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Enabling Fictions: Politics, Representation and the Environment in Maluku, Indonesia

Nicola Frost

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The legibility of a society provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering, high-modernist ideology provides the desire, the authoritarian state provides the determination to act on that desire, and an incapacitated civil society provides the levelled social terrain on which to build. (1998:5)

Introduction: state, development, and local authority in Indonesia

For more than three decades, the highly centralised, arch-modernist ideology of the New Order dominated every aspect of Indonesian political, economic, and cultural life.¹ Although the last three years have seen substantial changes in Indonesia's political climate, there is as yet no clear indication of a major change in its general direction. The drive towards modernisation and development, rationalisation and control has had profound implications for the relationship between people and state. This paper explores this relationship through an examination of the debates around the control of natural resources in Maluku, eastern Indonesia. It traces the logic of state development discourse, and the creative responses of local communities to its far-reaching influence.

The legible state and customary law

James Scott identifies some features that characterise large-scale, state-led 'development' initiatives:

A state's desire for legibility is a desire to limit the power of the unknown. As Scott notes, as long as local terrain, whether geographical or cultural, requires a local guide to render it legible to the state, it retains some level of autonomy or initiative (54). In an attempt to minimise this risk, complex and contingent variety is mapped onto a single, universal, unchanging template, which simplifies reality by focusing only on predetermined elements. Eventually, reality almost comes to resemble this inadequate representation. Almost, but not entirely. Scott discusses the critical role of what he terms *mētis* – the situated, local knowledge needed as the 'dark twin' in order to construct high modernism as the rhetorical antidote to backwardness, but which, ironically, is essential to the continued functioning of any modernist society (313).

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The Anthropology Department at Goldsmiths is one of the newest in Britain, having been formally created in 1985. We are proud of what we have achieved since then, and in particular of the way that people in the Department - students, staff and researchers - have sought to broaden the frontiers of the discipline and to engage critically and creatively with the traditions of Anthropology in the contemporary world.

We hope that the Goldsmiths Anthropology Research Papers will provide a platform to communicate some of the work that makes the Goldsmiths Department distinctive. It will include articles by members of academic staff, research fellows, PhD and other students.

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¹As the fieldwork on which the bulk of this paper is based was conducted in 1998, just before, and immediately after Suharto's resignation, I will concentrate on the situation at that time.

In the concept of 'development' (*pembangunan*) as it is currently understood in Indonesia, inheres an inextricable link between the overtly political reconfiguration of local systems of practice and the economic expansion promoted by the state, whose ends are both the material advancement of the population and the creation of a stable capitalist economy to which all its citizens are committed. (Mearns and Healey 1996:6)

As this comment implies, '*pembangunan*' carries resonances of the two most important modernist projects of the New Order – social and cultural 'modernisation' and control, and economic progress. The need for national development and the state's duty to use national natural resources to achieve it can be traced back to the Constitution of 1945. Chapter 33 states clearly that it is the right and responsibility of the state to control all natural resources for the general good of the Indonesian people. There is a sense that anything (including natural resources) can be rationalised, planned, and managed for the furtherance of the development goal. This central right and ability to control and 'manage' is also a powerful legitimisation for the nature and character, even the existence, of the Indonesian state. *Pembangunan* is presented as a politically disinterested, universally beneficial enterprise (Li 1999a). All good citizens must desire development, and therefore any resistance is seen as explicitly anti-Indonesian: 'according to Human Rights

Watch Asia, the label 'obstructor of development' has replaced 'communist' as the accusation of choice for allegedly subversive activity' (McCully 1996:264).

In Indonesia, a carefully limited incorporation of *adat* (local customary) law into national legislation helps underline the supremacy of the modernist state. Rather than disregard *adat* law altogether, the state incorporates elements of *adat* into its own modernist discourse, at once establishing a direct hierarchical relationship between the two systems, very much in the state's favour, and introducing a deviant 'dark twin' to affirm the modernist position. Under Indonesian law all land and resources not officially privately owned belong to the state. Under the Basic Agrarian Law of 1960, and the Basic Forestry Law of 1967, traditional communal land stewardship (*hak ulayat*) is however recognised as long as the land is under active cultivation, and it does not interfere with state interests (SKEPHI and Kiddell-Monroe 1993). *Adat* law is defined in relation to state law; *adat* rights are (in principle at least) respected, as long as those rights are recognised and registered *with the state* (Campbell 1999:3). By making the state the reference point for assertion of *adat* rights, it is hoped that local people will buy into the national development project:

Documentation and registration of indigenous people's lands will bring politically and economically disadvantaged and marginalised groups into the mainstream of national political

life, thereby lowering the possibility of political destabilisation, forest degradation, and acts of intentional destruction. (Zerner 1992:94)

The rationale for intervention of this nature depends on an image of 'indigenous' people as peripheral, backward, and uncivilised, in need of the guidance and superior technical knowledge of the modern state in order to develop and participate fully in national life. This approach does not permit conceptually the possibility of resistance: deviance and non-cooperation are seen as ignorance, and further proof of the need for state-guided development.

Unsurprisingly, national and international activist groups have sought to challenge this characterisation. However, the resulting shift is not as radical as it first appears. The negative stereotype of the ignorant primitive, rather than being systematically dismantled, and replaced with a new, more complex picture of social life, is often simply inverted, to present an image of the indigenous community, imbued with inalienable 'natural' ecological wisdom. The image remains homogenous, devoid of internal conflict, and spatially and culturally marginalised from national concerns. Uneven power relations remain unchallenged. Far from engaging with and debunking the idea of an overarching modernist ideology, these more benevolent representations have merely replaced one model with another: out with external technical expertise, in with indigenous knowledge for sustainable development.

Interestingly, however, the incorporation of *adat* into national law does permit limited dialogue between *adat* community and state, as there is an implied relationship between them. It is this state-engendered space that facilitates local people's radical, creative engagement in the politics of representation. The process of objectifying, simplifying, and stereotyping is strategically co-opted and adapted by local figures, along with national and international activists, in order to communicate with and influence the Indonesian government. These alliances are more loose, contingent coalitions of interest than stable 'communities' (Lash et al. 1996:23), serving the various political interests of their participants, and resulting in a localised level of personal empowerment, albeit within the overarching jurisdiction of the state.

Maluku and the anthropologists

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Spice Islands of Maluku in eastern Indonesia were among the most strategically important sites of the Dutch colonial empire. After independence, however, Maluku became a place of exile for political prisoners and an administrative backwater, virtually ignored by the Java-centric New Order state. In the scholarly literature, too, Maluku has been marginalised. The characterisation by the Leiden school of 'Eastern Indonesia' as a coherent unit of ethnographic study (Wrangham 1997:1) has had the effect both of isolating Maluku from its wider cultural and political context, and of masking the considerable diversity within the region.

Contrary to the image propagated by prevailing insular, arch-structuralist ethnographic accounts (see for example McKinnon 1991), Maluku is, and has always been, actively engaged with national and international debates. Indeed, its reference points have frequently bypassed the national, and connected directly with international elements. Under the Dutch the link was spices; the issue today is religious conflict.² Here, however, I concentrate on two related strands of national and international discourse with particular resonance in Maluku: the environment, and indigenous rights. A new anthropological approach can provide the detailed ethnographic analysis needed to situate the complexity of social life within a theoretical framework which encompasses national and international discourses. Anthropologists like Sandra Pannell have begun this work in Maluku (for example 1993, 1998), while Anna Tsing's approach to similar issues in Kalimantan has been widely influential (1993, 1999).

