Nusa Tenggara Timur have been turning to mining as a hoped for way to create jobs and bring in revenue to one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia. However local communities and members who originated from these communities who live in cities throughout Indonesia, have participated in massive protests and resistance through forums, the media, and the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commissions (Jebadu et al., 2009; Regus, 2009; Suban Tukan, 2009; Erb, 2011). In fact 29 May 2012 was recently proclaimed as the first annual National Anti Mining Day to show consolidated opposition to the allocation of mining contracts across the nation given to investors often without proper consultation with local communities, and resulting in growing conflicts and environmental destruction (JATAM, 10 May 2012).

On the Batu Gosok peninsula, north of the tourist town of Labuan Bajo in West Manggarai, a Chinese mining company that was given mining exploration rights in 2008, set up operations there in 2009. This peninsula is the location of one of the first "star" class hotels opened in Flores in 1996, by a Chinese Indonesian woman and her Australian husband, which in recent years has been sub-contracted to a European. Once the Chinese mining company began drilling there, according to local tour guides, guests were unhappy and left the hotel because of the disturbance, an incident that helped to rally the tourism businesses against the mining. On a neighbouring small island, where chalets had been opened in 2000 by another local Chinese businessman, the drilling site was visible, and over 2009 and 2010, the growing scars on the hillside as well as the noise worried the owner that in a short time he would have to close down his chalets and move elsewhere. Not only did these operations affect the tourism businesses in the area, but there was great fear that when the mine eventually became active, the blasting and the use of toxic chemicals would be detrimental to the sea and terrestrial life in the region, which was precisely on the border of the Komodo National Park.

The outcry against mining in Labuan Bajo and the coastal communities of West Manggarai has been strong and consistent since the mining contracts were allocated¹⁵. A civil society group was formed in Labuan Bajo to resist the mining under the name of GERAM (Gerakan Masyarakat Tolak Tambang [= The People's Movement to Reject Mining]). The acronym was chosen because *geram* in Indonesian means "anger"¹⁶. Many of the individuals involved in the movement were the same individuals who supported earlier resistance against TNC. Interestingly, also, many people who worked

for the TNC joint venture business Putri Naga Komodo operating the concession of the Komodo National Park, also joined the resistance against the mining. Many people in West Manggarai, particularly in Labuan Bajo, have come to accept tourism as the future of West Manggarai development, and the turn to mining seemed particularly strange to residents of West Manggarai, and other Manggaraian people living outside of Flores both across Indonesia, as well as internationally, who were at that time following with great anticipation the voting of the New Seven Wonders of Nature, of which Komodo National Park was a finalist¹⁷. The district head's decision to allow mining next to the park was a particularly jarring development, which ultimately resulted in so much resistance, that in the 2010 local district head elections, he lost the elections, and the new district head subsequently stopped all mining activities in the district (Asdhiana, 2011)¹⁸. The particular approach towards use of the environment which mining investment represents was strikingly dissonant with what local West Manggarai communities had come to expect from their own opportunities to interact with and utilise natural resources. Although many had been resistant to TNC strategies of conservation, it appears that many have absorbed the idea that ecotourism is the best means to interact with and utilise the environment, and the best livelihood strategy for local communities.

THINKING ABOUT THE "TRUTH": ENVIRONMENTALITY OF NATURAL AND HUMAN SUBJECTS

My final look at types of environmentality attempts to expose the complicated creation of environmental subjects in western Flores against my brief look at the long history there of environmental governance and resistance. I want to revisit the experiences of the village of Roe, chosen by Swiss Contact to be a "base camp" for trekking operations into the forests of Mbeliling. Roe's case is interesting, since the villagers there have been exposed to several types of "environmentality" over the decades. As a village located in an area designated by the colonial government as important for watershed protection, the forests of Mbeliling have been protected areas for approximately 70 years, and as part of the Komodo National Park since 1984, the area has been long exposed to a form of "fortress conservation". The recent efforts of Swiss Contact to implement the trekking project for ecotourism opened Roe village to a different type of environmentality, where conservation of the environment was to be a backdrop for entrepreneurial activities. In the midst of these various exposures to different environmentalities, I suggest that Roe villagers have come to forge their own understanding of the environment, which has created their own hybrid type of

¹⁵ This was against the background of the province-wide resistance to mining that had been growing since 2007, as mentioned, and the exposure of negative effects of mining on communities where it had been going on for some time. See papers in Jebadu et al., 2009 which especially talk about mining in some communities in Manggarai district, as well as the resistance in Lembata. Also see Colbran, 2010.

¹⁶ Early articles published to oppose the Batu Gosok and other mines in West Manggarai can be found at the GERAM website: <http://gerammabar.blogspot.sg/>

¹⁷ Komodo based on the voting on 11 Nov.2011, has been declared a provisional winner, see <http://www.n7w.com/>

¹⁸ Significantly he has been apparently the only district head in East Nusa Tenggara province willing to do so.

