THESIS

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF LIVELIHOOD TRANSFORMATION OF THE INDIGENOUS ATA MODO PEOPLE IN KOMODO NATIONAL PARK, INDONESIA

Submitted by

Gregorius Afioma

Department of Anthropology and Geography

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Kathleen A. Galvin

Lynn Kwiatkowski

Dimitris Stevis

ABSTRACT

POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF LIVELIHOOD TRANSFORMATION OF THE INDIGENOUS ATA MODO PEOPLE IN KOMODO NATIONAL PARK, INDONESIA

This paper examines the political dimensions of the livelihood changes of the Indigenous Ata Modo people in Komodo National Park (KNP), Indonesia. Established in 1980, KNP is well-known as the natural habitat of the renowned Komodo dragon (*Varanus komodoensis*). What is less known is that KNP is also the home of the local communities of Ata Modo. The Ata Modo people have changed their livelihoods from hunting, gathering, and farming to fishing and the tourism economy in response to processes of enclosure, dispossession, and dissolution of the protected area through various interventions from colonial times to recent years. Political economy critique tends to overlook the local dynamic, while the institutional framework of livelihood analysis tends to depoliticize livelihood adaptation as the economic survival mechanism. Using the framework of political ecology, this paper explores the political dimensions of livelihood transformation and the subject-making process of the Ata Modo people. Through livelihood adaptations, I emphasize the individual and collective agency in navigating their access and control over the resources around the park. This research is based on the ethnographic materials I collected during 2016-2022. Through the study of Indigenous Ata Modo's agency and their engagement with various regimes of conservation in KNP, I argue that the Indigenous Ata Modo's livelihood adaptation is an act of positioning in relation to the power dynamics of conservation and neoliberal conservation and ecotourism project. While

continuously marginalized by the fortress and neoliberal models of conservation, the Indigenous Ata Modo continue to define and build their livelihoods through everyday and spectacular acts of resistance, occupation, and incorporation. By focusing on the struggle and livelihood adaptations of the Indigenous Ata Modo, this paper contributes to the study of the interlinkage between conservation, ecotourism, and community engagement in development.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

In December 2018, the newly elected governor of East Nusa Tenggara Province, Victor Bungtilu Laiskodat, stirred controversy with his proposal to relocate the indigenous Ata Modo people from Komodo Island in order to restore the natural habitat of Komodo dragons (Varanus komodoensis). The governor considered the people of Komodo as wild settlers. He stated that in the national park, "There will be no human rights, only animal rights" (Dale and Afioma 2020, p. 1). This plan gained further support when President Joko Widodo endorsed it during his visit to the park in June 2019. He emphasized the importance of making the island an exclusive tourist destination with an expensive entrance fee to protect the natural habitat of the Komodo dragons.

This plan marked the rebranding of Komodo Island as a super-premium destination. It entailed an ambitious plan to bring together the goals of increasing tourism revenue and protecting the park. Within this ambitious super-premium tourism development strategy, the central government intended to transform the island into an exclusive tourist destination by relocating the indigenous Ata Modo people living on the Island of Komodo while granting business concessions to private companies to transform the island into an exclusive destination. Additionally, a pricing policy was introduced, setting entrance fees at 1000 USD to protect the island's endemic animal, Komodo dragons, from the negative impacts of mass tourism.

Over the past forty years, a persistent exclusionary narrative has shaped the dynamics within Komodo National Park. Since the establishment of the Komodo National Park in 1980,

the park has evolved into a contested arena where conservation and tourism development initiatives clash with adaptive responses and resistance from local communities (Dale and Afioma 2020). The Ata Modo people, who have inhabited the island for generations, have navigated various external interventions by transitioning from traditional livelihoods such as hunting, food gathering, and seasonal farming to fishing, and eventually embracing tourism-related livelihoods. When faced with the recent administration's proposal to relocate the community to establish an exclusive tourism zone, the community reflected on the four decades of marginalization and displacement. While opposing the government's relocation plan, they advocate for active participation in the tourism economy, emphasizing the importance of integrating community involvement in conservation and ecotourism efforts (Dale and Afioma 2020).

In response to the exclusive tourism plan, there has been a growing interest in examining the park's social impact. During 2019-2022, I attended various public discussions and forums organized by universities and civil society forums due to my involvement with the local community's mobilization. Those discussions sought to posit the park's problem not only in terms of conservation but also on the broader social and political issues of displacement, the relationship between conservation and poverty alleviation, and the local community's right in and to the park. Students, activists, and researchers began to recognize the inevitable link between social and natural dimensions of conservation and emphasize the role of park management as a site of political contestations over rights and access to resources. However, these discussions still focus more on the discursive critique of the park, emphasizing the political economy perspective without data from and perspectives of local stakeholders, especially the Indigenous Ata Modo people.

This thesis seeks to address the existing research gap by examining the dynamics of conservation at Komodo National Park from the perspective and experience of the Indigenous Ata Modo people. I am interested in examining the transformation of the Ata Modo people's livelihoods to understand the broader relationship between the park and its Indigenous constituents. By looking at changes in livelihood strategies, I hope to gain insight into the history of conflicts over protected areas and conservation projects from colonial times to the present when the ecotourism industry is taking the lead. I have been interested in the livelihood changes of the Ata Modo people since my encounter with the community in 2016. Livelihood changes reflect their indigenous history and socio-political, economic, and environmental changes in the park, yet it has received little attention from researchers and park authorities. Institutional approaches and policy-based research often simplify local livelihood strategies, emphasizing the economic framework and ignoring the complex socio-political, economic, and cultural processes involved.

Therefore, this paper will frame livelihood adaptations beyond their economic imperatives. Throughout the paper, I will emphasize the political and cultural dimensions of the livelihood changes for the Ata Modo people, adaptations encompass not only an economic process but a broader process of changes that affect their cosmology and their understanding of their position as political subjects and citizens. I argue that the livelihood adaptations of the Ata Modo people can be understood as an act of positioning in relationship to the arrival of powerful outsiders, especially the management and authorities of Komodo National Park. For the Ata Modo, livelihood strategies serve as political bargaining tools to control and access the resources around the park. By examining livelihoods, my goal is to explain the relationship between conservation authorities and local populations——why local people demonstrate discontent with

and resistance against fortress (a strict division of human-nature separation) and neoliberal conservation practices that are promoted by the state, corporations, and conservationists how they choose to respond to these various policies, and what factors that influence their actions and decisions. Moreover, I aim to highlight how livelihood changes among the Ata Modo represent a subtle form of political resistance. My objective is to describe how the Ata Modo resist and engage with the discourse of conservation and take the Ata Modo's challenge as an alternative to the mainstream conversation on conservation. By looking at the contribution of the Indigenous Ata Modo, I hope that this study will contribute to the existing scholarship on conservation and tourism. I also hope this study will help various stakeholders devise an effective policy that recognizes the local community's role in biodiversity protection and their search for social justice.

To examine the livelihood strategies of the Ata Modo people in relation to the conservation and ecotourism projects, I will present this thesis in several chapters. Firstly, I will discuss some conceptual frameworks that I use in this thesis, especially the political ecology lens to analyze livelihood changes. Secondly, I will describe the methodology of my research in Komodo National Park. Thirdly, I will highlight the history of conservation and ecotourism development promoted by the state, corporations, and multinational conservationists in Komodo National Park, and the history of the indigenous Ata Modo people. Fourthly, I will narrate local livelihood strategies from hunting, gathering, and seasonal farming to fishing and tourism-related livelihoods. In the final part, I will discuss the political dimensions of these livelihood strategies.

In the following part, I will begin by examining the theoretical background of this thesis. This section discusses how political ecology can contribute to the analysis of relations between conservation and ecotourism on the one hand and the livelihood changes of Indigenous

communities on the other hand. For this purpose, I will explain the nature of political ecology and its historical roots. I further focus on the relevance of political ecology in analyzing conservation and livelihood changes in Komodo National Park.

1.1 Theoretical Background

Political ecology is a suitable framework for understanding the complex intersection of conservation, tourism, and livelihood changes. Political ecology examines environmental change and human-nature relationships (Greenberg & Park 1994, p. 1). It investigates how the human-nature relationship is shaped and how disproportional access to and control of natural resources by different actors is determined. The main thread of political ecology lies in its explicit political dimensions. Paul Robbins (2020), one of the prominent political ecologists, emphasizes that environmental change is the product of political processes (p. 3). In this regard, political ecology combines political economy and cultural ecology analysis. While political economy addresses power distribution, cultural ecology seeks to understand the human-environment relationship at a particular place within the wider ecosystem.

The term "political ecology" was first used by Eric Wolf in 1972 after researching the dynamics of land resource ownership in the Swiss Alps. In its early development in the 1980s, scholars like Erick Wolf, Sidney Mintz (1985), William Roseberry (1983), Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield (1987), and June Nash (1993) saw local environmental changes as a result of global capitalism (Robert 2020, p. 6). Those studies led to further research on socio-economic modernization efforts in underdeveloped countries. These studies mainly address the friction between global capitalism and local communities that results in unequal power relations, which further create conflicts over access to and control of land resources in times of intense economic change (Robert 2020, p. 6). In the 1990s, political ecologists began to pay attention to the

alternative movements led by local actors (Robbins 2020, p. 7-8). This allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how political ecologists, on the one hand, demonstrated capitalism and the state are not all-too-powerful structures and, on the other hand, showed how community-led changes could drive progress and how local actors engaged in the global market with their values and agendas (Robert 2020, p. 7-8).

1.1.2 History of Political Ecology

Political ecology is a framework that is a confluence between cultural ecology and political economy. Cultural ecology highlights cultures and livelihoods as the adaptive mechanisms of human-nature relationships. Political economy, on the other hand, addresses the economic structures and power relations that cause environmental changes. Using them together provides a nuanced understanding of environmental conditions and the human-environmental linkage.

Cultural Ecology

Cultural ecology has made significant contributions to the study of local communities. It emerges as a response to neoliberal claims that portray Indigenous communities' livelihoods as backward, primitive, conservative, and inefficient (Robbins 2020, p. 40). However, cultural ecology tends to overemphasize adaptability and ecological functionality (homeostatic order) while failing to address the broader complex factors that could affect the local environment (Robbins, 2020, p. 41).

In contrast to neoliberal claims, cultural ecology focuses on ecological knowledge, environmental practices, and landscape production of local people (Robbins 2020, p. 38). Julian Steward, who was prominent in cultural ecology scholarship from the 1930s to the 1950s,

introduced the concept of culture core and studied how human social organization functioned as an adaptive mechanism to the local environment and subsistence practices (Robert 2020, p. 4). Another cultural ecologist, Roy A. Rappaport (1967), introduced the "new ecology" theory to complement Steward's conception (Robert 2020, p. 4). He studied the ritual cycles of Tsembaga in the Highlands of New Guinea by tracing the calorie that flows in the ecosystem (Greenberg & Park 1994, p. 4). Rappaport asserted that humans are part of the ecosystem. This is a departure from Steward's focus on the cultural system. Since then, cultural ecologists have shown how the livelihoods and subsistence of local communities reflect the immense adaptive capacity of Indigenous people. They also emphasize the sustainability of their way of life. Cultural ecologists attempt to recognize the local community's production process as complex, highly variable, rational, and comprehensive to counter the stereotypes embedded in the developmental and neoliberal models of development (Robbins 2020, p. 40).

Despite its contributions, cultural ecology has received criticism. Cultural ecology highlights the deterministic view of human-environment interactions, emphasizing environmental stability and balance. The theory tends to overemphasize adaptability and ecological functionality. Cultural ecology also tends to "naturalize" the change in human-environment interactions over time as the adaptive mechanism without looking into the complex and broader factors of causes such as land seizure, political marginalization, discrimination, and exploitation that threaten social and ecological systems. In short, human-environment interaction is viewed within determinism, which emphasizes the stability and balance of the environment as a homeostatic order. Cultural ecologists also overlook political aspects of the human-environment relationship, and their explanations are insufficient to address broader forces of

environmental changes, conflicts in production systems, and development dynamics (Robbins, 2020, p.41).