This paper draws on fieldwork conducted in Maluku from March to September 1998.³ The bulk of the research was carried out in the Tanimbar Islands, in the south of the province, but material is also drawn from visits to other areas, especially Haruku, in central Maluku (see maps). As a way of exploring connections between core and periphery, community and state, and of unpacking the political framework around which environmental and 'indigenous' discourse in Indonesia is organised, I focus

on two examples. The first is the promotion of *sasi* (a practice that regulates access to certain natural resources, practised throughout Maluku) as an indigenous system of sustainable natural resource management. The second is the opposition to a controversial logging concession granted by the Indonesian government on Yamdena island, Tanimbar. These case studies are examples of ways in which people and social practices from Maluku have been configured, represented, and valued in national rhetoric and international activism. First, I will explore the international conceptual and political context in which this occurs.

Victims or villains? Ambiguous images from the periphery

In the often overheated contexts of environmental politics, resource development, and human rights debates, indigeneity is more than a cultural identity. It represents a dynamic social process and a contested domain, wherein indigeneity can circumscribe a political argument, a resource-related practice, a stigmatised status, a shared

2 Since the fieldwork on which this paper is based was conducted, the province has again become prominent on the international stage. The scale and brutality of the communal violence in the region has made headline news worldwide. I will not consider the effect of the conflict on the issues discussed in the paper, as this is not yet clear.

3 I would like to thank Rachel Wrangham and Sabtu Ohoirat for their invaluable collaboration on this project.

historical experience or event, and a defining moment in nation-citizen relationships. (Pannell and von Benda-Beckmann 1998:20)

There are notable gaps and contradictions in the State's approach to forests. Part of this ambiguity is related to the people who live in or near forests, often far from political and commercial centres. Many of these people could be characterised as 'indigenous', and are thereby connected to a pervasive and politically nuanced set of images and assumptions. Characterisation of indigenous people is relatively clear-cut: depending on your political standpoint they are 'innocents, victims or villains' (Li 1999b:xv). The image is generally of a remote, isolated band of people, who are ethnically and socially homogenous, and relatively self-sufficient, not participating in the market economy, much less in the national community. In this section I look at the various images of 'indigenous people' promoted by the Indonesian state and campaigning groups, and examine the ways in which these representations can be co-opted by the people themselves in order to construct a dialogue with those in power.

Unity in diversity? Indigenous people and the Indonesian state

Kahn has noted how unequal power relations during the Dutch period were often understood in cultural terms as relations between distinct cultural groups (Kahn 1999). Indonesian state ideology today

preaches a similar ostensibly non-hierarchical, multicultural message. The state motto, 'unity in diversity', an apparently innocuous description of the multi-ethnic nature of the nation, has become a normative framework through which to organise society. Diversity has become subject to government definition: 'In Indonesia today, people without an acceptable "culture" or "tradition" cannot be readily incorporated within the state's framework for "unity in diversity"' (Li 1999b:10).

The inevitable result, in an authoritarian environment, has been the reduction of cultural variety to symbolic status. Several writers have suggested that the extent of state-imagined diversity is indicated by Jakarta's theme park, Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, where each of the recognised 'cultures' are represented, simplified, and depoliticised to the point of caricature through a series of tableaux of traditional architecture and costume: 'Indonesia's diversity is recognised in the national motto, but its representation is more evident in Taman Mini than in effective regional autonomy' (Chauvel 1996:61).⁴

Paradoxically, despite this heavy-handed nationalist promotion of homogeneity, in many ways the identity of Indonesia as a nation-state, like that of Australia, is based upon exactly this diversity (see Strang

4 See also Anderson (1973), a piece written, remarkably, before Taman Mini was even built.

1997:78). As with *adat*, it is therefore the *management* of diversity *within* state structures, not its elimination, which concerns the state.⁵

Aware of the political charge the term carries, Indonesia officially denies that it has any indigenous people (Barber et al 1995:37). The state has created its own category: *suku terasing*. This is usually translated as 'isolated people', but can also mean strange or exotic people (Li 1999a:300). *Suku terasing*, who are generally nomadic or semi-nomadic upland hunter-gatherers or shifting cultivators, are designated as primitive people, in need of state intervention to allow them to develop as 'proper' Indonesian citizens. The ideological role of the *suku terasing* is disproportionate to their numbers; the presence of deviance and backwardness affirms the normative image of the Indonesian citizen, modelled on the idealised Javanese peasant. This said, the status of the *suku terasing* – and of any cultural or ethnic group that deviates too far from the Javanese norm – is somewhat ambiguous. They are at once vulnerable *and* threatening, though this does not disrupt the civilising mission of the development project: 'Either way, Nualu [a group from Seram in Maluku] are frequently viewed as prime candidates for *pembangunan* (development) in its moral and ideological sense' (Ellen 1999:136). The designation and positioning of the *suku terasing* within the logic of the state allows their 'deviance' to be addressed through development.

'Black and white stories, multicoloured photographs'⁶: indigeneity in activist discourse

International activists and indigenous people themselves have made constructive use of the essentialised image of people with a special relationship with nature, charged with its care. Indigenous peoples are seen as unchanging, more connected with nature than history; they are the 'guardians of the rainforest', possessed of a special wisdom regarding the use and management of natural resources. From being vilified as primitives, indigenous people are now celebrated for their 'authenticity'. This celebration however reifies the stereotype and further entrenches the connection between legitimate political demands and a suitably 'indigenous' image:

The underlying assumption seems to be that since indigenous people have traditionally lived in environmentally sustainable ways, they deserve to be able to determine for themselves to continue their traditional way of life. Thus, while the environmental issue gives claims for self-determination an extra legitimacy, it also perpetuates the romantic image. (von Benda-Beckmann 1997:315)

⁵ Compare this with Fiji, where the colonial administration created a new, uniform socio-political structure in order '[t]o settle once and for all the "problem" of controlling the "natives" under a centralised authority' (Ratuva 1998:56).

⁶ von Benda-Beckmann 1997:307

Whereas minorities previously under-communicated their ethnic identity to avoid persecution, there can now be increased benefits in emphasising that difference. In Honduras this extends to reversing a previous enthusiasm for incorporating non-indigenous outsiders into Indian populations, for now people see this as a potential threat to tribal authority (Utting 1993:158).

As Brosius comments, NGOs (non-governmental organisations) appear to represent new forms of political agency and herald a fundamental shift in the balance of power (1999a:36) whereas in fact their strategies refer to the dominant paradigm, and do little to dismantle its essentialism. This positive view of the East is essentially a mirror image of pejorative orientalism; the 'other' remains intact, discrete, and different (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997:97). As Li comments, 'it is ... essentially the same' image of the "traditional" and/or marginal uplander that informs both the construction of state politics and also, paradoxically, their critique.' (Li 1999b:11) Where once were 'primitive tribes', now there are 'indigenous communities'.⁷ As Pannell and von Benda-Beckmann point out, 'many of the assumptions which underpin the construct "community" also apply to the category of

'suku terasing', but while *suku terasing* is random and destructive, 'community' is stable and orderly (1998:20). 'In this form of social and political essentialism, communities become the new tribes, or even worse, the new races of development and modernisation discourses.' (Pannell 1998:196) It is however important to distinguish between the essentialisms of the oppressed and the oppressor, despite the similarity of the images used, for, as we will see, the purposes for which they are used can be very different.

Beyond the noble savage

Within these rather static versions and inversions of the modernist paradigm is a complex and deeply political network of agendas and alliances. The homogenous 'community', beloved of social activists, development agencies, and governments is more accurately seen as a constantly shifting network of politically charged coalitions and conflicts, coming together at strategic moments for particular common ends. The way in which 'communities' are represented – and who does the representing – is therefore itself a political issue. It is however also a profoundly creative process, with real transformative potential, at least at the individual level.

