



RECLAIMING MOVEMENT IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: A CASE STUDY OF COSMOLOGICAL POLITICS IN KOMODO ISLAND, WEST MANGGARAI, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This research discusses the role of cosmological politics—an attempt in sustain, negotiate, and challenge the nature as well as culture—in tourism development project in Komodo Island, West Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia. The effort to explore this process is based on the premise that cosmological politics is central in tourist development project since it creates unequal development which threatening the community' livelihood, the indigenous animal, and its environment in general. Based on the case of a super- premium tourism development project in West Manggarai, Flores Island, in 2021, we aim to understand how communities attempt to secure rights to natural resources, including land and animals, by having their access claims recognized as legitimate property by an institution legitimate politics. More specifically, this research seeks to understand how the cosmological politics comes along with the process of appropriation, accessing, and contestation in claims to land, the animal, and its environment in general. This research seeks to challenge the dominant literatures which sees the cosmological politics in tourist development project merely see as one of the commodities. By using claim making framework, we provide perspective which see the cosmological politics as the product of multiple appropriation, accessing, and contested which involves contesting discourse, political economy interest, and power relations. This research found that there are three ways of practices of claim making: “grounding claims”; “talking claims”; and “representing claims”. This article argues that the cosmological politics that occurred in the Komodo Islands show that culture and historical beliefs are not just tourism commodities, but more than that as a movement to reclaim the legitimacy of local communities who have been excluded by the state and the private sector in super premium tourism projects.

Keyword: a) Cosmological, b) Political.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This article discusses the reclaiming movement carried out by indigenous communities on Komodo Island in order to defend their rights to land claimed by the state as a national strategic area in the super premium tourism project, Komodo, Labuan Bajo. In 2019, the national government of Indonesia designated Komodo National Park as a "super-premium" tourist destination. As consequences, the park and the surrounding area become the so-called "National Strategic Territory" (Kawasan Strategis Nasional) and to be developed as a "world class eco-tourism destination". To boost the infrastructure, the government granted concessions to a number of private companies and state enterprises that cover an area up to 447.17 hectares inside the park under the so-called "nature-tourism business permit" (Izin Pengusahaan Usaha Pariwisata Alam). Furthermore, the label as a super-premium tourist destination requires that all resources and energy in West Manggarai be dedicated to serve the interests of investment-based tourism development, including in the Komodo National Park (Taman Nasional Komodo/ TNK). For example, since 2014, the government has granted a privatization permit to PT Komodo Wildlife Ecotourism on an area of 151.94 hectares or 0.5% of the total area of Komodo island of around 32,169.2 hectares. On Padar Island, which is part of the TNK area, the government gave PT. KWE to manage a land area of 274.13 hectares or about 19.6% of the total area of Padar Island. Meanwhile, on Rinca Island, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry granted a privatization permit on an area of 22.1 hectares to PT. Segara Komodo Lestari. Two other islands, namely Muang Island and Bero Island, which are included in the TNK and the core zone and the Jungle zone, are planned to be privatized in preparation for the G-20 meeting.

This notion puts many indigenous people's livelihood at risk. An example is the plan to relocate the local communities of the island of Komodo – known as Ata Modo by the state because they are accused of being "wild settlers". For Ata Modo, this relocation threatens their space of life, as well as an attempt to erase the history and civilization of Ata Modo, even though Ata Modo has lived on the island for a thousand years (Verheijen 1987: 256, Auffenberg 1981:350). Besides threatening Ata Modo's agrarian rights, this super premium eco-tourism also intimidates the interspecies companionship of Komodo people with Komodo dragons. On Komodo Island, folklore about the Komodo species as a relative of the Komodo people (Ata Modo) is a legend that is believed and therefore Ata Modo cannot be separated from the Komodo species, for any reason including tourism development. Ata Modo have been living side by side with the ancient Komodo dragons in what anthropologists call an interspecies companionship (Tsing 2012, Harraway 2003). Known in vernacular as Sebae, meaning "the other half", Komodo is depicted in the indigenous fable as the twin of the Komodo people's ancestors (Dale and Afioma 2020). This kinship type of human-animal relationship between Ata Modo and Komodo is also expressed in everyday life.

To defend their space of life, Ata Modo and civil society alliances in Labuan Bajo constructed a counter discourse against the exclusive super premium development of the KNP. They developed three strategies, namely (1) developing the idea of community-based tourism. The

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civil society alliance and the Komodo people are trying to build a kind of cultural house that contains various relics of the ancestors of the Modo people that explain the living relationship between humans and Komodo dragons. The cultural house is expected to be an alternative attraction for tourists who more often visit the Jurassic Park built by the government. (2) spreading community-style conservation discourse. They do this by building a discourse that the large number of people living on the island of Komodo is not a threat to the Komodo, because in fact, they have lived together for centuries and the people there who have been keeping the Komodo dragon from becoming extinct. and (3) re-claiming their land.