“environmentalism”. On the one hand, this environmentality has resulted from a form of “discipline”, where residents have absorbed a certain ethic about the use of the environment from government programmes. On the other hand, perhaps it is possible to also link an understanding of Roe villagers’ environmental ideas to the type of environmentality that Fletcher refers to as “truth environmentality”. This way of governing the relationships to the environment draws upon the idea that people are essentially connected with nature, and this can be tapped into, and cultivated for the purposes of conservation (ibid: 177). Although some environmentalists idealise indigenous communities’ concepts of the environment as constituting a type of “indigenous wisdom” (as critiqued by Guha, 1989; Tsing, 1999; Li, 2001, 2002) upon which a basic truth may be built, Roe villagers’ relationship with their environment is not of this type, and ironically is not founded upon the “truth” at all, but instead started with a lie. However, after having been exposed to many different kinds of “environmentality”, it does seem that Roe villagers have crafted their own kind of “truth”, which may be the basis of a new kind of governing of the environment, and the foundation for a new brand of environmentalism.

For many years the local government of Manggarai, and later West Manggarai, promoted various programmes of reforestation in the Mbeliling Forest, and attempted to control the use of forest products by surrounding villages. More recently, Burung Indonesia, an affiliate of Birdlife International, has been working in the Mbeliling forests since 2006 to help protect a number of critically endangered bird species, as well as implementing a programme of integrated sustainable forest management (<http://www.burung.org/en/Mbeliling/flores.html>). They supported the Swiss Contact project because, like the government, they were concerned about the villagers’ overuse of forest resources. A discussion I had with one member of Burung Indonesia, who was visiting Roe when I was there, indicated a rather paternalistic attitude towards villagers, typical of “experts” noted by academics such as Li (2007) and Tsing (1999); he advocated the view that “villagers must be kept out of the forests”.

When I visited the village in 2008, I had an opportunity to meet some elders whose grandparents had been alive at the time of the Dutch colonial era, when the colonial government began enclosing forested lands in the vicinity of their village for watershed protection. The grandparents of Roe elders had told stories about how in the early part of the 20th century, they had been concerned about this Dutch enclosure programme, and formed their own plan for a kind of resistance. On their community-owned land in the forest they build a mock altar, calling it a *compang*¹⁹ *puar* [= forest altar], as a way of laying claim to this land. According to the stories they told their descendents, they pretended that the forest of Mbeliling was a sacred place for them, by placing chicken feathers on this “altar” to simulate sacrifices made there. The Dutch government took seriously the question

of “*hukum adat*” [= customary law] (Davidson & Henley, 2007; Li, 2007: 48–51), so according to the story they were willing to accept the word of the villagers when they saw evidence of sacrifice that this land was sacred to them. For this reason they did not fence off the forests near Roe, and these lands were not designated later as “state land”. Interestingly, subsequent generations of Roe villagers respected the forests around their village as their special responsibility, and did not take wood from these lands unless all villagers agreed to it. Instead, one elder slyly told us, they stole wood from the government’s land, so as to keep their own forests protected and intact.

In this way they admitted that in fact a lot of destruction had taken place on the lands that had originally been marked during the Dutch period as “natural reserves”, and which came to be treated during the post-colonial era as “state land”. They admitted that over the years, no one in any of the villages had felt any responsibility towards conserving the trees in the state forests, partially because many state officials also had been involved in covert operations that took valuable wood from these forests. But with the experiences that they have had over the intervening years, many of the members of the community now felt the foolishness of treating the forests in this way. With their exposure to the people who valued the forests and the birds, such as some of the European missionary priests²⁰ who had worked in their area in earlier years and the more recent efforts of Burung Indonesia, they had developed their own appreciation of the disappearing birdlife. Some villagers mentioned how they were now aware that birds, which they used to regularly hear and enjoy, had started to disappear from the forests. A group of Roe villagers in 2004 started to regret the loss of the forests in the wider Mbeliling reserves, and began to take pilgrimages to the top of Mt. Mbeliling, where they would pray the rosary. They said these frequent pilgrimages started to affect those from other villages, who had been taking wood illegally from the state forests, and these “*perambah hutan*” [= illegal loggers] began to stop their logging activities. Villagers said they even sometimes met the “forest police”, who were supposed to be guarding the forests, in the act of stealing wood themselves, and attempted to influence them to stop these illegal activities.

Roe villagers also talked about the Swiss Contact plans to form a trekking association. A number of them appeared critical of this effort, which they thought was done in the typical manner of the government and other external organisations, without enquiring what activities villagers had been involved in, and what programmes they felt they needed. These external experts and government actors, had in their experience, often used what they saw as village needs to create programmes through which they could themselves profit in the name of conservation. The local government, for example, would report that they had “re-greened” 70 hectares of the forest around Mbeliling, when in fact only 7

¹⁹ Compang are altars found traditionally in Manggaraian villages and are places to make offerings to the ancestors and spirits of the land. They would never be constructed in the forest.

²⁰ One priest whose parish included villages in the Mbeliling forests, was an accomplished ornithologist, and naturalist. See for example Schmutz, 1988.

hectares was involved, while the government agents pocketed the extra funds themselves. Sometimes the government staff would even cut down existing trees, in order to replant the ones that were provided by the re-greening programme. The villagers saw this as a particularly pernicious type of corruption.