Many marginal 'indigenous' groups rely for effective representation at national and international level on the support of mediators, be they NGOs, lawyers, or simply individuals from the local community. Wolvekamp describes their role as one of

⁷ While obscuring differences within communities, the indigenous label also disguises huge variations *between* groups. There is a substantial distance between the nomadic Penan, unsure of the meaning of 'Malaysia', and the satellite dishes and European pop music of the equally 'indigenous' Tanimbarese (Brosius 1997).

cultural brokerage, providing 'crucial support to bridge the gap between local aspirations and the formal language used by governments' (1999:11); Chee-Beng says that middle class representatives 'both complement and supplement the role of traditional leaders' (1997:280). But is the relationship always that straightforward? A legal ruling from 1989 indicates some of the potential tensions. The Indonesian environmental group WALHI took on five government agencies and the Indorayon Pulp and Paper Co. in a dispute over local people's rights in the face of commercial pollution of water sources. They lost, but the case is significant because the courts acknowledged for the first time that an NGO has the legal standing to represent local people's right to *environmental* protection. Interestingly, it was ruled that such an NGO must demonstrate that their aim is genuinely environmental, and that they are sufficiently *representative* of the local community (Sembiring 1996:88). The very fact that these elements are stipulated indicates that there is potential for debate on either point.

As political ecology reminds us, there are close links between environmental issues and broader political questions, especially the impact of global capitalism on the livelihoods of local people. An example is the Chipko movement in Uttarakhand, northern India: 'the most celebrated "environmental" movement in the Third World is viewed by its participants as being above all a peasant movement' (Guha 1991:xii). This does not denigrate its environmental contribution,

merely contextualises it within a history of state-peasant conflict in Uttarakhand. Similarly, the movement opposing the construction of the Narmada dam sees itself as much more than a single-issue pressure group; although there are location-specific environmental elements to the campaign, its leaders travel widely, promoting the rights of the poor in the face of development threats worldwide (McCully 1996:306).

If we consider these examples in relation to the Indonesian context, it is easy to see why the government is keen to isolate environmental disputes as much as possible from issues of social equity and human rights, and equally easy to see that this distinction, artificial though it is, can be useful for groups seeking to adopt an approach which will allow them to further their cause without undue restriction from an authoritarian state. Survival International points out that many activist groups operating under authoritarian regimes identify themselves as environmental campaigners, as the environment is seen as less politically contentious, and they are thus more likely to be allowed to continue operating.⁸ There is, however, always a more fundamental political agenda:

In adopting a particular strategy, social protestors are both trying to defend their interests *and* passing judgement on the prevailing social arrangements.

The latter, so to say, ideological dimension of social protest needs to be inferred even when it is not formally articulated.' (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997:13)

As we will see in the Tanimbar case study, the character of an organisation or a campaign is very often merely a question of emphasis. As Escobar says, social movements are cultural struggles over meaning (1996). Indeed, the ideological element can be evident before any environmental impact is felt. Colchester claims that the establishment of a nature reserve in Suriname was seen 'not so much as a problem of economic deprivation as a constraint on [local people's] customary political autonomy' (Colchester 1995:81). Similarly, Peluso notes that for many forest communities in Indonesia faced with restrictions on their access to forest land, 'their actual use of the forest changed much less than did their legal access' (Peluso 1992:72).

The issue of how representative an intermediary is raises some different, but related questions. As has been noted, 'communities' encompass a variety of agendas, interests, and perspectives. Anyone claiming to represent a community must inevitably consolidate this variety, in order to present a coherent argument, and 'speak the language' of those they hope to influence. This can result in an apparent 'gap' between represented and representative. Von Benda-Beckmann acknowledges the difficulties that might arise in trying to represent *back* to the

community the progress of international debates:

To be sure, intermediate NGOs are in a very difficult position, because they are forced to follow the accepted argumentations of the politically powerful institutions, both at international and national level, while at the same time having to legitimate themselves to the group they represent and for whom the ways of international politics are at times incomprehensible. (von Benda-Beckmann 1997:306)

I argue that this reveals more than a question of simply shifting between discourses for purposes of communication. A more radical, dynamic process of transformation is underway. The very act of representation makes the mediators active agents in the shaping of outsider perceptions, as they strategically construct their community in outsiders' terms.

In her discussion of Amazonian Indians, Conklin highlights how creative engagement with the prevailing discourses can involve active transfiguration of the way one presents oneself to the world:

All politics are conducted by adjusting one's discourse to the language and goals of others, selectively deploying ideas and *symbolic resources* to create bases for alliance. Reformulated representations of ethnic identity are strategic adaptations to specific political

⁸ Personal communication, September 1998.

and social environments. (1997:724 emphasis added)

Conklin usefully emphasises the aesthetic aspect of these symbolic resources – Amazonian Indians who *look* like Amazonian Indians have a greater claim to indigenous authenticity. This mirrors the privileging of visual imagery and language in Scott's account of state operations, and accurately reflects the importance of visual images in representation of this kind. However, perhaps because of this emphasis on the superficial basis of many of these images, Conklin gives a rather cynical account of their strategic manipulation by Amazonian Indians, stressing the way the reification of visual images can result in a narrowing of conceptions of indigeneity, on outsiders' terms:

There is an inherent asymmetry at the core of the eco-Indian alliance: the symbolic value of Indian cultural identity is bestowed on terms defined primarily by non-Indians. Transnational symbolic politics accommodate native peoples' definitions of themselves and their goals only to the extent that these self-definitions resonate with Western ideological and symbolic constructs. (1997:729)

Tsing takes a more generous view of 'indigenous' people's use of symbolic resources to pursue their own agendas. She sees the shifting space of intersection between the various 'development fantasies' as a valuable opportunity for local empowerment:

[Successful development collaborations] are made possible only by clever engagements with green development fantasies of the rural, the backward, and the exotic. "Tribal elders" are made in the mobile spaces found within coercive international dreams of conservation and development. And these men and women – granted agency within the fantasies of their sponsors – are enabled to forge alliances that yet somehow present the hope of transforming top-down coercion into local engagement. (1999:159)

Tsing develops a sophisticated understanding of the relationships between community, mediator, and those with political power. She sees the 'tribal elders', the public face of the community, in an explicitly creative rather than manipulative role:

[I]t is they who, to hold the attention of potential rural-minority advocates, take responsibility for the fantasy of the tribe... they enact a fantasy in which whether they play themselves or someone else's understanding of themselves is ambiguous; the community they can represent is produced in their development-directed performances of 'community'. (1999:162; 167)

In this section we have seen how powerful is the isolated primitive image of indigenous people, in different ways in both state and

activist discourse. However, as Li argues, it is not enough simply to correct stereotyped images:

Representations of the uplands in terms of marginality serve particular agendas, and have real effects in the shaping of upland development. They cannot simply be dismissed as incorrect, and replaced with more nuanced historical and ethnographic accounts. They need to be examined in the contexts in which they are generated and the purposes they serve. (1999b:1)

In the two case studies that follow, I aim to trace the way in which these various representations intersect and resonate with common symbols in contexts of environmental debates in Maluku. In particular, I hope to restore some measure of creative agency to local people, within the overarching context of Indonesian state discourse.

Sasi and the dynamics of natural resource management

The historical trajectory of a community-management structure, like that of any political and legal institution, is in part the product of the ways interested parties and institutions have imagined its purposes and narrated its history, and attempted to shape it to suit their own purposes. (Zerner 1994b:100)

Sasi is a general term to describe a varied and widespread practice in Maluku whereby access to certain natural resources in particular locations is restricted to specific periods throughout the year. *Sasi* regulations can be imposed by local government, the church, or *adat* leaders. It can be applied to a range of natural resources, from sea cucumbers and shellfish to coconuts, and even sand and rocks. In recent years *sasi* has been heralded by local, national, and international bodies as an example of an indigenous resource management system which successfully allows for sustainable exploitation of natural resources. However, ethnographic studies suggest that *sasi*'s presentation as 'indigenous', and as a system for 'resource management' serves a number of different political ends, not all of them ecological.