Political Economy

The political economy emerged to address the gap by emphasizing a myriad of relations between economic structure and power relations across scales. It draws upon various theories, such as common property theory, Marxist political economy, peasant studies, feminist development studies, and postcolonial studies. Political economy is helpful in comprehending the connection between the global and local.

These critical studies (common property theory, Marxist political economy, peasant studies, feminist development studies, and postcolonial studies), which started in 1980, contend that environmental catastrophes are not natural and inevitable phenomena. Instead, they attempt to expose the devastation linked to deforestation, climate conditions, soil erosion, tsunamis, and famines due to the global capitalist economy (Robbins 2020, p. 81). Thus, political economy explains structural forces and linkages between the global and local in changing the society and environment.

Nonetheless, this perspective is criticized for not addressing the local agency and culture in studying the connection between humans and the environment. The macro approaches to the systems often focus on how the macrosystem exploits the communities rather than on local populations' reactions or ecological adaptations (Greenberg & Park 1994, p. 7). Political economy also tends to reduce everything to social construction while excluding all factors from the non-human (Greenberg & Park 1994, p.1).

Political Ecology Contribution

There are several reasons why political ecology has become important in this thesis. Firstly. This perspective offers a definition of power that is fluid and highly contextual. Power is no longer defined as an institution and a structure. Power is understood as strategies, practices, and techniques that are more processual (Nepal and Saarinen Eds. 2016, p. 5). Following Foucault, who coined the terms disciplinary power and biopower, power functions not by suppressing and limiting capacities, and form of activity but by producing new identities, knowledge, and practices (discourse). Therefore, every individual, group, and private entity has power, and power becomes a venue of resistance (Nepal and Saarinen Eds. 2016, p. 6).

Secondly, political ecology places much emphasis on the interdisciplinary approach. Political ecology is not a theory or a kind of theory (Robbins 2020, p. 84), but an eclectic body of work in both theory and method. Political ecology seeks to mobilize concepts from various theories to explain socio-environmental phenomena (Robbins 2020, p. 84). Rocheleau (2008) used the term "hybrid" to underpin the idea that various theories, practices, and policy roles can work together to explain critical dimensions of development (Rocheleau 2008, p.717). By saying this, Rocheleau emphasizes the "hybrid" aspect of political ecology, which comprises multiple methods, objectives, actors, audiences, and integration of social and biophysical analysis of power relations and environment, as well as multiple scales of analysis. As a result, in terms of methodology, political ecology allows various methods, such as participant observation, survey, remote sensing technology, oral history, and immersive experience.

Thirdly, political ecology also has a solid practical orientation for socio-environmental outcomes. Robbins calls it a community of practice (Robbins 2020, p.85), through which university academics, journalists, international agencies, NGOs, national state bureaucracies,

local NGOs, and communities come together to discuss a specific theme with critical attitudes and find solutions. Regarding practical orientation, Rocheleau (2008) emphasizes political ecology by increasing engagement with activism (Rocheleau 2008, p. 721). Rocheleau emphasizes how recent political ecology researchers conduct studies with and for rather than only about social movement (p. 724). Taking the liberal ecologists, post-structural political ecologists, and feminist political ecologists into account, Rocheleau characterizes political ecology as the means of addressing the critiques of development and offering an alternative development (Rocheleau 2008, p. 721). Therefore, researchers of this perspective seek to embrace complexity while maintaining the explanatory power of structural relationships or the empirical roots of political ecology (Rocheleau 2008, p. 724). With the alternative orientation, political ecology is progressive, not simply retrospective or reactive (Robbins 2020, p. 98).

Fourth, political ecology has various forms of expression. As a form of expression, the main characteristics of political ecology are, on the one hand, to challenge the socio-economic-political system that underlies the injustice both socially and environmentally, while on the other hand, to provide alternative developments in social and environmental practices (Robbins 2020, p. 94). In challenging the systems, political ecology examines the inconsistency of development interventions and outcomes (Robbins 2020, p. 94) scrutinizes why those developmental interventions' approaches, techniques, and ideas produce the goals' reverse effect. Meanwhile, alternative development works can be enhanced by including participatory development, indigenous knowledge, and the dialectical approach in viewing the human-environmental relationship. Adding to those dynamics, political ecology always pays attention to the dialectical dynamics between the empirical observation of the physical world and the construction of ideas upon it (Robbins 2020, p. 96).

In recent years, political ecology has been used in various disciplines, including anthropology, forestry, development studies, environmental sociology, environmental history, and geography. Practitioners also use political ecology to analyze the relationship between economics, politics, and nature. They are driven mainly by the condition of the environment and the people who live and work within it (Robbins 2020, p.10). In the following part, I discuss its historical roots.

1.2 Political Ecology of Conservation and Livelihoods

To explore the confluence of conservation, tourism, and livelihood changes, I will delve into the contribution of political ecology to both conservation and livelihood change. Political ecology examines the political dimension of conservation and discloses its social impacts by illuminating the historical context in the political structure of colonial structure and extension of global capitalism (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 152). On the other hand, political ecology highlights how local dynamics in response to external interventions become a political response.

Concerning this thesis's general purpose, comprehending the political dimension of conservation offers a background of livelihood adaptation. Through the analysis of the ethnographic data, I emphasize the livelihood change as a political action. Livelihood adaptation implies a change in behavior, attitudes, and identity. It reflects the emergence of new kinds of people with their emerging self-definitions, understanding of the world, and ecological ideologies and behavior (Robbins 2020, p. 19).

1.2.1 Political Dimension of Conservation

Conservation has political significance (Agrawal and Redford 2009, p. 56). Conservation has deep roots in Western thought and modern state development. The modern state was built

upon the rationalization and the mastery of nature with the belief that nature could be understood, manipulated, and controlled for social benefit through the development of schematic knowledge (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 153). Nature is classified and counted by science and controlled by government bureaucracy to meet human needs. This process is governmentality (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 153). Thus, conservation is a way of seeing, understanding, and reproducing the World (West et al. 2006, p. 252).

In the late 19th century, the politics of conservation began to take shape. At that time, Nature was widely defined as pristine and wild, which implied that humans were separate from nature. This idea of human-free nature spread throughout the world through colonialization. Yellowstone was the first national park in the United States and became a model everywhere. This planning of the state-designated park was based on science (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 153). The distinction of human and nature space continues through the emergence of the modern states in the post-colonial eras.

During the1990s, there was a lot of criticism directed at this specific practice. This critique was related to the negative social impacts of the parks. Modern conservation has caused problems such as dispossession, poverty, culture change, and social and subsistence losses of indigenous people who lived in and around the park (West et al. 2006, p. 257). Moreover, there were concerns surrounding the state's use of force in protecting conservation areas, which raised human rights issues (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 159). As a result of the growing protests and movements against the park, management of the park improved. The new management brought together indigenous rights and poverty alleviation in the management of protected areas.

In response to this criticism, a new approach to conservation called ecological modernization was introduced. This approach addresses social-complex problems with technical

improvements. It also considers social justice and human rights (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 169). For instance, the “social Impact Assessment” and “corporate social responsibility and transparency” are considered. The new approach also considered the aspect of social justice and human rights (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p. 169). This approach is facilitated by international agencies, such as the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations World Tourism Organization, United Nations Environment Programme, and other influential international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) like the World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International (Nepal and Saarinen Eds. 2016, p. 9)

The park's management has shifted to a shared management approach, where the government now shares responsibility and accountability with the community and private sectors (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p.170). This new approach allows for co-managed, privately managed, and community-managed protected areas, which has led to the growth of ecotourism and the involvement of conservation NGOs and private sectors (Adams and Hutton, 2007, p.170). This also results in the commodification and marketization of nature, further exacerbating the exclusion of the local communities (Homes & Cavanagh 2016, p. 204).

To summarize, political ecology contributes to revealing environmental change and the social impacts of conservation on people. It also explains how the cost and benefits are allocated and outlines the influence and roles of global bodies, states, private actors, and local communities.

1.2.2 Livelihood Changes

The political ecology of livelihood refers to the study of how people make a living and adapt to environmental changes. It responds to the fact that livelihood adaptation is analyzed as

biophysical dynamics. It is often oversimplified when viewed solely from an economic perspective. As a result, the idea of livelihood improvement, promoted by international agencies and the state in the co-management governance, underlined the economic improvements. Originating in the development thinking of a modern state, it overlooks the power relations and the broader context of livelihood adaptation (Carr, 2015, p.332).

The political ecology brings back the political dimension of livelihood adaptation. By actively engaging in complex dynamics of reality, people can transform their livelihoods. This process also highlights the importance of assets, which provide a means of making a living and create a sense of meaning and purpose. Meaning and perception play a crucial role in decision-making, further constructing actions, ideas, and identities. These factors are entwined with the necessities and complexities of power (Robbins 2020, p. 207). Therefore, the political ecology of livelihood seeks to understand how people make a living in a particular place and why they choose to do it (Carr 2015, p.334). Both political and social questions are important to address.

The political ecology of livelihoods emphasizes individual or collective agency of the community. The community asserts its self-determination and identity by making a living (Robbin 2020, p. 208). The livelihood identity demonstrates how local people view, produce, and defend ecologies (Robbin 2020, p. 216). In bringing back the political dimension of livelihoods, Scoones asserts the importance of the politics of interests, politics of individuals, politics of knowledge, and politics of ecology. This aims not only to take sides with the marginalized but also allows us to locate livelihood approaches in wider political project (Scoones 2015, p. 312).

In contrast to the idea of seeing communities as weaker actors or victims, this framework emphasizes how local communities accept some form of development while rejecting others.

People encounter development from their mundane, daily concerns to improve their livelihoods. Livelihoods are not only related to access to material resources but also have cultural and social dimensions. In the discussion part, I will delve into how conservation is not only seen as cultural erosion but also as avenues for cultural enhancement. Scholars like Carr (2015), Bebbington (1999), and Scoones (2015) underscore the importance of the discursive dynamics of the culture in this context.

1.3 Questions

Using political ecology to examine the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people offers a significant site for understanding the political dimension of livelihood change. Toward this goal, the thesis will investigate the following operational research questions:

1. How have external interventions in the development of Komodo National Park affected the Ata Modo people's lives?
2. How have the indigenous Ata Modo people responded to external interventions in terms of livelihood transformation?
3. What is the political dimension of the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people since the establishment of the park in 1980 to present model of conservation?

Answering these questions will allow us to understand how the Ata Modo people engage and disengage with the state and conservation practices in contemporary Indonesia. The research will shed light on the relationship between the local community, state, and market.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

The research data was gathered between 2016 and 2022 using an ethnographic methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, participatory action methods, and archival methodology. The research involved 30 informants for the interview sessions and the researcher's long engagement with the community. The research methods evolved over time. It started with an encounter with the community to build trust and relationships. The initial process aimed to understand the social demography of the community, the relationships among the people, and their livelihoods. Subsequently, the research progressed to a more structured methodology focusing on livelihood transformation. Semi-structured interviews took place in 2020 with audio-visual recordings. Finally, the back-and-forth communication during 2020-2023 with the community has shaped the accuracy of the data. The Colorado State University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board protocol 4576 approved the qualitative research.

Understanding the context of this research and my positionality is pivotal. The data collection process primarily took place before my master's degree at CSU. Engaged with a research and advocacy-focused NGO in Flores and a local media in Flores, I was actively involved in collecting documents, involving various forums, and conducting interviews from 2016 to 2022. The process of gathering data was also driven by the interest of advocacy and the social movements with the local community aimed at challenging the macro-political economy

process of the park development. Interviews related to the history and community's livelihood were predominantly conducted after the 2019 protest and during the COVID-19 pandemic to counter the macro-structures of the political-economic process. The research underscores the importance of amplifying unified community narratives in response to external discourse from the park authorities and the government. However, the data collection regarding livelihoods had limited consideration for gender, diversity, and power relations among households, focusing more on general livelihood patterns.