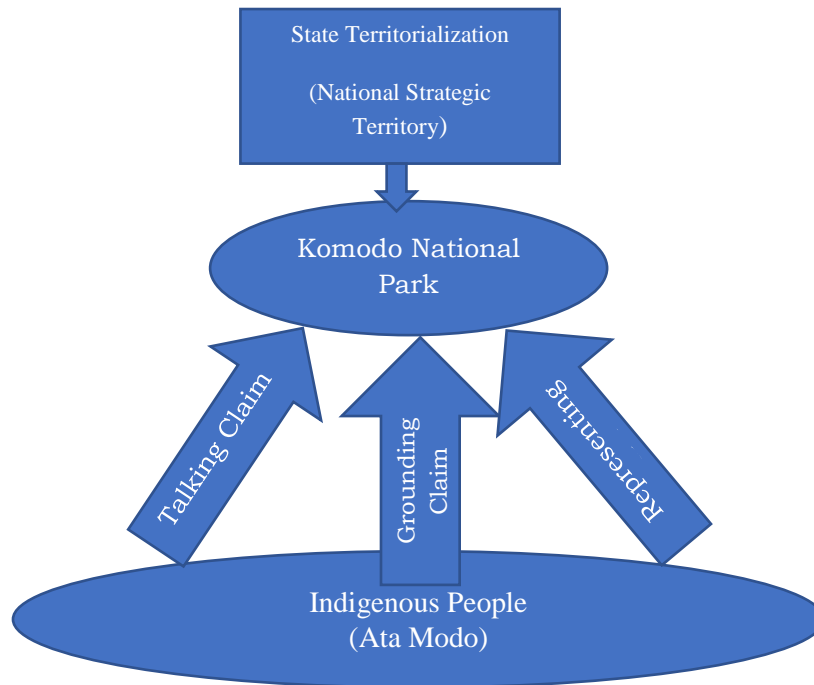
They try to claim their land by continuing to garden in a place that has long been used as their source of livelihood because the Komodo people not only live as fishermen, but many also live by farming, even in areas prohibited by the government. Therefore, eco-tourism of TNK is not only discussed in the context of conservation and ecological interests, but as political-economy projects.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The type of research used in this research is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Data sources in this research consist of primary data and secondary data. Data collection techniques in this research were carried out through observation, interviews, documentation and document study. This research was conducted on Komodo Island, Labuan Bajo, in October 2021.

This article proposes a framework for studying and understanding how people make claims to land and other natural resources. We argue that a focus on claim-making practices of actors (individuals, groups, institutions, companies, the state), and the processes of appropriation, accessing and contestation that come along with it (Garcia, A. & Van Dijk, H.; 2019)

According to Kronenburg García, A., & van Dijk, H. (2019), we identify and discuss three practices of claim making: “grounding claims” is the practice of inscribing or altering the landscape with visible markers connoting ownership; “talking claims” is when speech is used strategically to make, justify and contest claims; and “representing claims” is when claims are represented on material objects (maps, title deeds) that are detached from the resource.



In the context of the Ata Modo community, the grounding claim referred to the efforts of indigenous people to defend land rights based on evidence that supports the claim, for example plantation areas, settlements, building fences or tree plantations. The talking claim in question is the indigenous people's efforts to defend land rights by activating the folklore of Komodo as the twin brother of the komodo people (Ata Modo). Meanwhile, representing claim in this case is an effort to defend land rights through evidence represented by a number of documents such as zoning maps, certificates and other proof of ownership rights.

3. RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Policy Discursive

The dynamics that mark the entire tourism development policy process in Labuan Bajo place the investment-based tourism development discourse represented by the government vs. community-based tourism development promoted by the parties, especially NGOs and indigenous communities on Komodo Island and its surroundings, as the main discourses that confront each other.

First, investment-based tourism development which makes the market (corporation) the main pillar in tourism development. This is demonstrated by the granting of Business Permits for Providing Nature Tourism Services (IUPJWA) and Business Permits for Providing Nature Tourism Facilities (IUPSWA) to private parties to participate in structuring tourism infrastructure in the Komodo National Park area. such as on Loh Liang (Komodo Island) and Loh Buaya (Rinca Island). Tourism development with a model like this is considered to rob



Komodo dragons of their living space, for example reducing agricultural land and increasingly cramped residential areas.