Little is known about the nature of pre-colonial *sasi*, as written records do not exist. Zerner notes however that in the Kei islands: 'By the early twentieth century, and probably for decades before written records were produced, *sasi* was a changing hybrid institution that arose in a border zone of intercultural contact, crosscutting interests, and competing claims on resources' (Zerner 1994b:88). The position of *sasi* as a space for cultural and political intersection has persisted and developed over the last century. Zerner continues: 'Far from having germinated in an indigenous institutional or political vacuum, these ideas are being nurtured and disseminated by a variety of sophisticated institutional bodies with

overlapping and often intersecting interests' (Zerner 1994b:103).

During the first half of the twentieth century, much of this intercultural contact was between locals and the Dutch. Colonial administrators played an important role in codifying and developing the existing informal system. Charles Zerner shows how an attempt to inscribe the fluid, historically shaped practices of *sasi* in the form of European law at once deprived it of its flexibility, and introduced an element of formal enforcement (Zerner 1994a). The records of penalties for infringement of *sasi* regulations suggest the system was not unanimously popular with local people. Dutch officials record how they had to force the rules on the recalcitrant natives; there is a clear sense that refusal to comply with *sasi* regulations was equated with resistance to Dutch governance (Zerner 1994b:86).

Sasi today

After independence interest in *sasi* as a vehicle for state control faded. In recent years, *sasi* has been revived and reconfigured once more, this time by a combination of international environmental scholars, elements of central government, and certain local individuals. For its environmental advocates, *sasi* is a static, ahistorical system, practised by the people of Maluku since time immemorial, and representing indigenous wisdom, that is only now fully appreciated for its contribution to conservation. For the government, *sasi* is a prime exemplar of the doctrine of sustainable development (see

Nikijuluw 1994), over which it seeks to assert a level of ownership. However, an ethnographic study of contemporary *sasi* reveals a more varied, dynamic picture than these characterisations suggest. At the local level, *sasi* is closely bound up with sources and patterns of local authority, connections with international commodity circulation, and cultural and spiritual priorities.

Pannell, amongst others, makes an interesting case for the connection between the conceptualisation of a species as a potential commodity, and its inclusion in *sasi* regulations, and says that the length of time that *sasi* is 'closed' (i.e. when access is restricted) is largely determined by the arrival of traders. (n.d.:6). In Kei Besar, *sasi* on trochus shells, and the rituals accompanying it have been evolving since the 1920s, when Japanese buyers first came to Kei (Thorburn 2000:1467).

In Tanimbar, there is *sasi* on coconut trees, which are generally privately owned and harvested for copra, a major cash crop in Tanimbar as it does not require complex processing. In effect, the *sasi* on coconuts operates as a kind of savings scheme. The rationale is that if a larger amount of copra is sold at once, yielding a lump sum, the money can be used for making large purchases, such as school uniforms, or building materials. Although coconut trees produce fruit all year round, it is easier to tempt traders to more remote villages if larger quantities of copra are being produced at one time. *Sasi* is opened and

closed by the appropriate village authorities (see below). The basis on which these decisions are made is not always ecological. In the Tanimbar village of Tumbur in 1998, village officials kept *sasi* on coconuts closed for a longer time than usual (six months rather than the usual four) in order to secure enough village labour to work on the construction of the new church. However, finally the people themselves defied the authorities and 'opened' *sasi* themselves in a bid to provide additional income during the economic crisis. This kind of action does not help to enhance respect for *sasi*, and indeed, in Tumbur there is considerable paranoia about coconut theft, to the extent that, once *sasi* is open, people harvest their coconuts day and night, and in the pouring rain, in an attempt to thwart thieves.

The motivating force behind many of these variants is a desire to participate in the cash economy, not just locally, but on the international market. In Tanimbar *sasi* does not play a major role in maintaining the sustainability of resources. Even where *sasi* was used to attempt to regulate overexploitation, in 1998, at the height of the economic crisis, assuring short term cash income was many people's first priority. Although the minimum harvestable size of some shellfish was theoretically determined by *sasi*, 'Chinese' merchants (who act as middlemen for all Tanimbarese export transactions) were willing to buy smaller and smaller specimens, partly to take advantage of high profit margins while export prices were high in Rupiah terms, and partly to

enable local fishermen to pay off the debt they had incurred in the merchants' shops over the period when *sasi* was closed.

Sasi regulations are mediated through a series of interlocking, sometimes conflicting, layers of authority and influence. The rigour with which the regulations are observed is a good measure of the local balance of power, and in particular of the balance between local (*adat*) and central (government) authority. In Tanimbar, several different sources of authority participate in *sasi*. *Sasi gereja* is controlled by the church, the observation of which is part of being a good Christian. The penalty for breaking *sasi gereja* is a supernatural one, and is widely feared. In Makatian in Tanimbar, a family explained that they were frightened to put *sasi gereja* on their citrus tree in case one of their children took a fruit and was punished by God. Pannell notes the feeling on Luang that continuing trochus stocks are the result of correct observation of the *sasi gereja* regulations, which relate directly to Christian ethics, rather than scientific knowledge of ecosystems: 'even in the face of diminishing returns, there is still a widespread belief among collectors that the social management of the species will somehow miraculously ensure an endless supply of trochus shells.' (1993:63).

Sasi adat, imposed by *adat* elders, has a similar effect in areas where *adat* is still strong, as a violation constitutes disobeying the ancestors; it would not be surprising for the guilty party to fall ill shortly after the

offence. On the island of Haruku, where *adat* remains strong, *sasi* is strictly observed; the harvesting period for lumba fish is only one or two days a year, fish stocks are protected, and benefits are felt fairly evenly throughout the community, as everyone has the same opportunity to harvest lumba. In some villages in Tanimbar, however, *sasi* regulations are regularly flouted. As prices for commercial marine species destined for export rose with the economic crisis in 1998, the fines imposed by *adat* officials provided no deterrent, and stock levels diminished rapidly.

In several villages, the church has lent its authority to *sasi adat*, resulting in a sort of hybrid operation whereby the *adat* elders, in particular the *tuan tanah* (a kind of customary village landlord whose counterpart the *tuan tanah laut* has similar jurisdiction over the sea) decide on the most appropriate date to open *sasi*. In Makatian, the opening of *sasi* on sea cucumbers and other marine produce involves a ceremony in a boat on the sea, in which the elders drink *sopi*, a coconut spirit, in order to be able to communicate with the ancestors and ask their permission to open *sasi*. A glass of water filled with candlenuts is thrown into the sea to make the water calm and enable people to dive for produce. The village priest, in this village a Protestant, is invited to accompany the expedition, and prayers are said in church. At the close of the harvesting period, some produce is brought to the church for a special thanksgiving service. Catholic priests stressed that their

involvement in *adat* was merely a reflection of the Church's participation in all areas of spiritual life, and that it merely contributed its authority to the *adat* process, without interfering.

Debates around marine *sasi* on Luang illustrate the intersection of *adat* authority with national ideology. Butonese fishermen visiting Luang counter local claims of *adat*-defined rights to coastal waters by evoking the concept of common Indonesian nationhood – *satu nusa, satu bangsa* – which denies Luang people's special claim over those resources. Pannell comments that although it might appear that these two sides are operating within different symbolic fields, in fact as we have seen, *adat* ownership is explicitly recognised by national law, but is ultimately subject to the state's jurisdiction. (1993:70) A national-legal register brings together these two discourses, but at the same time underlines the way in which *adat* has been co-opted by the Indonesian state into a deeply asymmetric power relationship. Lokollo (cited in Zerner 1994a:1112) is more optimistic about this intersection. He criticises the hijacking of *sasi* for environmentalist ends, but indicates how positioning *sasi* within Indonesian law can help protect local interests against private sector exploitation.