2.1. Ethnographic Methodology

Ethnography is an approach to understanding "human behavior and how people construct and make meaning of their world and their lives are highly variable and locally specific (Schensul & LeCompte 1999, p. 1)." There are at least three reasons why ethnography is an appropriate method for this research. First, it emphasizes the researchers' role in collecting the data. The "discovery" through the researcher's direct experience in the natural settings makes ethnography resourceful as a scientific method (Schensul & LeCompte 1999, p. 2). The data is obtained through conversation and using all senses to understand behaviors and lived actions that require researchers' time and engagement to observe. Second, by considering the community's perspectives and values, ethnographic research aims to solve problems and bring positive change to the community (Schensul & LeCompte 1999, p. 6). Third, ethnography encompasses a wide range of methods such as surveys, interviews, participatory observation, archival research, and so on. Ethnography also makes it possible to create locally appropriate aids for data collection or instruments that can help understand pictures, narratives, and local stories. (Schensul & LeCompte 1999, p. 3).

In this research, I demonstrate how ethnography is not just a method of writing and collecting data but also a culturally grounded way of both being in and seeing the world that even drives theory and creates action and change. To this end, this research relies heavily on participant observation and simultaneously uses the interview method, participatory method, community-based collaboration, and archival methods as needed.

2.1.1. Participant Observation

Participant observation is one of the foundational methods in ethnographic research and in cultural anthropology more generally. Participant observation is a research activity that encourages the researcher to take part in the "daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of groups of people as one means of learning both the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and culture" (Musante 2015, p. 251). It encompasses understanding the tacit aspects of culture, the participant's point of view, social context, and behavior by being part of participants' lives and making them available for analysis (Musante 2015, p. 258). Consequently, participant observation is not limited to understanding culture intellectually but uses "senses" to get into the culture. Asking people, "What is an individual doing?" is done through observation rather than "asking them" through an interview (Musante 2015, 258).

In the research on livelihood transformation in Komodo village, participant observation is a crucial method for eliciting detailed information and enhancing the quality of the information. Between 2016 and 2022, I regularly visited the island and lived there each year. I would stay for only 2-3 days and sometimes 1-2 weeks. Living among the community and following their activities provided me with an understanding of the community's day-to-day activities and their social relations, which cannot be pursued merely through a formal interview. In relation to their livelihoods, I visited Loh Liang, where most villagers spent their time. I stayed the entire day

observing how people interacted with tourists and sold their products. I also followed how the naturalist guides accompanied visitors and listened to their explanations of the environment. Meanwhile, in the village where people lived, I observed the daily activities of Komodo crafters, making statues beneath their stilt houses, and the fishermen catching fish or repairing their boats. I also attended special events, such as weddings, engagements, and cultural events.

In participant observation, another critical task is how to convert the participation data. Musante (2015) emphasizes the importance of field notetaking in recording the details of observations. Unlike formal interviews, which are visually and often audio recorded, field notes are the appropriate way to record "observation" of day-to-day events and behavior, overhearing conservations, and casual interviews, which are the primary materials of participant observation (Musante 2015, p. 274). Field notes are not interviews or transcriptions but rather a form of reviewing a day's events and analyzing events, behavior, and speech within a social context (Musante 2015, p. 275). Fieldnotes consist of events observed, information given, activities, and ceremonies (Musante 2015, p. 275).

In my case, field notes have played an essential role. I used to take notes to remember the important facts and information that emerged during casual conversations. As I got to know more people in the community, casual conversations often occurred at any time, and valuable information was given. I used the field notes to write down my feelings during observation and the activities I had been through on the day. In addition to the diary, I took pictures and recorded videos during the activities, such as guiding tourists, crafting Komodo statues, and repairing fishing nets.

2.1.2 Interview

The interview process took place in 2020 and the focus was on the livelihood changes following my long-term engagement with the community. To ensure a more structured interview process on the livelihoods theme, I used mixed methods, starting with descriptive exploration and then more structured interviews (Bernard & Gravlee Eds. 2014, p. 343). In 2016, I conducted open-ended and free-listing interviews to map the socio-demographic background, history, and people's perspectives on conservation. The participants were randomly selected from various community groups: elders, village office staff, young people, souvenir sellers, and crafters. It is worth noting that people in Komodo village can hold multiple social statuses and occupations, such as being customary leaders, souvenir sellers, fishermen, and village office staff, simultaneously or one after the other. As a result, I produced a draft containing basic information on the community's social structure, which was crucial for the following research.

The extent to which mixed methods were applied in this research is essential to describe. According to Bernard & Gravlee, Eds. (2014), mixed methods are necessary to gain trustworthy findings, especially given the limited time of the fieldwork (Bernard & Gravlee 2014, p. 359-361). For this purpose, Bernard & Gravlee, (2014) raise concerns not only about how to rigorously follow the steps of the mixed methods to ensure the validity of the data but also about selecting the informants and their credibility. To this degree, to test the respondents' credibility, incorporating both open-ended and structured interviews as well as questionnaires and the scalability of the research are critical factors to consider. In other words, quantitative and qualitative methods are used to achieve the highest accuracy possible (Bernard & Gravlee, Eds. 2014, p. 359–361). In comparison to this guideline, the research process utilized qualitative methods but did not use quantitative measurements or questionnaires. Instead, the primary

methods used in this research were in-depth interviews combined with participatory observation. It is worth noting that I was not constrained by any deadline and had a lot of freedom to interact with people.

Moreover, in telling stories about their myths, a single source is often subject to criticism from community members as they respect the collegial nature of their customary leadership, which consists of the representatives of different clans. It often happened that the media only quoted the story from a single person, given the limited time on the ground. I interviewed ten elders, including the customary leaders representing each clan, to address this concern. Meanwhile, because I visited the island quite often, I interviewed and talked with the same respondents several times.

In developing research questions, I did not ask all informants the same questions except their perceptions of conservation practices. The questions being asked depended on their profession, experience, and occupation. For instance, I explored more specific questions about those considered livelihood pioneers. I asked the person who was the first to make the statue of Komodo dragons in the village or a person who was the first community member to go to high school and the first person to explore the tourism sector. This process was only possible due to my previous encounters, which provided me with clues and information about community members. The overall interview process ran smoothly. Besides having a good relationship with the community, the intention of the interviews was aligned with the community's struggle, and I was known in the community as the one who advocated on their behalf. Most of the interviews took place after the massive demonstrations in 2019 (see Chapter III for more information on this). Moreover, interviews were conducted with the assistance of youth, who were expected to

document the community's history and struggles. Before beginning the interview, we always explained the interview's purpose, which was advocacy.

In selecting participants in interview, I take into account age, and experience factors. In this regard, respondents were the elders, those who witnessed and experienced firsthand the farming practices and hunting in the past. They vividly remember their lives before the park's establishment in 1980. These people were about 50–70 years old. Another category of respondents was those who spent their childhood engaging in fishing activities before later engaging in tourism in the late 1990s. The last category of respondents was the younger generation, born when the tourism sector thrived in the community. In analyzing the results of these interview sections, I use coding to refer to each respondent. The respondent is represented by the letter R, the number combined with a number indicating the respondent (shown in Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 The list of the participants during the interview session

Code	Stakeholder group	Age	Gender
R1	Teacher	41	Male
R2	Teacher	40	male
R3	fisherman	60	male
R4	fisherman	40s	male
R6	fisherman	50s	male
R7	fisherman	60s	male
R8	Fisherman	70	male
R9	Tourism (sculptor)	70s	male
R10	Tourism (sculptor and souvenir seller)	70s	male
R11	Tourism (Sculptor and souvenir seller)	60s	male
R12	tourism sector (sculptor)	60s	male
R13	Tourism (souvenir seller)	60s	male
R14	Tourism (sculptor and souvenir seller)	60s	male
R15	Tourism (souvenir seller)	50s	male
R16	Tourism (sculptor and souvenir seller)	54	male
R17	Tourism (souvenir seller)	44	male
R18	Tourism (Sculptor, souvenir seller, travel agent)	45	male
R19	Tourism (souvenir seller)	30	male
R20	Tourism (sculptor)	33	male
R21	Tourism (naturalist guide and boat captain)	45	male
R23	Tourism (naturalist guide)	35	male
R24	Tourism (naturalist guide)	50s	male
R25	Tourism (guide and travel agency)	33	male
R26	Tourism (guide and travel agency)	27	male
R27	Tourism (guide and travel agency)	29	male
R28	Tourism (tourist and guide)	29	male
R29	Fisherwoman	30	female
R30	Fisherwoman	40s	female
R31	Fisherwoman	50s	female

2.1.3 Participatory Methods and Community-Based Collaboration

Other methods used in this research are participatory methods and community-based collaboration. Engaging this method enhances the ethnographic approach as a methodology that requires long-term engagement in the community and engaging underrepresented communities in research to create social change. This transformational goal, the research activity is viewed not only as scientists' work but as a collaborative effort involving community members. In other words, the research is not limited to developing theory and methods but also creates policy change and addresses structural problems and power differentials (Schensul et al. 2014, p. 185). Meanwhile, emphasizing community participation is also a way to democratize science. Democratizing science means making science's methods, theories, and results available by lay and community researchers (Schensul et al. 2014, p. 202).

This goal has been prevalent throughout my research activity. My involvement in Ata Modo's communal struggle was inextricably linked to my interests as well as my work for an NGO (www.sunspiritforjusticeandpeace.org) on the main island of Flores and the local media (www.floresa.co), which my friends and I founded in 2014. The first time I visited the island in 2016 was to facilitate the visit of the Human Rights Commissioner, who wanted to learn about the lives of people within the park and human rights violations. Since then, whenever I visit the island, I occasionally publish an article in the media, which has resulted in me being frequently contacted by researchers and journalists, both national and international, who want to cover the island's story. In 2017, for instance, I facilitated a group of visiting national journalists and conducted interviews in the village. We also published a magazine that focused on the livelihoods of the Ata Modo people, as the early findings led to a more in-depth investigation later on.

These previous bonds were strengthened by the involvement in massive protests in 2019 to oppose the government plan for relocation. I joined the public rally in the town and prepared posters, infographics, and press releases. I was also tasked with coordinating the media outreach. I also accompanied five community representatives to Jakarta, the capital city, organizing meetings with ministry officials such as the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Ministry of Tourism, and the Executive Office of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, as well as building networks among national-based NGOs and media visits. As a result of these visits, a joint group of officials from different institutions visited Komodo village, which provided significant momentum for the community. On the day of the rally, the community members gathered to stage a protest against the government's plan. The community ad hoc group, consisting of 20 people, assigned me to coordinate the press release and document the entire protest. Through this dynamic, I was able to map actors, the people's behaviors and thoughts, and the internal dynamics of the community.

Following this process, the need for the co-production of research and community-based collaboration arises. The community grew interested in producing knowledge about their community in anticipation of future contestation. The younger generation, with whom I interacted, was expected to take responsibility for this task. In 2020, alongside my interest in livelihood changes, the young in the community planned to generate more stories about their history. I conducted interviews with the youth leader to gather historical materials through participatory videography. It took place in 2020, a good time for me to observe how livelihood dynamics occurred amid the COVID-19 pandemic. We asked questions and recorded stories. Moreover, making the community part of the research team was also important as we conducted

videography training for 10 young people to enhance their ability to conduct videography independently (Schensul et al. 2014, p. 202).

2.1.4. Archival Method

Lastly, in addition to previous methods, I researched archived materials to analyze the ideology and reasons underpinning the government, scientific community, NGOs, and corporations' interventions in Komodo National Park development. Archival materials are all kinds of documents, such as minutes of meetings, annual reports, publications, regulations, and policies, as products of the writing systems of powerful actors and institutions. Since 2016, I gathered the master plan for park management 2016–2025, ministerial decree documents from various years, zonation policy documents, permit documents from corporations to privatize the park, minutes of meetings among the stakeholders, statistical annual reports from the government, and the Progress Report of The Nature Conservancy of 2004. These documents were obtained through the Internet, meetings, and from officials. From the community, I obtained photographs, statistical data, and a “land title” document containing information about the farmlands that were later taken over by the park authority.