Second, the government considers the growth of the population of the Komodo island, which consists of 500 families and 1,818 people, to be a "threat" to the conservation and survival of these endangered species. Therefore, limiting the number of residents to the number of tourist visits to the loh liang area is a concern of the Komodo National Park Center (BTNK). This form of restriction was originally intended to be carried out by relocating residents living in Komodo dragons, but due to the massive public reaction, the alternative is to make the Loh Liang area a super premium zone which is expensive (1000 USD), and therefore only accessible to wealthy tourists.

Meanwhile, on the other hand, Komodo dragons who have lived on the island for hundreds of years have their own way of defining themselves with Komodo dragons. In the language of the Modo people (Ata Modo), komodo comes from two (2) syllables, namely ko (owned) and modo. So komodo means belonging to (people) modo. In the legend of Ata Modo, Komodo is their twin brother. Once upon a time, long ago, there lived a princess named Dragon Princess who married a young Moja. The Princess became pregnant and gave birth to twins (2) male. However, the two twins have different shapes. One in the form of a human and the other in the form of a lizard. This embarrassed the Dragon Princess and Moja. Then the baby in the form of a lizard named Sebae (Ora) and exiled in a forest. While the human baby was raised and named Gerong. Days passed, years passed, Gerong grew into a young man who was agile and brave. It is said that once Gerong was about to hunt deer in a forest, and he met a giant lizard. Gerong then chased the giant lizard, and was about to kill it with a spear. Suddenly the Dragon Princess appeared and prevented Gerong from drawing his spear at the giant lizard. The Dragon Princess tells Gerong that the giant lizard is Komodo which is Gerong's twin brother. After that incident, the local community treated Komodo well. This is a legend that has been passed down from generation to generation and is believed by the Komodo dragons. and this is what underlies the beliefs and attitudes of the Komodo dragons to stay on the island and be friends with the Komodo dragons who are treated as brothers.

Third, the policy of developing super premium tourism in Labuan Bajo, and especially in the TNK area, does not have a significant economic impact on the Komodo dragons. The tourists rarely stop by the settlements of the Modo people. From Labuan Bajo, tourists can go directly to Loh Liang via a special port that serves as a pier for pinishi ships. This contrasts with the komodo people's port which is located right in front of the Komodo village office, which can only be a place for simple and cheap local boats to dock. In other words, the Komodo dragons are not an integral part of the premium tourism that is being intensively in Labuan Bajo in general. This is what triggers the existence of alternative community-based tourism for the Komodo community, which unfortunately does not get the full support of the government. The Komodo conservation community led by Akbar, who is struggling to build a cultural house that



can be an alternative tourism for tourists, does not get government support, not even the Komodo village government.

Claim Making in Tourims Development Project

State-led development project of the “Komodo Super-Premium Program” is threatening people’s livelihood (Ata Modo) who live in the islands for centuries. The program includes Labuan Bajo in West Manggarai and several islands which includes Komodo National Park (TNK). Consequently, the government boosts infrastructure development through The Ministry of Public Works and Housing which limits the community’s livelihood area at the same time. In total, TNP has 181,700 ha which includes both land and sea areas. The areas have been divided into nine zones where the smallest one belongs to resident areas for 298 ha. In order to protect the super-premium area, the government has limited the population which the community consists of 500 households and 1,818 people. The government sees them as a threat to the conservation and the sustainability of Komodo (the giant lizard) itself. Through BTNK (Komodo National Park Institution), the government has planned to limit and evacuate the people from the forest, where they have been living there since years ago (Interview with the head of BTNK, October 15, 2021). This plan gets a massif rejection reaction both from the community and the environmental NGOs. Eventually, the government decided only the Loh Liang area, the forest area in TNP, becomes the super-premium zone where the tourist needs to pay 1,000 USD to enter the zone. In other words, it is only the privileged tourist who can access the Loh Liang area and the community itself cannot enter the zone as free as before.

The exclusion from the state has triggered some NGOs both local and national based to initiate reclaiming movements. There are SunSpirit for Justice and Peace (which was later called Sunspirit only), a local environmental NGO based in Labuan Bajo, and WALHI, one of the biggest environmental NGO in Indonesia. The movements bases on the fact that the community cannot be separated from the Komodo’s area due to the people and the giant lizard is one ecosystem and need one each other. They have instituted advocacies both in formal and informal ways. Three reclaiming strategies have been done.