At the local level, however, the state's influence over *sasi* practices varies widely. *Sasi negeri* is determined and administered by the village head (*kepala desa*), a government official. Some powerful *kepala*

desa, such as the one in the remote Tanimbarese village of Makatian, have used *sasi negeri* successfully to generate village revenue, and to promote the building of permanent housing, but this success is likely to be as much owing to Makatian's isolation from the capital Saumlaki (organising harvests at the same time attracts traders to the village), and the incumbent *kepala desa*'s impeccable *adat* credentials (his clan was one from which traditional leaders were chosen), as it is to any innate authority vested in the government position. On the island of Seira, off the coast of the main Tanimbarese island, Yamdena, *adat* and government have joined forces to try to contain the endemic flouting of government-imposed *sasi* regulations. The island's one policeman caught some men stealing marine produce at night. The next morning they were brought before the village head and fined Rp250,000, to be divided equally between the five villages on the island. The village head explained that this was both an *adat* and a government matter; while there is no tradition of imposing financial sanctions for *adat* transgressions (an *adat* penalty is usually paid in jewellery and woven fabric – traditional exchange items), the fine is designated *sangsi adat* (*adat* sanction). This lends the action the authority of *adat* (with its implications of disapproval from the ancestors, and the danger of falling victim to sudden illness as a result).

Clearly, the relationship between *sasi*, *adat*, and government is an intricate and mutually dependent one. In Luang, Pannell notes,

local officials' involvement in *sasi* indicates the potentially productive and collaborative nature of state governmentality at the local level (n.d.:11). However many people in Tanimbar commented that transgression of *sasi* regulations was a village matter, and should be settled internally. When an incident of coconut stealing in the village of Ilngei was transferred to the sub-district head in the local capital, there was widespread criticism of the village head for being unable to deal with the problem locally.

Eliza Kissya and the Haruku kewang

Zerner notes how seeking to legitimise *sasi* as an indigenous system for natural resource management helps empower peripheral communities (1994a:1083). In Haruku, an island near Ambon in central Maluku, the resurrection of flagging *sasi* institutions has operated as a vehicle for diverse forms of local empowerment. Although the success of *sasi* depends on the cooperation of the whole village, the initiative here largely relates to one individual. An image of the indigenous community as an undifferentiated group obscures this crucial element.

The driving force behind the Haruku *sasi* revival is Eliza Kissya, the descendant of former *ketua kewang* (head of *sasi* wardens), and an energetic advocate of Haruku interests in a number of fora. He has written a book about *sasi* in Haruku, funded by Oxfam, and published by Sejati, a Jakarta-based NGO, in Indonesian and English

(1995).⁹ Kissya explains that his aim was not to inscribe a definitive version, depriving *sasi* of its crucial fluidity. The book is an attempt to reclaim *sasi* from outside experts by inserting a local voice into the growing literature. It also, paradoxically, promotes *sasi* to that same audience, as a way of maintaining international donor interest in the region.

This second aim has been extremely successful. Kissya's involvement in community affairs does not end with *sasi*; his role in the *kewang* has formed the gateway to other opportunities. In 1993 Kissya founded a small NGO, Yayasan Learissa Kayeli, which does agricultural extension work in Haruku. Learissa Kayeli is affiliated to the Oxfam-funded Baileo network of organisations in central and southeast Maluku, based in Ambon. As a result, he travels widely within Maluku and beyond to workshops, meetings, and training courses. He is part of an emerging local NGO elite, who pepper their Indonesian with English 'development' phrases: participation, gender awareness, capacity building.¹⁰ The Baileo members I met are all energetic, committed people, and highly politically aware. Many Baileo members are involved in reformist politics, and see their work on rural livelihoods as an integral part of promoting local political autonomy. Twenty-first century

sasi therefore refers to elements of traditional practice, but is also firmly connected to local and international NGO networks, and to national political activism: 'Transforming *sasi* these days is an act of global imagination and improvisation' (Zerner 1994b:108).

Rather than seeing *sasi* as unchanging traditional lore, Kissya links the weakening of *adat* and *sasi* authority over the last twenty years directly to the local government laws of the late 1970s. These laws draw on an institutionalised suspicion of traditional *adat* leadership, the desire to entrench the power of the then ruling Golkar party, and the need to have a local-level bureaucracy capable of implementing government regulations. Their effect has been to centralise considerable power in the hands of the government-approved *kepala desa* (village head), and to sideline *adat* authority. Whereas previously in Maluku, village leadership was determined by *adat*, and usually selected from a number of ruling clans, the 1979 law directed that any adult, providing they fulfilled certain legal requirements, could become *kepala desa*. Although the *kepala desa* is elected, the local government bureaucracy has considerable influence over selection of the candidates, and in practice during the New Order, non-Golkar voters were excluded from candidacy. In many areas in Maluku a lack of legitimate local leadership has had a harmful effect on local resource management:

In the ensuing power shuffle, the question of who had authority to

declare and enforce *sasi* or similar strictures became increasingly unclear and conflicted in many villages. Local acts of civil disobedience and non-compliance were applied to demonstrate villagers' non-support for village government leaders – one of the first victims in many Moluccan villages was the practice of *sasi*. (Thorburn 2000:1473)

This phenomenon would certainly appear to be supported by experience in Tanimbar. A village official in Ingei, standing in for the *kepala desa* while a new one was chosen under the new regulations (an extremely lengthy process), said that although some people continue to violate the *sasi* on coconuts, he is reluctant to administer the Rp100,000 fine, as this would cast doubt on his own integrity, with people suspecting him of embezzling the money, and further reduce his fragile authority.

Although *sasi* was a local victim of the state's anti-*adat* policy, it has not been possible to eradicate *adat* authority altogether. Ironically, *sasi*, a system dependent on situated knowledge and local authority, has recently been the focus of considerable state attention. The *kalpataru* prize, awarded annually by the Ministry for Environment and Population to the community who makes most efforts towards preserving the environment, was presented to Haruku in 1985 for its *sasi* system. There is a shadow of the colonial project of using *sasi* as a medium for surveillance and control in this

move to give a state identity to *sasi* practices. Kissya has noted its tokenism (1995:19), and lack of corresponding local government support for conservation initiatives. However, state recognition is crucial if *sasi* is to remain a site of national and international interest; the former minister for the Environment, Emil Salim, contributes the preface to Kissya's book.

Zerner describes *sasi* as a 'discursive projectile carrying community claims to resources and territories into a hotly contested political-economic arena' (1994a:1115). *Sasi* is also part of a complex and deeply strategic response, not only to falling marine stocks, but also to the vacuum of local authority resulting from state attempts at centralisation and control. It constitutes a site for wide-ranging political debates and expressions of protest relating to local autonomy. By appropriating and incorporating *adat* law into national legislation, and actively promoting sustainable management systems, the state has opened a channel for dialogue between government and people. *Sasi*, as a symbol of indigenous natural resource management, is the 'enabling fiction' (ibid:1105) that makes this possible.

Forests, logging, and the politics of indigeneity in Tanimbar

It is not enough to live in the forest. One must have a stable village that can be identified and funded. One must have a distinctive culture worth studying and saving. And one must have a strong visible leadership to

⁹ See Rahail (1996) for a similar account of *sasi* in Kei.

¹⁰ Riles notes a similar trend among NGO employees in Fiji (2000)

articulate community concerns in a way that these agencies can understand. (Tsing 1999:184)

In 1992 a group of people from four villages in Tanimbar organised protests at the forest camp of the logging company PT Alam Nusa Segar (ANS), which had recently been granted a logging concession in Tanimbar by the Indonesian government. Villagers smashed up machinery, and some incidents turned violent – a local demonstrator was shot in the leg. Many people, including local village leaders, were given jail sentences. Although this concession was subsequently revoked, in 1995 a new, smaller concession was granted to the parastatal company PT Inhutani I. Since then, protests have continued, not with direct action, but through legal challenges, ministry-level lobbying, and international campaigns, organised by a Jakarta-based group of Tanimbarese, Ikatan Cendekiawan Tanimbar Indonesia (ICTI), the Tanimbarese Intellectuals Association, and supported by the Indonesian forestry NGO, SKEPHI.