Archives are understood as hegemonic instruments of the state or power (Zeitlyn 2012, p. 462). Historically, archives have been viewed as manifestations of administrative power with the goal of counting, surveying, prescribing, and controlling the activity of others (Ventresca and Mohr 2017, p. 806). In colonial times, archives were used to colonize and suppress other nations and groups (Zeitlyn 2012, p. 462). In modern bureaucratic organizations, archives and writing systems are the most powerful characteristics. The archives in modern organizations render authoritative statements that show the credibility, veracity, and efficacy they wish to ensure

(Ventresca et al. 2017, p. 806). Thus, the importance of the archives here is not just to provide historiography but also to understand the logic of modern organizations.

In political ecology, the human-environment relationship is a product of the political process. In this respect, the documents are not only seen as materials but as social entities, in which materials are produced, maintained, and used in socially organized ways and reveal social order and many kinds of relations, the meaning of strategies and actions of actors and organizations, the sequence of events, and the logic of actions (Ventresca and Mohr 2017, p. 819). Thus, by analyzing the documents, I can understand the political practices and identify the problems.

2.2 Challenges

In the ethnographic approach, recognizing the researcher's biases is methodologically important and acceptable. Researchers' way of thinking and analysis cannot be separated from their personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, sexual orientation, and ethnic affiliation), training experiences, and theoretical orientation (Musante 2015, p. 272). In this research, I realize that my biases have been central to the research and are important to disclose.

Using ethnographic methods, the research requires me to stay longer in the community and cultivate long-term relationships. It was not an easy process in the beginning, as I was hesitant due to my religious and ethnic background being different from the island's population. They are entirely Muslim and speak their own language, whereas I am Catholic and a member of a neighboring tribe. However, I felt welcome even on the first day because I had already been acquainted with the schoolteacher on the island prior to the visit, with whom I often met when he was in town. I realized that we also shared many similarities in terms of culture, which helped

me quickly connect with the community. Another important bias is the advocacy-driven research. The participants primarily consist of male members who hold influential positions in the community's initiatives, while aspirations and voices of women were not actively sought out. Nevertheless, numerous discussions occurred frequently in group settings and informal contexts. This disparity was also because the cultural and religious barriers that hindered engagement with female participants. However, this will be future research due to partly changing power relations in the community with the women's prevalent role during the 2019 protests.

The media approach also played an important role. The inhabitants experienced a crisis of representation with the lack of media coverage and the biases in covering their lives. A teacher (R2) told me that the media had often interviewed him but that the interview had never been published. When I wrote about them, it enhanced our connections. However, I received complaints from the park authority officials. I was accused of not being fair as a journalist because I did not cover both sides. I was frequently subjected to park officials' surveillance, which overwhelmed me. For instance, when I visited the island in 2020 to interview and make a film, I was asked to follow the procedure by submitting a permit. I followed the procedure, but I did not receive a response. My connection with some officials on the ground allowed me to proceed, though the permit was not officially given.

Furthermore, ethnography does not go without consequences. The relationship among the community members was complex and complicated. There were many intense conflicts among them, such as land disputes and village budget management issues, which caused a lot of tension. Due to my proximity to some individuals, I overheard their complaints about other people in the village, which affected my perceptions of certain people in some ways. Sometimes, they tried to convince me to reveal some corrupt practices of head officials, which I often avoided. Another

example is when two families had a conflict, one family reported it to the authorities. Another family approached me to help them resolve the problem through negotiation rather than legal procedures. It was difficult, but I went to the local police office to facilitate the peace process between the two families. Even though the outcome was successful, it became apparent that I was closer to one family. Overall, I tried to avoid getting involved in internal conflicts while convincing them to unite against the external threat.

Meanwhile, transformational research is also sometimes challenging. It poses challenges for me as a researcher as outside individuals have asked me to facilitate entry into the community. Although I am an outsider in the community, my knowledge, connections, and media capital have frequently led to me being perceived as a community member, playing a more significant role, and thus being appealing to the media or outsiders. I often received contacts from journalists and researchers to describe the community, causing mixed feelings. I feel obligated to interrogate the goal of the research and journalistic coverage before passing their requests to the community leaders or local community members, prioritizing them in response to the request. Often, outside coverage was biased and intersected with regional or national politics, so I felt compelled to provide additional explanations. I had fears that coverage could cause harm to the community or be too involved in the community dynamics. This relationship challenged me in terms of how well I can represent the community.

To summarize, understanding the culture and lives of Ata Modo is a valuable resource for dealing with contemporary conservation policy and practices. It requires anthropological approaches and ethnographic skills. The ethnographic method was used in this thesis through participant observation, interview methods, participatory methods/community-based collaboration, and archival methods. While these methods complement each other to obtain

information and the ethnographic outcome, the process demonstrates that anthropology is more than just producing knowledge (politic of representation); it also implies political commitment (politic of participation). In this regard, knowledge and practices are inextricably linked and simultaneously shape each other. In other words, anthropology can address social justice, structural violence, and environmental degradation, which are often rooted in colonial history and exacerbated by globalization and contemporary forms of capitalism. This method is one that I consider to be part of engaged anthropology (Kirsch 2018, p. 3).

Chapter 3

BACKGROUND

In this chapter I, the history of interventions in Komodo National Park (KNP) and the history of the Ata Modo people as an indigenous group. The main question is: How have external interventions in KNP been developed over time and how have they affected the local community? It discusses the general history of external interventions and the history of the indigenous Ata Modo people. The first section will describe a historical overview of conservation and tourism interventions. Secondly, I will explain the indigeneity of the Ata Modo people and their relationship with the dragon.

3.1 The Overview of Komodo National Park

Komodo National Park (KNP), located in Manggarai Barat district, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara Province, Eastern Indonesia, is the natural home of around 2897 komodo dragons (*Varanus komodoensis*), the world's largest surviving lizard (KNP 2022). The park consists of three main islands (Komodo, Rinca, and Padar) and smaller islands (26 islands) that cover 173,000 hectares. It includes a terrestrial area and marine ecosystems. In addition to being also a charismatic species' habitat; KNP is one of the world's richest marine biospheres with unique coral reefs. There are around 1000 fish species, rich coral reefs, and mammals. These exceptional attributes have earned as one of Indonesia's most precious biosphere reserves and a renowned ecotourism destination.

While the Indonesian government, international NGOs, and the media often portray the park as a pristine nature for wildlife, the park is also inhabited by local communities. According to official government data, the total population inside the park was reported to 4,995 inhabitants (BPS 2020). These residents reside in several administratively organized kampongs (an indigenous neighborhood) within three distinct "desa" (villages); Papagarang, Pasir Panjang/Rinca, and Komodo. Komodo Island alone is home to approximately 1,845 inhabitants (BPS 2020). This thesis further discusses the Ata Modo people living on Komodo Island. Their exposure to the conservation policy and intervention, as well as their proximity to the park entrance gate and the tourist sites inside the park, has led this village to experience much more different livelihoods from time to time, while other villagers are still relying on the fishing (Dale and Afioma 2020, p.3).

Humans have inhabited the island for a long time. Located at the intersection of the maritime route linking the western and eastern of the Malay Archipelago (modern Indonesia), the island had been exposed to traders for centuries. Historically, humans have been present in Indonesia since at least 40,000 BC, and China has had a significant impact on Southeast Asia, particularly the Malay Archipelago, since 3000-500 BC (Lutz & Lutz 1997, p. 7). Verheijen and Auffenberg predicted that the island had been inhabited for as long as 2000 years. Archeological excavations on several islands in the 1960s and 1980s, such as Warloka on Flores Island, Rinca Island, and Komodo Island, revealed China's influence in the region. Similar ceramics and gabah (unhusked rice) were discovered at three different sites, all of which were thought to have come from China between the 10th and 17th centuries (Verheijen 1985, p. 6).

Figure 3.1. The map of Komodo National Park and Komodo dragon's population (google map)

This geographical position (as shown in Figure 2.1.) has made the Ata Modo people not an isolated society from a long time ago. According to historical records, they had a history of trade and interactions with other tribes, dating back to the reign of the Bima Sultanate (Indigenous ruler) from 1669 to 1949 (Verheijen 1985, p. 4). The Bima Sultanate on Sumbawa Island had jurisdiction over Komodo Island and the western area of Flores Island, but the Bima Sultanate was subject to indirect colonial rule. In the Eastern part of Indonesia, the Dutch colonial government (1595-1945) controlled regions through the indigenous rulers. From the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, the Bima Sultanate gathered and collected taxes, slaves enslaved people, and tributes (agricultural products) from its chiefdoms in Western Flores. Because Komodo Island is in the middle, it used to be a transit hub for boats sailing west.

The tamarind was a valuable commodity from the island during this period (Verheijen 1985, p. 4).

Despite these historical facts, the presence of the Ata Modo people in the history of Komodo National Park has been largely overlooked. The focus of scholarly visits, mainly natural scientists from 1910-2000, totaling around 50, was on Komodo dragons (Murphy et al. 2015, p. 19). While Komodo dragons have been glorified as an important species from the distant past with their unique size and limited population, as well as deadly hunting skills and poisonous saliva (Burden 1928), the presence and history of the Ata Modo people have been ignored (Dale 2024). The local community has been considered migrants, convicts, or exiled from the indigenous ruler from pre-colonial times, the Sultanate of Bima. In 2000, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) described the Ata Modo people as" the descendants of the Ata Modo natives still live in Komodo, but none of them have pure blood (KNP 1997, p. 27)." Their indigenous identity was not recognized by arguing that their culture and language have gradually assimilated with the immigrants.

In recent years, the marginalization of their history has intensified due to the rise of neoliberal conversation practices and the expansion of tourism. In 2019, Victor Laiskodat, the governor of East Nusa Tenggara Province in Indonesia, unveiled a contentious proposal to evacuate Komodo Island to restore the natural habitat of the komodo dragons. Justifying the relocation of the Ata Modo people from the island under this new initiative, Laiskodat labeled the komodo inhabitants as wild settlers and declared that within the national park (Dale and Afioma 2020). The accusations sparked significant opposition among the Ata Modo community.

In this chapter, I will emphasize the intersection of the history of Komodo National Park and the indigeneity of the Ata Modo people. I address the Ata Modo people as indigenous people

of the island, although their history has been simplified. They have their language and their own language and cultural identities, as documented by Verheijen in 1985 (Verheijen 1985, p. 40; Dale 2024). However, the media, government, and NGOs have not given them enough attention. The unpopular position of the Ata Modo people reflects unequal power in knowledge production, leading to marginalization through the reproduction of knowledge and identities.

3.2 History of the Komodo National Park

The creation of protected areas in Indonesia has been rooted in the Western ideas of wildlife management. This approach views nature as pristine and wild and suggests that nature can be understood, manipulated, and controlled through development. The history of Komodo National Park since colonial times exemplifies the dynamics of the development of pristine nature through various policies, regulations, and interventions led by the colonial authority, the state, international NGOs, and corporations. In the following parts, I will describe the history of Komodo National Park in the colonial era, the national state regime, and neoliberal conservation.

3.2.1 The Nature Reserve in Colonial Time

In 1912, P. A Ouwens, a curator at the Zoological Museum in Buitenzorg, Batavia (Jakarta) wrote an article titled "On a Large Varanus Species from the Island of Komodo" in Bulletin du Jardin botanique de Buitenzorg. The article showed a photograph of a Komodo dragon (Figure 3.1.). This publication introduced the island's endemic species to the Western scientific world, locally known as "Ora." "If the animal is indeed a species not yet described, I proposed to call it Varanus komodosiensis," he wrote (Ouwens 1912, p. 3). The story began earlier when Van Steyn van Hoensbroek, a Dutch colonial administrator on the Island of Flores, heard reports of "large land crocodiles" from the island. He visited the island in 1910 and killed

two specimens. He then sent the skin and photographs to Peter Ouwens, urging him to conduct a scientific analysis.