Swiss Contact programmes were designed to help villagers to leave the farming way of life, but one Roe villager felt that cash crop farming in their village vicinity could be very lucrative; there was still plenty of land and a conducive climate for many different kinds of cash crops such as cloves, chocolate, and vanilla to flourish. He did not see the need to bring tourism into the village to help the villagers make money, since they had all the opportunities they needed to do so already. In fact, the villagers with whom I spoke were of the mind that Roe village had been a rather special place; they were blessed by a bountiful environment and the level of community unity was high. They worked together to guard their forests, and if any villager needed to take wood from these village forests, all needed to consent to it, which had kept their forests well protected. They respected the rights of the village as a whole, and all seemed proud of the way that things worked in their village. It appeared ironic, in a way, that perhaps an initiative of their predecessors to bypass the Dutch colonial government appears to have created a strong sense of community. People claimed this was unlike in many other villages where people squabbled over land, and many conflicts and land wars had emerged in recent decades. The villagers felt that the Swiss Contact initiative, which was supposed to help them to make money, had in fact brought them nothing but tension and an unravelling of their sense of community unity. Since the Swiss Contact programme focused on only a few individuals, and the activities they wanted to develop were too limited, not everyone in the village could find a way to get involved in these tourism endeavours. Instead some villagers suggested that the programme might have been expanded to include the “selling” of everyday life activities in the village (making handicrafts and tapping sugar palm, for example), instead of merely trying to develop trekking.

CONCLUSION: THE DISSONANCE OF CONSERVATION

Conservation in the present century is emerging as a very complex issue, as the experiences related here of conservation efforts and natural resource use in western Flores attest. Increasingly many concerned about conservation are recognising that mistakes have been made in human relationships with the environment. These mistakes have to do with overexploitation, mismanagement, and also as some academics are beginning to argue, a type of environmentality—a form of governance over the environment—that has often been insensitive to local community needs and understandings about the environment. These complexities, as I have tried to illustrate here, entail situations where differences in understanding and outlook meet, and create a feeling of dissonance for local actors.

I have tried to show that this dissonance for villagers and other residents of western Flores has partially had to do with different global and national actors arguing for uses of the environment that appear to conflict. A long history of government support for conservation agendas and the creation of protected areas in western Flores were contradicted by what appears to be a new direction of environmental exploitation represented by national and local government support for open pit mining, a notoriously destructive use of the natural environment. These different strategies of environmental use help to highlight different means of governance towards the environment—what I have examined, following Fletcher, as varying environmentalities. Coercive approaches, disciplinary approaches, and approaches emphasizing privatisation and entrepreneurship, underscore for people in western Flores many of the contradictions of both the global and national support of environmental values of conservation on the one hand, but destructive ways of using the environment on the other, that seem to emerge from the growth of more aggressive forms of capitalism in recent decades. This dissonance also resulted from what appears to be the “false” or unfulfilled promises of both restrictive conservation agendas and the more entrepreneurial development strategies, neither of which have resulted in the promised prosperity for local communities.

I have suggested that different scales can also be a source of dissonance. Local communities are uncertain about the rights and responsibilities associated with different scales (the local, the national, and the global), and the understanding about which different actors are situated at these various levels compounds the dissonance. The growing alternative environmentalisms, that is, movements to promote a particular agenda towards environmental conservation, are also scale-making projects. Global conservation organisations promote a sense of global responsibility through their activities in local communities and nationally protected areas, while national imaginings are awakened by the pride of certain places being globally recognised and lauded as places of environmental and natural worth, such as World Heritage Sites, or, as in the case of the Komodo National Park, a rare spot on the list of one of the world’s New Seven Natural Wonders. Villagers in places of global renown have come to value their local environments and natural resources very differently, as they come to recognise their homes as places of global significance, but they still struggle to make a living through sometimes increasingly restricted livelihoods.

Finally, views of conservation may be intricately connected to an understanding of time, and these different uses of time can be a source of power in the fashioning of a particular environmentalist agenda. The construction of a history of Komodo island by various scientific experts has attempted to erase the place of the human communities on the island, marginalising their claims to the place and their rights to make a living there. Although not as dramatic as the stories of slow violence related by Nixon, it is still possible to claim that “their once sustaining landscapes have been gutted of their capacity to sustain by an externalising, instrumental logic” (2011: 19). The case of Roe village underscores

another historical construction influential in the creation of an environmental sensibility. The cherished memory of a time in the past when their ancestors created the surrounding forests as a protected place helped them to not only protect their environment from outsiders, but also shaped a new understanding of themselves and their relationship to their environment, helping them to protect it even from themselves. Their ancestors' act of resistance became an "innovative challenge" that fostered a new kind of environmentalism, a movement by which they attempted to peaceably influence their neighbours to change their behaviours and attitudes towards their natural surroundings.

Hence stories from western Flores illustrate how the ironies and the dissonance of conservation can be put into relief by taking a closer look at some of the ways that governance has worked, and how different kinds of "environmentalities" have shaped peoples' varying understandings of the "environment", of nature, and of conservation.

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