As a point of intersection between various local, national, and international discourses, the forest is a fertile source of metaphors for groups involved in Tanimbar to express a range of 'development fantasies' (Tsing 1999). Tanimbar has the only remaining pristine forest in southern Maluku, harbouring a number of rare bird and tree species (SKEPHI 1992). Forest land is used not only for shifting swidden agriculture, but also as a source of building materials, fuel wood, hunting (wild pigs and buffalo), and

fruits. For local people, the forest represents freedom of access to land to ensure a secure livelihood through the maintenance of swidden gardens growing subsistence food crops, and to facilitate participation in the international economy, through the cultivation of cash crops such as coconuts.

In contrast with this local perspective, the state makes a direct link between forests and national development, both social and economic. For the state, the forest is a potent symbol of Indonesia's wealth of natural resources, and the key to its continued development as a unified, heavily centralised nation.¹¹ However, forested areas tend to be remote, inaccessible places, dangerous frontier areas, where state power is at its weakest. In Southeast Asia in particular, with its arbitrary, colonialy determined national borders, liminal forest regions are seen as points of vulnerability. As we have seen, forests can conceal potentially 'uncivilised', undesirable social groups, which impede national development aims.

ICTI, mediating between these two positions, draws on both ecological and indigenous rights discourses to engage the international activist community, and facilitate a constructive conversation with the state.

¹¹ By contrast, in parts of Latin America forests are seen as an obstacle to development (Utting 1993). Indonesia being an archipelagic nation, one might imagine marine resources filling the role of symbol of national wealth, but this is not the case. I suggest that the close connection, both historical and contemporary, between forests and control of land and boundaries is one reason for their symbolic prominence.

ICTI's representation of the people in Tanimbar is complex and dynamic, sensitive to shifts in the national political climate, and in the culture of international activism. Aiming to engage the state in debates about local land rights, it uses the forest as the basis for a shared space within the parameters established by the New Order imperative of national development.

State rhetoric in Tanimbar

In Tanimbar, PT Inhutani I is a symbol and agent of centralised state control. Inhutani is a *badan usaha milik negara* (BUMN), a state-owned company, and the development discourse of the Constitution informs Inhutani's rhetoric when describing its role in Tanimbar. Inhutani staff speak of their tripartite 'mission': '*pembangunan daerah, pembinaan hutan, dan untung*' ('regional development, cultivation of the forest, and profit'). There is a clear conceptual connection between the management of forests for economic development, and intervention in social affairs. Inhutani claims that the withdrawal of ANS led to an immediate decline in local income levels, increased unemployment, and a spate of illegal logging, implying that local people were incapable of managing not only the forest, but their own development, without government help.¹²

One way of dealing with the perceived threat of disorder and chaos presented by

the forest and its inhabitants is to incorporate it into the mainstream of the state apparatus. In this unregulated state, it is suggested, the Tanimbarese people actually invited Inhutani to come to Tanimbar to manage the forest more successfully. In contrast with the previous company, ANS, who '*masuk lewat jendela*' (came in through the window, i.e., without requesting permission), Inhutani made a point of '*masuk lewat pintu*' (coming in through the door, that is, through the correct channels). In rather unclear circumstances all village heads were given a letter to sign, giving their permission for Inhutani to work on their village land. Token payments were then made to the villages, but more importantly, on 30 June 1995, an *adat* ceremony was held in the capital Saumlaki, at which the head of Inhutani was invested as an *adat* elder. This action has been much criticised by *adat* and church leaders in Tanimbar. A Catholic priest commented that this ceremony was not conducted in the proper way and did not constitute true *adat*. He complained that only government employee village heads (*kepala desa*) were invited to sign the permission letter, and *adat* leaders, especially *tuan tanah*, who are responsible for granting the use of land, were excluded.

As Peluso explains, attempts both to regulate and gain economically from Indonesia's forests preoccupied Dutch administrators and Javanese princes before them. Although methods have changed as scientific knowledge advances, the basic motivation remains the same. For the state, 'forestry has

¹² Inhutani press release, 1997.

not only evolved as a science... but also as a political-economic system for resources control' (1992:237). 'Under the Basic Forestry Law of 1967, nearly three quarters of Indonesia's total land area ... is defined as 'forest', regardless of its current vegetation.' (Li 1999b:15). The means by which the forest is tamed and controlled begins, as this suggests, with a process of mapping and categorisation, which reduces a complex ecosystem and cultural and political symbol to its most basic productive elements: 'the radical simplicity of the scientific forest' (Scott 1998:20). The office at Inhutani's logging camp is full of complex and elaborate maps and plans, showing areas of logging activity. These range from coloured satellite images of the island down to hand-drawn plans recording the size and species of each individual tree. Each new assessment of Tanimbar's logging potential has resulted in new surveys and maps, and although many I saw seemed to differ markedly both from each other and from my observations, it is clear that since the suggestion of a logging potential here, the island has been mapped, demarcated, and conceptualised quite differently from local people's methods, which are orientated by unmarked village boundaries, sacred ancestral sites, and hunting grounds.

Logging in Tanimbar has not proved a productive operation. Although the conceptual reasoning of legibility and scientific development has remained intact, the practical result has been less than impressive. The logistics of marketing non-

standard timber¹³ from a remote corner of the periphery have proved difficult: piles of logs lie abandoned on the quayside, and the director of Inhutani in Tanimbar admitted that the operation is losing money. Social projects such as loan schemes and infrastructural projects too have met with limited take-up by a generally hostile local population. Following the logic of national development discourse, problems with the operation of programmes like reforestation and community forests (there have been some unexplained fires, which some say were started deliberately) are due to the ignorance of the local people: they are not culpable, merely uninformed of the benefits of such programmes. Inhutani will not allow these failures to weaken the power of its development mandate. Indeed, these setbacks merely reinforce the Tanimbarese population's need for state guidance. Setting out its plans for future cooperation with the Tanimbarese, Inhutani talks about 'illuminating' (*penyuluhan*) the local population in order to successfully resolve the disagreements. The discourse allows no space for error or adjustment on the part of the developers, or for conscious resistance or sabotage on that of the developed.

Local priorities

For the Tanimbarese, being circumscribed and effectively immobilised by state rhetoric, coupled with a centralised administration and the threat of coercive power, is nothing

¹³ *Kayu torem*, an unusual local hardwood, needs special handling at the sawmill.

new. Over 1000 miles from Jakarta, Maluku is on the receiving end of centralised legislative decisions and top-down development schemes, and lacks opportunities for local participation in decision making, particularly with regard to the use and management of natural resources.¹⁴ Local 'forest narratives' very clearly contain people as well as trees; angry reactions to the threat of the logging were a way of expressing deep concerns about security and livelihoods. Local people do not consider trees as a commodity with cash value, nor do they wish to preserve the forest in a pristine state. They feel increasingly squeezed by a rising population and land restrictions, some of which result from the logging concession. As it has become more profitable to grow coconut trees for copra, particularly during the economic crisis, pressure on land has increased.

The forest does have spiritual significance for the Tanimbarese: despite conversion to Christianity there is a strong animist tradition, in which the spirits of the ancestors inhabit and control access to the forest. But this connection does not prevent the relationship between people and land in Tanimbar from changing, as participation in the cash economy becomes more of a priority. One man in Ingei explicitly identified

the loggers' presence as a divisive force in the community, splitting the village between those who benefit from Inhutani's loans or planting schemes, and those who fear a loss of land and trees for future generations. Negotiating a balance between the various demands on forest resources is, however, not an option for local inhabitants: the debate takes place at the level of scientific surveys and legal argument. A senior Tanimbarese *adat* leader repeatedly complained that all this was difficult for untrained villagers to understand.

Although anti-logging feeling has not diminished, people are now understandably far more circumspect about open condemnation. One ex-village head, who had been imprisoned as a result of the protests against ANS, commented resignedly that the people were '*cukup sakit, masih luka*' (no longer sick, but still wounded). Inhutani is effectively a state organ, and action against the state is seen as deeply unwise, and almost certainly futile. The situation is not uncommon under authoritarian regimes, and impasse would have been reached long ago, without the efforts of ICTI.