Figure 3.2. A photograph of a komodo dragon on Komodo Island published in the Bulletin *du Jardin botanique de Buitenzorg* in 1912

This publication further triggered curiosity and visits from Western explorers, scientists, and collectors from the first half of the twentieth century. As its status became more and more significant in scientific research, the Dutch colonial government took significant steps to protect this unique species. In 1915 and 1920, the government made a regulation to stop hunting activities, which were common among the natives. The Dutch colonial government also took over the jurisdiction of the island from the indigenous ruler, the Bima Sultanate. Meanwhile, the Dutch government facilitated the arrival of the scientists.

The increased interest in komodo dragons brought a new turning point when komodo dragons were successfully transported abroad alive and displayed in zoos and natural museums.

It started in 1926, when an expedition led by an American scientist, Douglas Burden, successfully brought two live komodo specimens. In the US, two komodo dragons were displayed in the Bronx Zoo, New York, resulting in a large number of visitors and profits for the zoo. Following Burden's successful expedition, Komodo dragons were killed or captured and brought abroad to be displayed in zoos and natural museums worldwide (Barnard 2012, p. 87). According to Auffenberg (1981), since 1926, approximately ten komodo dragons were taken every year, not including the illegal smuggling of this species (Auffenberg 1981, p. 350).

While it marked the commodification of this celebrity species, this phenomenon raised concern about the population in its natural habitat. Supported by the Dutch government, De Jung conducted a study in 1929. The study revealed the importance of protecting the komodo dragon ecosystem, which led the government to issue a 1929 ordinance banning Komodo trade and turning the area into a nature reserve (Barnard 2012, p. 115). Although concrete measures were taken, the situation had not changed much. Another study was carried out in 1937, revealing that the number of komodo dragons continued to decline (Barnard 2012, p. 119).

According to Barnard (2012), the Dutch colonial intervention was ineffective because of contradicting political interests, the commodification of komodo dragons for profit-making, resistance from indigenous rulers, and corrupt bureaucracy (Barnard 2012, p. 123). For instance, the Dutch government used komodo dragons as political diplomacy to create the impression of a civilized society that supports global scientific progress. As a result, despite the ban on the trade of Komodo, the colonial authority still allowed the practices until the 1930s. The lack of law enforcement at the local level and the corrupt practices of Dutch officials also contributed to the ineffective implementation of measures. Meanwhile, the problem with indigenous rulers

persisted as they challenged Dutch authority by secretly facilitating explorers, collectors, scientists, and hunters on the island (Cribb 2008, p. 53).

3.2.2 National Park Regime (1980-1998)

Komodo National Park (KNP) was established in 1980 after Indonesian independence following its designation as a nature reserve during the colonial period. The park was created with the intervention of multinational organizations (IUCN, UNESCO, and UNDP) and aimed to preserve a pristine nature with a strict separation of humans from nature. Unfortunately, this approach led to the exclusion of the indigenous Ata Modo people and paved the way for the neoliberal approach to conservation that emerged in the 1990s (Dale and Afioma 2020).

On March 6, 1980, the Ministry of Agriculture issued a decree for the development of Komodo National Park, covering an area of 75,000 ha, which included Komodo Island, Rinca Island, and Padar Island (Kusumasumantri 2016, p. 169). Following this designation, Komodo National Park gained increasing recognition with President Soeharto's visit in 1988. International publications and titles also put Komodo National Park in the spotlight. UNESCO granted the park Man and Biosphere Reserve status in 1988. The title of a World Heritage Site was awarded in 1992 due to its universal outstanding value (UOV) of "exceptional natural beauty" and that it "contains the majority of the world's areas in which wild populations of the Komodo lizard still exist" (UNESCO, criteria vii and ix of World Heritage Sites).

However, the development of the park caused a social problem. Derived from the concept of pristine nature, the development of the park required the relocation of the local community, who lived scattered on the island. The government forced the community to relocate to a 17-hectare enclosed area by mobilizing military forces. They were also prevented from accessing

their former livelihood activities, such as hunting, foraging, and farming, as the park took their farmlands. They lost their land rights and customary land system. The rules were strictly enforced to protect nature through disciplinary approaches. The community's house was regulated; for example, the community was not to use aluminum roofing, and the community's livelihood activities were monitored. Dogs were not allowed on the island either.

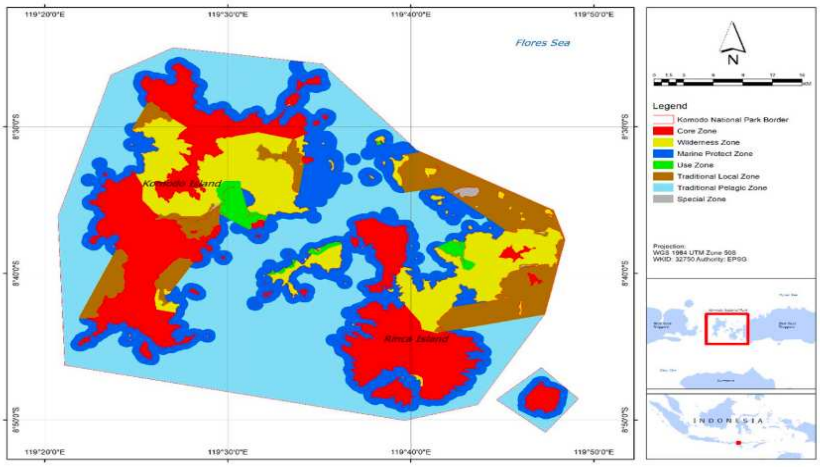
Although there were tourist visits, the number remained insignificant due to the lack of connecting transportation infrastructure to reach a remote island in Eastern Indonesia and, more importantly, for political reasons (Dale & Afioma 2020, p. 7). The focus was primarily on conservation during this period, while tourism was not yet significant. Soeharto's regime heavily relied on extractive resources such as logging, palm, oil, natural gas, and coal. Nevertheless, dispossession and enclosure of the commons occurred during this time, while private accumulation had not yet happened (Dale & Afioma 2020).

3.2.3 Neoliberal Conservation (1995-2010)

In the 1990s, there were significant shifts in the park's management through the intervention of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a US-based NGO. The park management aimed to achieve social, economic, and environmental goals by integrating market mechanisms, moving away from exclusion-based conservation. Political and economic factors influenced the integration of market mechanisms in conservation. With the fall in oil, natural gas, and coal prices, the government utilized the tourism sector as the new source of foreign exchange. The mobilization of tourism as a means of protecting biodiversity and economic development opened up conservation areas for tourism business with the assumption of providing incentives to stakeholders such as business operators, local governments, and communities to protect nature (UNWTO 2002). In pushing this goal forward, The Ministry of Forestry and Environment began

collaborating with global conservation NGOs, such as TNC, in 1993, with its role initially limited to policymaking and acting as a think tank institution at the national level. In 1995, TNC was tasked to assist in the operational management of Komodo National Park primarily focusing on marine protection (Mous et al. 2004, p.10).

TNC's presence led to substantial changes in policy and management. By 2000, the central government expanded the park's size, from 72,000 hectares to 173,000 hectares (Minister of Forestry and Plantation Decree No. 172/Kpts-II/2000 dated June 29, 2000). This expansion included 132,572 hectares of marine area. Coupled with this regulation, the government implemented the zoning system (Ministerial Decree No. 65/Kpts/ DJ-V/2001(Figure 3.2). The zoning system assigned specific areas of land and water to certain restrictions and uses (TNC 2004, pg. 35). Regulations for each zone ensured the long-term survival of the Park's flora and fauna, its ecosystems, and the local communities that depend on the Park's resources (TNC 2004b:35). Meanwhile, under the framework called the Komodo Collaborative Management Initiative (KCMI), TNC introduced the privatization of tourism management (TNC 2004:13). The central government gave a 25-year management concession to the private company, PT. Putri Naga Komodo. Its shares were held by TNC and an ecotourism company, PT. Jaytasha Putrindo Utama. Its core business was to collect various tourism revenues, such as an entrance fee for tourists, a fee for diving activities, a fee for researchers, and a fee for documentary activities (Mous et al. 2004, p. 14; Dale & Afioma 2020, p. 8).



ZONES	AREA (in hectare)	FUNCTIONS		
		Conservaton Only	Community use	Tourism use
Core Zone: no-take (fishing or harvesting), no-visit area	34,305	34,311		
Wilderness Zone: no-take (fishing or harvesting), but allowed for tourism such as diving, trekking and sea kayaking.	22,192			66,921.08
Pelagic Zone (off shore): used for tourism; allowed for pelagic fisheries but subject to restrictions on gear-type, location and target species, and only with permits)	59,601		59,601	59,601
Marine Protected Zone: not take zone; allowed for tourism	36,308			36,308
Traditional Marine Utilization Zone: allowed for traditional fisheries using small-scale gear (subject to permits and restrictions), tourism (but not recreational fishing), free passege for vessels	17,308		17,308	17,308
Traditional Terrestrial Utilization Zone: for community use (subject to permits and restrictions) and tourism	879		879	879
Terrestrial Tourism Utilization Zone: not allowed for local communities; specific for intensive tourism	824			824
Marine Tourism Utilization Zone: not allowed for local communiteis; specific for intensive tourism	1,584			1,584
Special Settlemnet Zone: subject to permit and restrictions	298		298	298
Total	173,299	34,311	78,086	183,723.08
		16%	**36%**	**84%**

Figure 3. 3 The zoning system and description of each zone in Komodo National Park (source: Dale 2024)

Despite all claims to the contrary by TNC and the Indonesian government, this approach faced massive resistance from local communities. The implementation of the core (no-take) fishing zone, for instance, included the community who were subject to surveillance and law enforcement over the use of marine resources, while the diving industries were given more opportunities inside the park (see Figure 3.3.). Meanwhile, the implementation of the zoning system allowed marine and land areas for tourism activities (84% of the park), while areas for traditional livelihood practices (36%) and enclosed conservation (16%) areas got smaller. This

led to a massive protest in 2012, during which the TNC office was attacked and destroyed by the fishing communities. The KCMI also faced internal problems stemming from the lack of mutual trust and transparency between the TNC and PNK, causing conflicts (Cochrane 2013, p. 137). As a result, although the concession was expected to last until 2030, the management privatization failed after five years in operation, leaving the problems unresolved, and the management returned to the government park authority in 2012.

Nevertheless, the intervention of the strategies mentioned above did create opportunities for further ecotourism growth and investments. The diving and snorkeling industry grew significantly. Foreign visitors rose from 15,000 in 1990 to 29,842 in 1997. The strategies have successfully transformed the local community's livelihoods from fishing into tourism. By 2011, 60 percent of Ata Modo people relied on tourism. Local communities today increasingly rely on tourism as a source of living (Cochrane 2013, p. 133).

3.2.4 The Rise of the Ecotourism Program in The Indonesian State

After TNC left, the Indonesian government intensified market-based mechanisms to boost ecotourism development. There were two significant features in this period. First, the central government accelerated infrastructure projects and gave concessions to private companies. Second, in contrast to its inception in 1980, the park has managed to combine mass tourism and exclusive tourism (Dale and Afioma 2020).

In 2014, the government envisioned the main island of Flores as one of the country's "10 new Balis". To do so, the central government designated Komodo National Park and surrounding areas as a National Strategic Zone for Tourism Development (Westoby et al. 2021, p. 702). Under this scheme, the Indonesian government rapidly developed infrastructure such as airports,

roads, public facilities, and hotels. Meanwhile, between 2014 and 2019, the government granted five business concessions to private companies to operate inside the park. Following TNC, the Indonesian government claimed that ecotourism investment brings prosperity to local communities as well as environmental protection (Dale and Afioma 2020).

The park is designated for a combination of mass tourism and exclusive tourism. Rinca Island is for mass tourism, while Komodo and Padar Islands are for exclusive tourism. Rinca island has a "Jurassic Park" (a large circular concrete structure that facilitates tourists walking around the park and viewing the dragons from an elevated deck) to host high numbers of tourists (up to 1.5 million tourists per year) (compared to 221,703 per year in 2019 and 49,982 in 2012). Meanwhile, Komodo and Padar Island and their surrounding marine territories are allocated for exclusive ecotourism, and tourists are charged an entrance fee of US$ 1,000. Private concessions were given for these two islands. At the same time in 2019 Indonesia authorities announced a plan to relocate villagers (1,818 people) from Komodo island (Sunspirit and Floresa 2019).