Firstly, the community has talking claims by spreading the local legend story which says that the Komodo is their twins' brothers. They are known as Komodo people (Ata Modo) in the local language. It consists of two words, ko (belong to) and Modo, so Komodo means belong to Modo people (Interview with conservation activist, 17 October 2021). The community re-enacts the local legend as proof that they are entitled to the Komodo territory Once upon a time, there was a princess named Dragon Princess who gave birth to a twin son. However, the twin has very different psychical appearance where one of them look like a lizard. Their parents have named the boy Gerong and the lizard as Sebae (Ora). The parent, the Dragon Princess and Moja, felt ashamed of their lizard son so Ora is exiled into the forest. After years have passed, Gerong becomes a good man who has good hunting skills. He went to the forest to hunt the deer but he found a giant lizard instead. Next, Gerong hunts the giant lizard and forgets the deer. Fortunately, the Dragon Princess came up and prevented Gerong to kill the giant lizard. The

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Dragon Princess explained that Gerong cannot kill the giant lizard because it is his twin brother. Since then, the community on Komodo island has treated the animal properly as their family. The story has spread out into several islands around it where the giant lizard also exists. This story has been living in the community and verbally tell throughout generations so that the giant lizard cannot be separated from them.

Second, the community has grounding claims in investing in tourist infrastructure and having an audience with the National House of Representatives. The state-led tourism development project sells and represents the premium facilities only, including the modern boat. The boat has a crucial role in the Komodo islands' tourism because there are 147 islands around the National Komodo Park where the Komodo lives on several islands only (Interview with Regional Secretary, 14 October 2021). The community started to invest and exhibit their traditional and minimalist boat in the tourism area in Labuan Bajo (Interview with tourist operator, 13 October 2021). The action aims to gain attention from the tourist and hopefully, they will use their service instead of the modern one. The price from the community is much cheaper than the modern one. They can offer to start from 140 USD, while the modern one start from 1.000 USD (Interview with tourist operator, 13 October 2021). The community and the SunSpirit are aware that they are in a weak position so the grounding claim needs to be done continuously in several ways.

The community and Sun Spirit actively held demonstrations so that they caught the National House of Representatives attention. This is a good opportunity for them because they can wider and get more attention at the national level to the discourse on community-based tourism development. They invest to build a relationship and try to cooperate with them. The “Komodo Super-Premium Program” is a highly political issue because the national government dominates the plan and the implementation. Meanwhile, the regional government and house of representative have a little contribution, including in tax and levy issues. The National House of Representatives has invited the community and the Sun Spirit to discuss the problem. They also promised will negotiate with the President so that the community has more participation opportunities in the tourism development project (Interview with Sun Spirit, 17 Oktober 2021). Even though the negotiation is still in progress, the case shows how grounding claims through the National House of Representatives can contest the national discourse.

Lastly, representing the claims have been done by developing a house of culture and alternative tourism route. The tourist project initiated by the government focuses on premium facilities which are usually owned by oligarchy and investors outside of the islands. The community and the Sun Spirit have initiated alternative tourism activities based on local wisdom and culture (interview with Sun Spirit, 12 October 2021). They build a house of culture, which is based on the community residents, containing the local artifacts and the historical relationship between the community and the Komodo. The house is not merely a tourism site. Moreover, the house can tell how close the relationship between the community and the Komodo itself is, that the community is the one who can understand and take care of the Komodo since years ago. The alternative tourism package will teach the tourist how to speak the local language and how to

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approach the Komodo smoothly like locals (Interview with the local activist, 16 October 2021). Unfortunately, the house of culture is stuck nowadays because of a lack of funds and support. Consequently, the tourists tend to go to Loh Liang, the National Komodo Park, instead of visiting the community residents.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has showed that State-led development of the “Komodo Super-Premium Program” in West Manggarai, Flores has been eliminate local community both in land and coastal areas. The state facilitate the private sector by giving them concession and permit to govern and even develop tourism project. Furthermore, the state has classified the sea into several zones which allows the private sector to expand their tourism project as well as their capital accumulation. Aside from that, the provincial government has planned to relocate the local community which sees as illegal resident because they do not have land certificate. This legal approached ignore the fact that the local community has been living in the Komodo area since years ago, long before the premium tourism project initiated by the national government.

In order to respond the policy, this article has demonstrated how the local community defend and actively reclaim their legitimation over the territory. Along with the NGOs both from national and local, including the Sunspirit for Justice and Peace, they are able to establish cosmological movements in three areas. Firstly, they are claiming their relationship with the Komodo through talking and echoing their identity as a twin brother of Komodo. Consequently, the local community can be separated with the Komodo. Secondly, the local community has grounding their claims in two ways, investing in tourist infrastructure and having an audience with the National House of Representatives. Lastly, the community represent their relationship with Komodo by building a house of culture and alternative tourism route. The cosmological politics that happen in Komodo islands shows that culture and historical believe are not merely a tourism commodity. Furthermore, the cosmological aspects see as movement to reclaim the local community legitimation who has been excluded by the state and private sector in super premium tourism projects.

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