Indigenous intellectuals

That ICTI have been strikingly successful in drawing the attention of international groups to the Tanimbar case demonstrates how familiar the story of powerless primitives struggling against the environmental ravages of capitalism has become. Earlier allies included the environmental advocacy networks Rainforest

¹⁴ Legislation passed in 1999, aimed at increasing local autonomy, places special emphasis on local control of natural resources. Its impact has yet to be assessed.

Action Network and EarthAction, and Down to Earth, a British-based organisation devoted to ecological justice in Indonesia. Their presentation of the islands and their people connects with a long Western tradition of images of Eden – pristine, innocent, bountiful – on tropical islands (Grove 1995): ‘the island of Yamdena, with its lush rainforests and turquoise coral reefs looks like an idyllic tropical island paradise’.¹⁵ The Tanimbarese are presented as ‘indigenous’, ‘natural’, and unchanging, and there is a tendency for ICTI to ‘disappear’, in favour of the impression of direct action by islanders.

ICTI members explained that the only reason they became involved in the logging issue in the first place was because *adat* permission was not granted to the loggers. More recently, as the changing political climate in Indonesia has made it possible, and as rights-based issues have come to dominate international activist debates, ICTI has engaged with organisations concerned more specifically with indigenous rights.¹⁶ The level of international interest has enabled ICTI to maintain a series of legal challenges and ministry-level exchanges in protest at Inhutani’s presence in Tanimbar. It has also drawn the attention of the European Union to Tanimbar – a delegation visited the islands, and in 1998 was looking for ways to fund infrastructural projects in Tanimbar.

ICTI conducts this campaign in the name of the people of Tanimbar. More accurately, it claims that anyone from Tanimbar is

automatically a ‘member’ of ICTI – that there is no distinction between the two.¹⁷ According to ICTI, members in Jakarta are not *representing* the Tanimbarese through explicit mandate (although they were granted one in 1991 at a meeting of all Tanimbar’s village heads); rather, they *are* ‘the Tanimbarese’ (*anak Tanimbar*). However, the way in which ICTI describes the logging issue, and conceives of the forest in general, is distinct from the language used and concerns expressed in Tanimbar itself. This hints at ICTI’s complex relationship with the narrative of authenticity described by Conklin (see above). Paradoxically, in order to be able to speak to the world, ICTI must leave the community, both physically and conceptually.

The name ICTI has special resonance within Indonesia. It at once recalls ICMI (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia), a scholarly Islamic organisation with considerable political influence. ICTI’s use of *cendekiawan* suggests a kind of anti-intellectualism, a ‘natural knowledge’ possessed by the

¹⁵ Down to Earth press release 1992. See also SKEPHI 1992.

¹⁶ E.g. Survival International and The International Alliance for Indigenous People.

¹⁷ Chidley and Potter (1997) report that ICTI originally called themselves a ‘community organisation’, rather than an NGO, in order to strengthen links between the local and ‘expatriate’ communities, since it emphasises universal ‘membership’. This became useful as the campaign progressed, as the government was unable to ‘ban’ an ethnic group.

Tanimbarese because they are indigenous, which confers, if not rights, then at least a certain authenticity, which can be used to promote rights. This connection is particularly interesting, considering all the ICTI members I met were teachers, and that its very use suggests a sophisticated understanding of national politics. Members of ICTI, as Tanimbarese, consciously romanticise their own image, characterising the inhabitants of Tanimbar in such a way as to engage with a sophisticated network of discourses unfamiliar to the islanders themselves. One can only be ‘indigenous’ away from home, and yet their claim to authentic indigeneity – as defined by popular activist images – and their relationship with those they represent, is compromised by their contact with that activist community (see Bétéille 1998:190).

Fields of attraction

As we have seen, the balance between representation and creativity for mediators such as ICTI can be very delicate. This is where the symbol of the forest is especially useful, providing a metaphorical bridge between registers. As Tsing suggests, this is not simply a question of tapping into a pool of existing images. It is a consciously creative process, which builds on a combination of prevailing political and aesthetic currents:

[F]or tribal elders to flourish, it is not enough to posit the existence of ‘tribes’; a *field of attraction* must be created to nurture and maintain the relationship between the rural

community and its experts. (1999:162, emphasis added)

In Tanimbar, the reference point for this field of attraction is the forest. Images of tropical rainforests, with or without inhabitants, appeal strongly to international advocacy movements; local people use the forest to talk about both livelihoods and spiritual issues; the state sees forest lands as both crucial to national economic development, and symbolic of the dangerous periphery in need of order and control.

This synthesis has had considerable impact, both in terms of raising the profile of Tanimbar and in terms of the transformative effect on ICTI members themselves. One member in particular is now deeply involved in international debates about indigenous rights, and regularly flies around the world to attend meetings. A field of attraction, however, is not a universal basis for alliance: it is a politically and historically contingent, constantly shifting network, which can create temporary or issue-specific coalitions, but does not deny the heterogeneity of its participants. We have seen how certain environmental and social activist groups have moved closer to the centre of the field at particular times. In Tanimbar itself, long-standing inter-village rivalry did not prevent collective action against the logging, but nor did it result in lasting solidarity.

Although it allows a small space for discussion and intersection, the field of attraction is far from being neutral territory.

All debate is clearly circumscribed by the state narrative of national development. Fitting within this, ICTI presents ecologically and socially sensitive development as a solution to the problem of unsuccessful development programmes in the region (ICTI 1993), and uses scientific evidence to support this. ICTI states explicitly: 'We are partners with the government. We never oppose the government, rather we point out where it has made errors of judgement' (cited in Chidley and Potter 1997:27).

ICTI's aim is to adapt transnational mantras to accommodate and resonate with national discourses, in order to challenge the state. At the macro level there has been minimal shift in the balance of power. Islanders feel as marginalised and imposed upon as ever, and their relationship with ICTI in Jakarta is not unproblematic. However, there have been small-scale triumphs, as this single case feeds into a broader protest movement at national level. And there has also been transformation and empowerment on an individual level for ICTI members.

Conclusion

If ever there was a rich site of cultural production, it is in the domain of contemporary environmentalism: a whole new discursive regime is emerging and giving shape to the relationships between and among natures, nations, movements, individuals, and institutions. (Brosius 1999b:277)

This paper has shown how the ambiguity resulting from the state's attempt to regulate all aspects of social life is crucial to the establishment of a field of attraction within which dialogue between social actors can take place. Certain images or social practices can act as 'enabling fictions', building on that ambiguity to maintain dynamic and responsive collaborations.