These plans faced resistance from the local communities, not only the Ata Modo but also the local tourism companies. Despite protests, the development of "Jurassic Park" was completed in 2021. Although the development of resorts inside the park has not yet happened, privatization permits have not been canceled. A massive protest occurred in 2021 when a new management company, the provincial-owned company, raised the entrance fee to enter Komodo Island. At that event, the government mobilized the police force, and about 40 people were arrested. They were only released after making a confession video that they supported the government plans. Yet, the Ata Modo people have not been relocated. When I visited the Island in 2022, the Ata Modo people not only controlled the Loh Liang–the tourist entrance gate, but they also

controlled tourist shops with their souvenir and culinary stalls. To understand the shift to the tourist trade, I will describe the political dimensions of their livelihood change.

3.3 Historical Trace: Ata Modo as The Indigenous People of Komodo Island

The Ata Modo people are an indigenous community of Komodo Island. The Ata Modo people have lived there for centuries (Verheijen 1985). However, this claim remains largely unexplored. Throughout this part, we discuss their indigeneity, relationship with Komodo dragons, and governmental administration.

3.3.1 Indigenous Beliefs and Identity

The indigenous community of Komodo Island is known as Ata Modo. Initially, it was believed that the Ata Modo people were migrants from nearby islands and their language was a mixture of other languages. However, Verheijen's research (1985) proved that they were the indigenous people of the island. Verheijen noted that the Ata Modo had their own language, called Wana Modo, which is an independent language group. He also acknowledged that there were influences from other languages due to their past social interaction (Verheijen 1987, p. 291).

The Ata Modo people have a unique origin and kinship system that has influenced their language to some extent. According to their belief, the Ata Modo people belonged to the island and their population remained stagnant for a long time. In their myth, this was because the Ata Modo people did not know how to give birth naturally. Every time the mother gave birth, her belly was cut open, and while the baby was saved, the mother died. However, one day, when an Ata Modo man was upset about his pregnant wife near the beach, he met a group of people from Sumba who got stranded on the island on their sail to the West. Knowing his problem, a midwife

from Sumba helped with the birth, and in return, they were asked to live on Komodo Island, where they were granted, a location called Wau. Other ethnic groups who got stranded on the island were also offered a place to live. The oldest ethnic groups in Komodo were Sumba, Welak, Munting, Ambon, and Sape, which later became a clan in the village. According to their myth, they agreed and divided territories according to these clans. The Ata Modo lived in the mountainous area called "Gunung Ara," while others lived in the bays. Some people were still living in the mountainous area until the preparation of the park establishment in 1960s. Haji Akbar, whose name was "Aras," meaning "root," was born there. Nowadays, people in Komodo village still associate with one clan or another, but at the same time, they identify themselves as "Ata Modo". They spoke the same language, shared the same cultures and dances, and are considered part of the same kinship due to marriage over the generations. In addition to kinship by blood, they also believed that the identity of the Ata Modo was determined by practice and social relations on the island when clans were welcome and lived together.

The kinship among them is reinforced in their shared cultural practices of belief. Despite being Muslim, they continue to ask their ancestors through various rituals. For instance, every clan has specific sacred sites where they offer prayers and make offerings like eggs, tobacco, and white flag. These sites are known as "Mboho," constructed by stacking stones to form an altar. People visit these sites to ask for blessings from their forefathers or to pay homage to them. For instance, the Sumba clan's Mboho is known for granting blessings of fertility, where couples often come and offer goats as sacrifice in hopes of having children. In 2020, a young couple who struggled to have kids for years visited the Mboho and offered a goat. Miraculously, they had children in the following year. Each sacred place is associated with a certain purpose and goal, which everyone can come to worship and seek blessings.

In terms of livelihoods, the Ata Modo community on the island used to be a hunter-gatherer and had seasonal farms before the park's establishment. They followed a traditional system of managing resources, which will be further discussed in Chapter III. Although they lived in scattered locations around the island, they moved a lot across the island. An old woman recalled walking from Gunung Ara on the mountain to the coastal area to search for staple food, *Mbutaq* (palm). One of the customary leaders mentioned that he knew the entire island because he had walked extensively in the past. Whenever fires occurred in the park, he guided people to the location and shut the fire down.

They also had "the matrilocal system." They engage in inter-island marriages, where men from other patrilineal ethnic groups on the surrounding larger islands settle on Komodo island with their wives, following a "matrilocal system." The elders said that it was rare for men and women from Komodo Island to move to other islands. The elders explained that it is intergenerational advice that they perceive themselves as a small group of people who should maintain the island and not move to other places (Dale 2024, p. 14).

This "matrilocal system" often becomes the subject of criticism from external actors/organizations. In the village, the Ata. Modo people followed the patrilineal system to associate with their clan, but their kinship, on the other hand, was largely determined by their mother's side. Without taking this complexity into account, the critique is also exacerbated by the dominant concept of indigeneity associated with "pure blood", as stated in park authorities' document. It leads to the misrecognition of the complex history of cross-cutting ties of ethnic groups on smaller islands (Dale 2024, p. 14). Verheijen argued that interaction and infiltration of other ethnic groups on the island occurred for centuries in small groups at different times and

were unrelated to one another (Verheijen 1985, p. 292). What amazed him is that despite their small populations, the Ata Modo people are inclusive to other worlds (Verheijen 1980, p. 60).

Relationship with Komodo Dragons

The Ata Modo people have a unique relationship with the komodo dragon. While media and natural scientists always depict the species as wildlife animals with deadly hunting skills, the Ata Modo people consider the species as part of their lives. According to their myth, Komodo and humans were twins. The local language refers to komodo as Sebae, which means "sebelah," or twins. The legend tells the story of a native couple, Umpu Najo, and his wife, Lea. The birth caused the mother's death as her belly was cut to save the child. She gave birth to twins— a baby boy and the other a baby dragon—and the mother died. One was raised in the house, while the other fled to the forest. The story has been passed down through generations and explains why Ata Modo people have a close relationship with the animals and their population as small as the komodo's population (Dale and Afioma 2020).

The Ata Modo people do not consider komodo to be wildlife. In the past, during the hunting period, they used to share deer meat they caught with komodos. Whenever they caught a deer, they would give the inner organs, head, and legs to komodo dragons. When they heard the dogs barking, they got closer. A local man (R13) said it was their kinship obligation to take care of komodo dragons. In addition, komodo is not a man-eater animal (Lutz & Lutz 1997, p. 104), and the natives were not afraid of them. Hunters used to sleep overnight in the forest with meat. Although there were rare cases of komodo attacking humans, the Ata Modo people did not believe they posed a significant threat. He (R13) asserted, "If we think that this animal is a threat, not a twin, we would have killed them a long time ago." Due to their traditional belief, elders claimed that the Ata Modo people and Komodo dragons could not be separated. A customary

leader even said, “If the Ata Modo people would be relocated from here, komodo would be disappear.” Even in the present day, their familiarity with komodo dragons continues. Komodo are often sighted in the village. The baby komodo (1-3 years) lived on the villager’s house rooftops of the villagers’ houses, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 3.4 A Komodo dragon was spotted lying on the ceiling of a house in Komodo Village (Afioma 2020)

Furthermore, the Ata Modo people believed that the survival of komodo dragons depended on human presence. According to them, komodo dragons were not great hunters but portrayed them as lazy animals with a low chance of survival if they were not being helped. Instead of hunting its prey, komodo dragons tactically trap them. The Ata Modo believed that what their ancestors had done in the past was reasonable for sharing food. They also perceived komodo as having an opposite character, rather than being greedy eaters. A man (R18) jokingly said, “If a komodo dragon is already full, even if a goat steps on its head, Komodo does not care." However, in recent years, due to the ban on hunting and feeding practices, komodo

dragons have been spotted around the village, targeting their livestock, mainly goats. This is because goats are easy targets compared to wild boars and deer. The Ata Modo people reflected on their livestock losses as a continuation of their kinship ties but raised concerns about the park management and the food shortage in the park.

For the Ata Modo people, Komodo dragons have distinct characteristics that make them easy to recognize. Despite appearing passive, they have a good memory, which is why the Ata Modo people ask that they not be mistreated. Komodo also tends to stay in a particular spatial area, which allows the Ata Modo to recognize them individually and even give them names. In 2020, a woman reported seeing the same komodo in her backyard every day. She sometimes threw food at the komodo. These familiar characteristics have made the Ata Modo people feel strongly connected to these creatures.

To summarize, the Ata Modo people have a deep connection to the island not only because of their maternal human lineage but also because of their cosmology, which emphasizes the maternal relationship with the komodo dragons. Both The Ata Modo and the dragons were born on the same island and from the same native mother. In other words, they have lived side by side with the dragons in what anthropologists called inter-species companionship (Tsing 2012), or rather in their case, interspecies kinship (Dale and Afioma 2020; Dale 2024).

Administration and Rule

Figure 3. 5. Komodo village occupies 17 hectares of settlement area on Komodo Island with a population of 1845 inhabitants (google map).

Under the Bima Sultanate, the status of Komodo Island was the chiefdom. The village had two leaders: the village chief, known as "tua killing," to manage the land areas and village organization, and the punggawa, who oversaw the use of coastal/marine resources (Verheijen 1985, p. 10). Although the area was taken over by the Dutch colonial government in the 1920s and the Indonesian government in 1945, this model of governance still lasted until the 1970s. Before the village status, village chiefs were Umpu Kija, Umpu Bongko (Sabah), Umpu Pala, Umpu Puano, Umpu Husen.

By the 1970s, the status of the komodo community was a village, a government's small administrative unit. Previously led by two leaders, the authority concentrated on a single leader.

Village chief, known as the tua killing became the village head, while Punggawa's power was weakened. The village head was not elected democratically but appointed by the family line. Haji Tayed, a son of Umpu Pala, was the first Indonesian government's version of the chief. He facilitated Verheijen's research in 1977. Haji Rasyid, his brother, was his successor. Both were well-known as charismatic leaders who helped to establish the park in the 1970s and 1980s. Haji Tayed's stepson (R16) told stories about his father, who always went to the forest with the directorate of nature conservation patrol staff to look for hunters and poachers from the nearby islands.

Recently, a democratic system has been established at the village level after the decentralization policy in 1999. Haji Aksan was the first democratically elected village head in 2012, and he still holds the position. The major challenges by the village currently are the limited settlement zone, dense population, and insufficient infrastructure. Since 2015, the Indonesian government has allocated a significant amount of funds to the village for program and project development. They need to ask for approval from the park’s authority whenever they build public infrastructure.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

This chapter delves into the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people. In the previous chapter, I explored broader social and political structures of conservation and neoliberal ecotourism projects that influence the human-environment relationship. In complementing this top-down approach, I will shed light on the local dynamics of the process of livelihood transformation in the Komodo Village. The chapter consists of two main parts. In the first part, I will describe the complex dynamics of livelihood changes from hunting, gathering, and farming to fishing and, eventually, tourism-related activities. The later section will emphasize the local community's perceptions toward conservation and ecotourism and the pathways to sustainable livelihoods.

4.1 Livelihood Transformation of the Ata Modo People

In this part, I will consider the lived realities of the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people from hunter-gatherer societies to fishing, and tourism livelihood. I would argue that various interventions become “provocations” that result in the complex dynamics of livelihoods in the Ata Modo people's lives. Using periodization, I will describe the main features of each period, including conflict, argument, debate, and contest. This is not a clear cutting-edge periodization, but it aims to show the main features of each period.

4.1.1. Pre-1980: Hunting, Food-Gathering, and Seasonal Farming

When I visited Komodo National Park in 2016, I spent a day accompanying a naturalist guide (R22) from Komodo village in Loh Liang, the entrance gate for tourists in Komodo National Park. He guided some visitors around the park. At one moment, when we were alone, he pointed out some trees growing in a row, saying that those trees were the natural fences of their farmland before 1980. Currently seen as a feature of the park's walking track, they were originally planted by Ata Modo farmers to mark their land's boundaries. These trees, known as Kedondo trees, were planted in a round shape over an area of 20 hectares, with other Kedondo trees linking the periphery of the round areas to the center. This land area was divided according to a traditional land tenure system called the lingko system, which was used to point out land ownership. To convince me, he also showed me the cemeteries located inside the tour area. Two cemeteries were hidden under the bush.

Little is known about the livelihood of the Ata Modo's people. Before the park's establishment in 1980, the Ata Modo people relied on hunting, foraging, and farming as their primary means of subsistence. They used to cultivate seasonal crops, practice hunting, especially Timor Deer (*Cervus timorensis*), and gather forest food, such as tamarind (*Tamarindus Indica*) and forest tubers. They also lived scattered around the island, such as in Loh Lawi, Sebita, Gunung Ara, and Loh Sebita (see Figure 3.3.) An elderly woman (R34), a traditional singer, said that during her childhood, she sang the song with the lyrics, "Our food is sago, and our vegetable is deer's meat." An old man (R6) described this period as "we were mountainous (farmer) people," highlighting that they relied on the terrestrial area despite living near the sea. Many Ata Modo today believe that this subsistence shaped the harmonious relationship with the Komodo dragons.

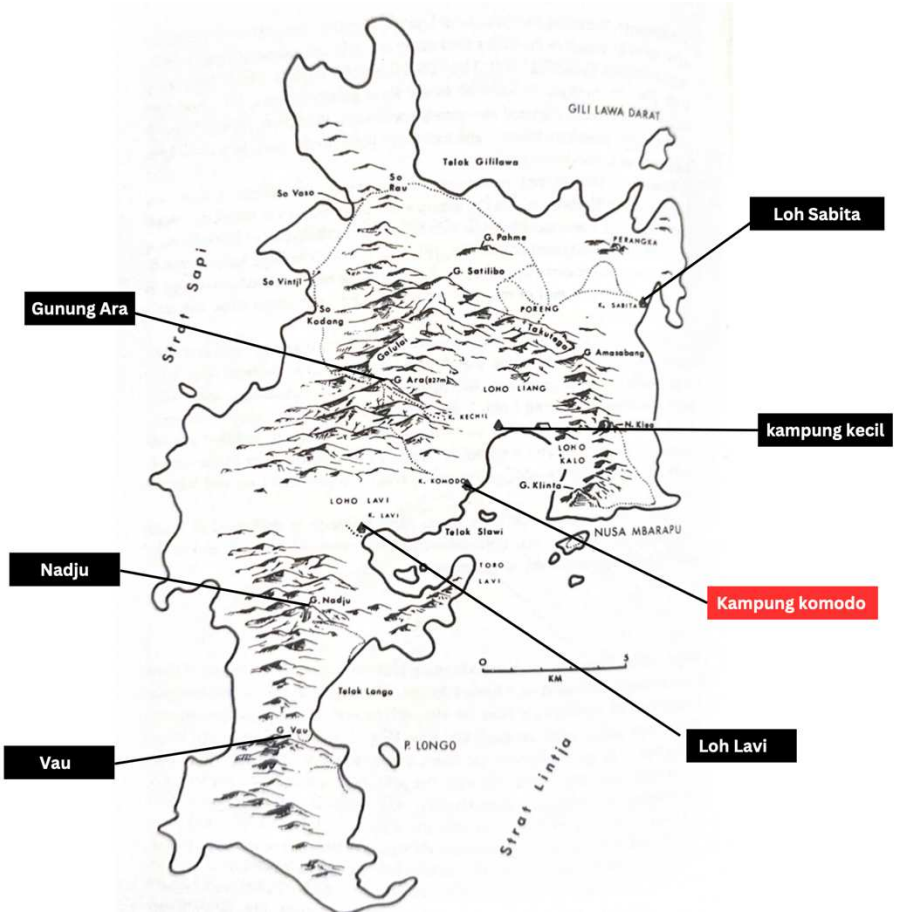


Figure 4.1 the name of places where the Ata Modo people lived on the Island of Komodo before the Komodo National Park's establishment (illustrated by Auffenberg 1981, edited by Afioma)

Hunting was a popular activity on Komodo Island for the Ata Modo people and the neighboring ethnic groups who sailed to the island. The main target was deer, and during the hunting season, Ata Modo would explore the forest in search of deer. However, while other ethnic groups engaged in hunting for sport and profit, an old, former hunter (R15) claimed that Ata Modo's hunting was driven not only by consumption but also by their beliefs and strict adherence to customary leaders' rules. For instance, when they killed a deer, they would share it with Komodo dragons. The Ata Modo would give the inner parts, head, and legs to Komodo. This food sharing was motivated by the Ata Modo belief that the dragons are their ancestor's

twin, known as *Sebae*, meaning "the other half." When they hunted in the forest, it was common that komodo would be around, drawn by the barking of the Ata Modo's dogs or by their keen sense of smell, which can detect carrion from up to four miles away.

The Ata Modo people were also looking for palms in the forests called *Sagu,* or *mbutaq*, produced from the gabang palm (*Corypha Utan*). Sago was the staple food for the Ata Modo people, in addition to corn and rice (Verheijen 1985, p. 14). They cut the stems into large pieces and carried them to the village, where they were mashed into a powder. It could provide them with food for weeks. The Ata Modo people also used to collect tamarind, selling it to a buyer from neighboring islands to the village. Half of the villagers would leave the village and make a temporary hut in the area where tamarinds were plentiful. The huts were built on the ground, made of rough wood and leaves (Verheijen 1985, p. 11).

Because of their mobility during this period, encountering komodo dragons was common. One popular story among community members was about a baby who peacefully slept beside a komodo dragon. While searching for tamarinds in the forest, they used to leave the toddlers in the huts. Upon returning, they were surprised to see a komodo sleeping next to their baby without causing harm. It became a story passed down from generation to generation. The Ata Modo people also believe that Komodo dragons could understand their language. If komodo dragons were blocking their path, they asked them to leave using the komodo language. They believe it because they have an intimate relationship with komodo.

Furthermore, despite living near the sea, they did not perceive themselves as fishermen as they had limited sea harvesting. They did not employ techniques commonly practiced by Indonesian fishers at that time, such as *tambak* (plots bordered by embankments, which are flooded at high tide and trap fish at low tide), *sero* (a giant trap installed on the bottom of the

sea) and *jala* (throwing net). Instead, they fished near the beach or used a canoe with a piece of worm as bait (Verheijen 1985, p. 7). They could also utilize a tube to catch certain fish in rock wall holes near the beach during the low tide (Verheijen 1985, p. 7). Aside from that, *Ngenti Ihang*—collecting small fish, crabs, and sea creatures left behind in puddles and holes at low tides—was a common practice (Verheijen 1985, p. 8). In addition, the Ata Modo people, led by the customary leader *Punggawa Taseq*, engaged in communal fishing and algae collecting. The fishing, specifically for small shrimp, small fish, and small squid, was done in the bay and required many people to work together using a net made from palm leaves. (Verheijen 1985, p. 10). *Punggawa Taseq*, a customary leader, would set the time, lead the activity, and resolve disputes.

Lastly, the Ata Modo people relied on farming. Their farm practices were divided according to the traditional land tenure system called *Lingko. Lingko* is the dividing of land among families in a unique way, with each family having a piece of land patterned like a pizza (see Figure 3.4.) They cultivated crops such as corn, grain, sorghum, cassava, sweet potato, pumpkin, watermelon, grey beans, papaya, and green beans. In 1977, there were around nine *lingkos* in total; two were located in Loh Liang, which is currently the entrance gate of Komodo National Park. *Lingko* was traditionally only used for one or two years and then left fallow. Some of them became private land when they cultivated coconut trees with the permission of a customary leader. A customary leader called *umpu lodok* played a central role in dividing and regulating the farm. There is a ritual before cultivating the crops, harvesting the crops, and after harvest season. They sacrificed goats and gathered food from their gardens (Verheijen 1985, p. 13).

Figure 4. 2. Lingko is a land tenure system in Komodo Village (Verheijen 1985).

Hunting, gathering, and farming were seasonal activities but well-organized among community members. While collecting stories from the older generation, Verheijen (1985) described details. However, he overlooked the dynamics and changes when the park was established. In the following part, I highlight the process of change that has been taking place in their livelihoods.

Livelihood Change and Conflict

Since the area's designation as a national park in 1980 through a minister's decree, not only did the state take over the Ata Modo's territory, but also their relation to their environment and livelihoods (Dale & Afioma 2020). The Ata Modo people were seen as a threat to this endangered animal, komodo dragons. Consequently, the residents who previously lived in several scattered kampongs (villages) and practiced agriculture, hunting, and food gathering were forced to relocate to a designated enclave. They were no longer allowed to hunt deer and cut down trees. The size of the village is only 17.3 hectares. The Ata Modo also had to leave Loh Liang, one of the main agricultural areas, before the park was established.

The takeover of the land in Loh Liang was marked by intimidation and violence, with the government mobilizing the military force to destroy the plants and force the landowners to leave. Reciting this story, R3, a staff member at the village office (R3), felt angry, explaining that they had no rights over the island. In 2020, a customary leader (R12) and an old woman who witnessed the tragedy, showed us the locations of the *lodoq* land and spring well, where they used to cultivate crops and gather water. The customary leader (R12) spoke of the cruelty he witnessed firsthand, with the government destroying crops and using battery water to erase any proof of community ownership. He (R12) said, "I am not telling this as if I heard from my parents, but I have witnessed how cruel the process was. It was terrifying." However, for them, when the authority forgot to remove the natural fence, which has now grown into trees, the fence became substantial evidence of their land's ownership.

Locals also changed their livelihoods and daily activities to comply with strict conservation rules. Hunting and foraging in the forest were prohibited; instead, people were encouraged to fish. The military killed their dogs because they were considered a threat to conservation. Rather than being shot dead, some people were asked to relocate their dogs to another island voluntarily. A local man (R8), who took his dogs to neighboring island, said he shed tears when moving them, as they had become part of their lives. Furthermore, those who broke the rules faced fines and punishment. A craftsman shared his story of being caught by the patrol's police for taking a deer. He claimed the deer was dying in the sea when they took it. However, the park's authority accused them of hunting the deer. They were beaten but eventually released. The Ata Modo people were also required to use environmentally friendly materials for their stilt houses, such as wood and leaves, instead of zinc or concrete.

Besides military and park staff, the village head had a stake in the conservation rules. In the 1970s, the first village head (modern government system) transitioned from the customary system and helped the park staff patrol around the park before it developed. In the 1980s, his brother, Hajj Rasyid became the new village head, making daily inspections around the village to ensure the villagers obeyed the rules and maintained cleanliness around their houses and the village. People still remember that when they walked around the village, people were afraid, making sure that their houses were clean. Otherwise, they would get beaten or scolded. However, these two village heads were also considered charismatic leaders among the villagers for their kindness in solving problems among the villagers. Researchers around that time, such as Walter Auffenberg and Verheijen also mentioned how they were kindly helped by these leaders. The first village head's son (R16) stated that his father and sibling were fiercely strict to the villagers to prevent them from the park's official punishment. They would be embarrassed if the villagers got punished by the authorities.

As such, establishing the protected area affected and changed Ata Modo's livelihoods and social relations. The strict regulation combined with the disciplinary approach imposed a new conception of how to view their surroundings. Nevertheless, those actions also caused resistance from the community members.