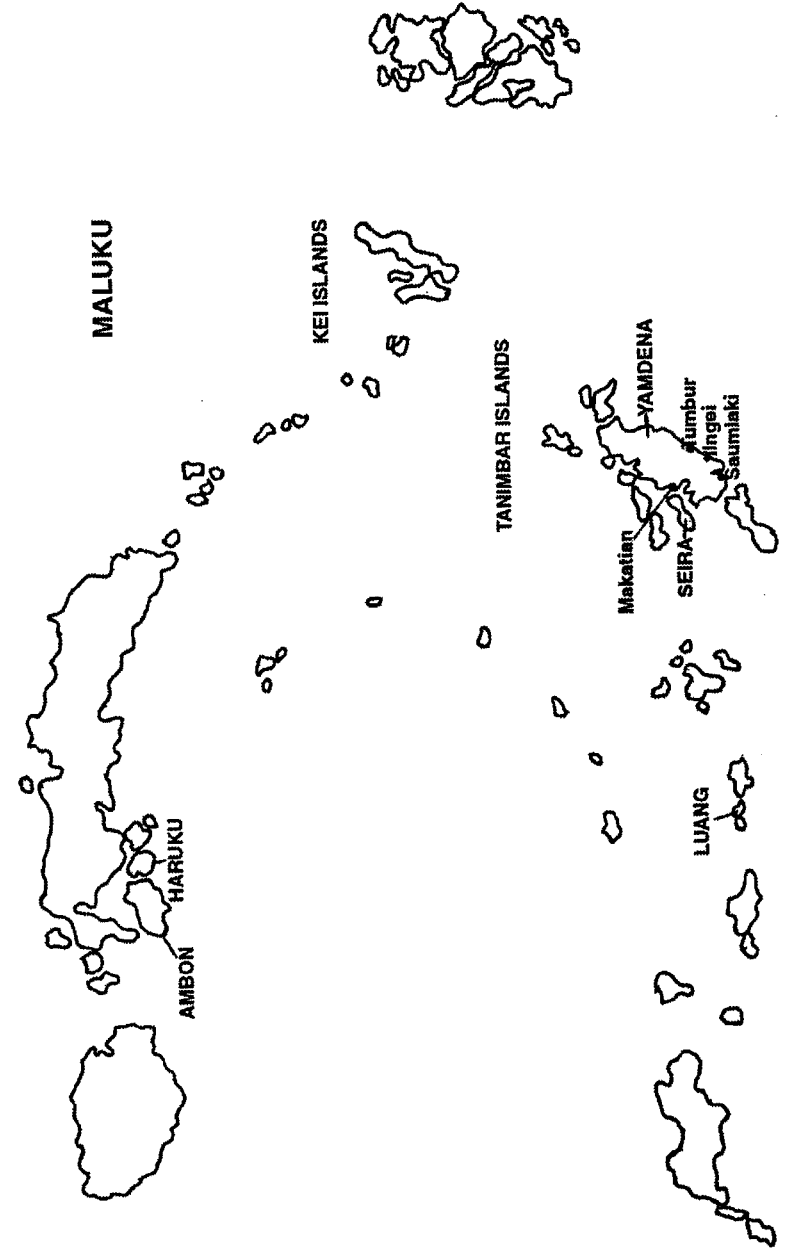
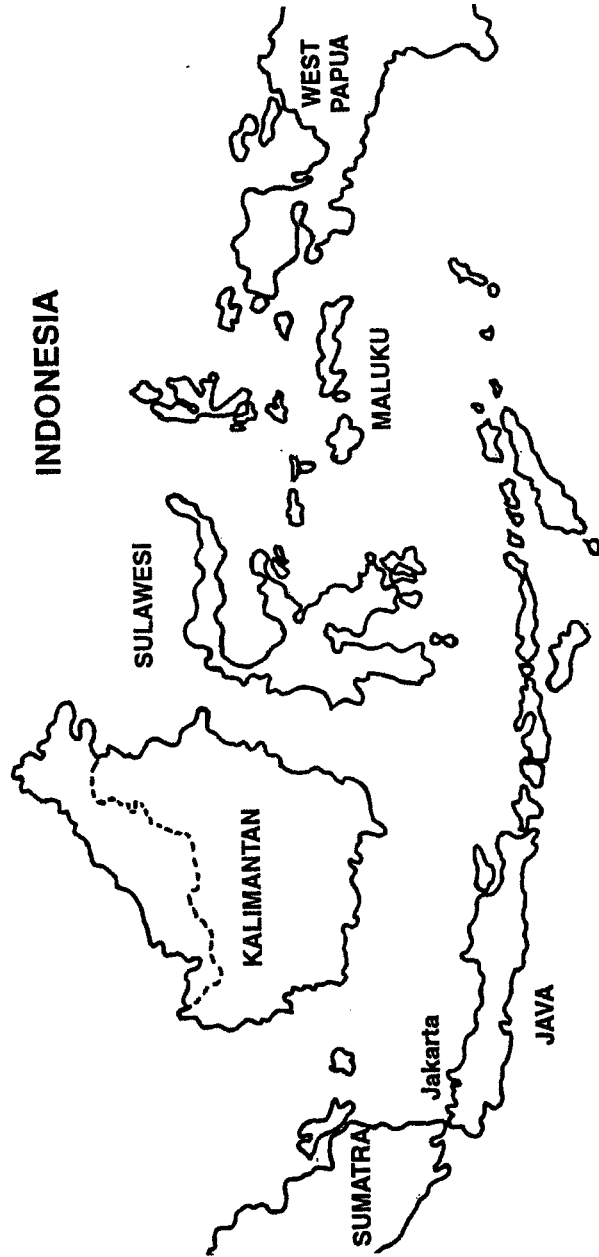
While Scott's observations provide an insightful model with which to examine the interaction between people and state in Indonesia, his analysis does not account for the (albeit limited) transformations experienced at local level. To counteract possible charges of romanticising traditional knowledge, Scott notes that local communities are not necessarily united, equitable, or democratic. Beyond this statement, however, we are given little sense of the individuals within the communities under discussion, nor of the local-level relations with state institutions and representatives. I have aimed to blur the boundaries that were necessary to produce a work with such theoretical clarity as Scott's,

by relating the national picture to more detailed ethnographic enquiry. The question of a suitable theoretical framework through which to think about local articulation and transformation of national and international mantras remains. Tsing argues, '[w]hat is needed is a theory of localisation, in which attention can be focused on the ways categories become stretched beyond themselves in particular events and confrontations.' (Tsing 1999:198) This theory of localisation would focus on the agency of local people in positioning themselves in relation to those categories. In particular, in Indonesia, this would involve those marginalised groups, dismissed by the state as incapable and ignorant, taking responsibility for their actions within the constraints under which they operate. It is possible that the observations in this paper already herald an era of more equal partnership between marginalised groups and other elements of civil society. Ethnographic studies have revealed the extent to which these partnerships are a contemporary manifestation of the often-overlooked connections between peripheral regions such as Maluku, and the national and international community.

It is less clear, however, whether this new mode of collaboration extends to relations with the state. Incorporation of both traditional practices and more contemporary constructions into the rhetoric of the state, while allowing the space for dialogue, merely reasserts the state's position as a universal point of reference. While it is

important for anthropologists to play a leading role in developing a new theoretical approach to intra-national and transnational connections, which is sensitive to the way 'local' agency moves beyond the local, in Indonesia at least, appreciable social transformation relies on radical government reform. As new decentralising legislation is rolled out, its impact on village-level social and political life is eagerly anticipated.

Maps



Glossary

Adat – term used throughout Indonesia to describe traditional forms of authority and practices specific to particular areas.

Anak – child; *anak* Tanimbar – child of Tanimbar.

ANS – PT Alam Nusa Segar, the original logging company in Tanimbar.

BUMN – *Badan usaha milik negara* – state-owned company.

Butonese – people from the island of Buton, South East Sulawesi, well known as sailors and traders throughout the archipelago.

Cendekiawan – intellectual.

Hak ulayat – the traditional right to use land, according to adat, and recognised by the state under certain circumstances.

Inhutani – PT Inhutani I, the parastatal company that took over the Tanimbar logging concession in 1995.

ICMI – Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia – an influential national Islamic organisation in Indonesia.

ICTI – Ikatan Cendekiawan Tanimbar Indonesia – the Tanimbarese Intellectuals Association.

Kepala desa – village head; a local government official.

Kewang – a group of wardens enforcing sasi regulations.

Pembangunan – development.

Penyuluhan – information, illumination.

Sasi – a system of natural resource management practised in various forms throughout Maluku.

Sasi adat – *sasi* regulations subject to the authority of traditional village leaders.

Sasi gereja – *sasi* regulations subject to the authority of the church

Sasi negeri – *sasi* regulations subject to the authority of the (local) government

Suku terasing – isolated people; a term used by the Indonesian government to designate certain people in need of state intervention to aid development and 'civilisation'.

Tuan tanah – traditional *adat* landlord responsible for granting access to land and sea.

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