Resistance Narratives

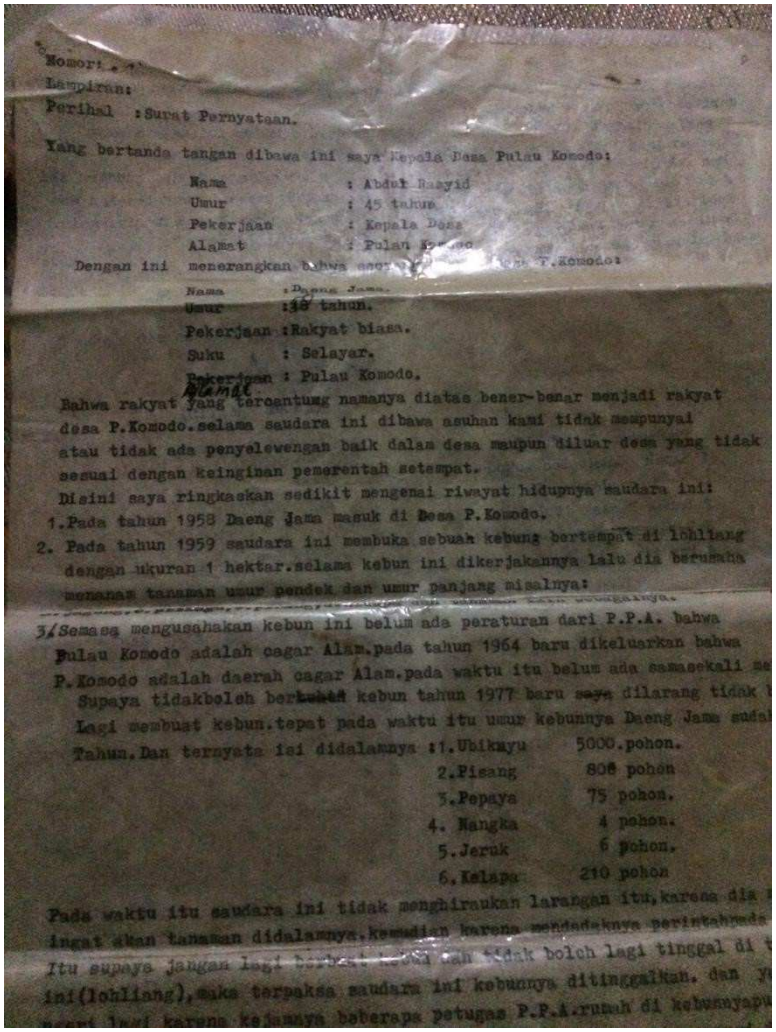
There was resistance against those processes. Unlike in other places in Indonesia in the 1980s, as described by Hall et al. (2011), the resistance to the protected area was a collective and open resistance in an alliance with the local NGOs. In the case of Komodo National Park, the community resistance was subtle and hidden rather than open resistance, except in the story of

one man who did not want to leave his garden. Moreover, located on a remote island in Eastern Indonesia, they needed a network to seek alliances for advocacy.

When the park was established in 1980, the Ata Modo people in general complied with the decision. The state was a strong entity with a militaristic approach under Soeharto's regime. People were afraid of the military. Moreover, the context was close enough to the communism massacre in Indonesia in the 1965-1966. There were approximately 500,000 suspected communist party members throughout Indonesia being killed following the communist coup in 1965 (Cribb 2001). It was also widely broadcast on the radio. The first high school graduate in the village (R15), told me that he was used to listening to the radio broadcasting about how cruel the military shut down communist members. The military image was quite intimidating. When government officials, military, and park staff visited the village, people were scared, following what they said. A local sculptor (R13) and village head (R14), who worked as "hansip" (auxiliary community security officials) at that time, vividly remembered how some adults were forcefully asked to carry the government officials, police, and soldiers on their shoulders to protect them from getting wet during the visit by boat.

There was one memorable conflict between the military and a villager. When the government took over the farmlands in Loh Liang, the villager did not want to give up his one-hectare land farm. In 1977, when the villagers began to leave Loh Liang, he continued working on his land. However, the soldiers came and beat him, forcing him to leave the land. His stilt huts were burned down. According to his son (R6), getting angry with this situation, he left Komodo Island after that, settling on the neighboring island. He was disappointed with the lack of support from his fellow villagers and the head of the village during his fight. Later, in the 1990s, he continued to fight for his land, seeking compensation from the government, but the effort failed.

Before his passing, he was entrusted with a “land title” (See Figure 3.5) given to his son (R6) containing the list of plants he had in Loh Liang and urged him to continue the fight for their family’s land. His bravery and determination earned him the admiration of many people in the Komodo village. On many occasions and meetings, the local community always mentions the land’s acquisition in the past and its legacy.



Nomor:
Lampiran:
Perihal :Surat Pernyataan.

Yang bertanda tangan dibawa ini saya Kepala Desa Pulau Komodo:

Nama : Abdul Rasyid
Umur : 45 tahun
Pekerjaan : Kepala Desa
Alamat : Pulau Komodo

Dengan ini menerangkan bahwa saudara [illegible] P.Komodo:

Nama : Daeng Jama.
Umur : 38 tahun.
Pekerjaan : Rakyat biasa.
Suku : Selayar.
Pekerjaan : Pulau Komodo.
Alamat

Bahwa rakyat yang tercantumg namanya diatas benar-benar menjadi rakyat desa P.Komodo.selama saudara ini dibawa asuhan kami tidak mempunyai atau tidak ada penyelewengan baik dalam desa maupun diluar desa yang tidak sesuai dengan keinginan pemerintah setempat.

Disini saya ringkaskan sedikit mengenai riwayat hidupnya saudara ini:

1.Pada tahun 1958 Daeng Jama masuk di Desa P.Komodo.

2. Pada tahun 1959 saudara ini membuka sebuah kebun bertempat di lohliang dengan ukuran 1 hektar.selama kebun ini dikerjakannya lalu dia berusaha menanam tanaman umur pendek dan umur panjang misalnya:

3/Semasa mengusahakan kebun ini belum ada peraturan dari P.P.A. bahwa Pulau Komodo adalah cagar Alam.pada tahun 1964 baru dikeluarkan bahwa P.Komodo adalah daerah cagar Alam.pada waktu itu belum ada samasekali Supaya tidakboleh berkebun kebun tahun 1977 baru saya dilarang tidak Lagi membuat kebun.tepat pada waktu itu umur kebunnya Daeng Jama Tahun.Dan ternyata isi didalamnya :1.Ubikayu 5000.pohon.
2.Pisang 808 pohon
3.Pepaya 75 pohon.
4. Nangka 4 pohon.
5.Jeruk 6 pohon.
6.Kelapa 210 pohon

Pada waktu itu saudara ini tidak menghiraukan larangan itu,karena dia ingat akan tanaman didalamnya.kemudian karena mendadaknya perintahnya Itu supaya jangan lagi berkebun [illegible] tidak bolch lagi tinggal di ini(lohliang),maka terpaksa saudara ini kebunnya ditinggalkan. dan yang lagi karena kejamnya beberapa petugas P.P.A.rumah di kebunnyapu

Figure 4. 3 The land title of a local farmer certifies a one-hectare land area located in Loh Liang (Afioma, 2016)

Meanwhile, rather than openly resisting, the community challenged the authority through various ways such as gossiping, disobeying rules, and tricky negotiation. For instance, they were indifferent to the park staff stationed on the island. They told the story that when the park was still under the status of a nature sanctuary (established in 1966), staff members often came to the village, and the villagers treated them kindly. Some of the villagers even assisted them in monitoring the forest for the poachers from a nearby island. However, when the park was established with its strict rules, fierce implementation, and land acquisition, the local community felt betrayed by these officers. Whenever they appeared in the village, the Ata Modo people did not talk to them, treating them with silence and indifference.

They also began to disobey certain rules. The Ata Modo people used zinc for the roofs of their houses despite its prohibition. Whenever the patrol staff came around, they would hide it by covering it with leaves. Recounting those moments, they remembered that one officer shed tears when he realized that the Ata Modo people had tricked them. However, they often described it as "crocodile's tears," thinking that the park officers only cared about conservation not Ata Modo's people or livelihoods. The Ata Modo people wondered how they could maintain their houses with wooden materials while they were not allowed to cut trees in the forest (Figure 3.6.). For them, zinc and concrete houses lasted longer and symbolized progress. Therefore, despite the rules, their persistence in using the zinc made the park's staff give up on this matter, ignoring people who used the zinc for the rooftops of their houses.

Figure 4.4. Houses of Komodo inhabitants were made from environmentally friendly materials (Photo by Auffenberg/Community Documentation (n.d.).

Another story about their resistance was related to Soeharto's visit in 1988. Though the plan was to relocate the Ata Modo to the main island of Flores in 1980, they were still on Komodo Island, living in an enclaved area~~,~~ around 3 km from the park entrance. However, the president's visits in 1988 made the villagers worried about whether the original plan would be executed. Moreover, their relationship with the park's authority then had deteriorated. What was surprising at the time was that Komodo dragons went missing from the park entrance a few days before the presidential visit. The park's staff panicked and did everything possible to resolve the issues. They killed the goat as bait, but the komodo did not show up. They invited a natural guide from the main island of Flores, but that did not work.

According to an older figure (R13), they eventually sought assistance from the Ata Modo people despite their awkward relationship. He remembered the park's staff visited his father as one of the customary leaders, bringing a bottle of local alcohol, cigars, and betel leaves as a symbol of an apology. As one with spiritual ability in the village, his father (R13) was asked to

perform a ritual that would attract Komodo dragons to the area. Agreeing with the request, his father and family clan performed the ritual at their sacred site (*Mboho*) in Loh Liang. Amazingly, during the president's visit, komodo dragons appeared. This story highlights their ties with the Komodo dragons and supports their right and claim to live on the island. Many believe that their relocation was canceled because of this contribution.

Looking back at these types of moments, the Ata Modo people, despite their resentment, generally have positive attitudes to conservation. A man (R3) who was asked to carry the military and officials from the boats lamented how he was ashamed of this story, but he realized it was for a good reason. He (R3) admitted, “We were stupid, while the government people were intelligent people who knew better than us. Whatever they order, we obey.” He added that what the government was doing aligned with the villagers' beliefs in protecting the komodo as their twin. The son (R6) of the farmer who would not leave his farm and dozens of landowners in Loh Liang also emphasized the same point. Even though 60 landowners filed a petition to the court to reclaim the land in Loh Liang in 2015, their main intention was not to reclaim the land but to seek compensation from the government. Their demand was rejected by the court. A customary leader (R11) said, “Indeed, we would not take the land back because conservation is important. We just want the government to acknowledge the history and our rights.” In the democratic era, the acquisition of people’s land is regulated to have monetary compensation. More than that, the local community wants the park authority to acknowledge the history of the land’s acquisition in the past. Meanwhile, in recent years, their positive attitude toward conservation has been shaped by economic improvement through tourism activities.

In summary, the Ata Modo people were not passive during the imposition of the park rules. They acted to defend their rights and showed what they thought about it, although it did

not result in significant wins for the community. Their actions were subtle due to their fear of violence and punishment. Through intergenerational stories, those stories have influenced their current movement and political negotiations.

4.1.2 1980s-2000s: Fishing Livelihood

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, several Ata Modo were working on repairing their fishing boats. Because tourism vanished, they returned to fishing to survive the crisis. I accompanied a fisherman (R13) to repair his bagan boat one afternoon. He has not long been involved in fishing since working in the tourism sector as a souvenir seller in Loh Liang, the main tourist entrance in the park. He realized that depending on tourism as a livelihood had placed them in a vulnerable position. The pandemic made them aware of the importance of having multiple sources of income.

Bagan fishing was a primary livelihood of the Ata Modo people between the 1980s and the early 2000s. Since the prohibition of nomadic farming and hunting in 1980, they relied on the sea harvest as their source of living. In addition to netting, collecting fish during low tide, bagan fishing was a popular fishing technique. Bagan is a fishing technique using a boat equipped with portable lights or kerosene lanterns used as an attractant or lure for squid, the main catch from the sea (Figure 3.7). With the importance of fishing during this period, the number of bagan increased rapidly, from only 3 bagan boats in 1977 to 18 in 1980 (Verheijen, 1984). According to a fisherman (R13), the number of bagan boats in Komodo village was up to hundreds of boats until the early 2000s.

Figure 4. 4 Bagan fishing in Komodo Village (Source: Auffenberg/Community Documentation (n.d.).

The Ata Modo people learned *bagan* techniques from the Bajo ethnic group, known as sea nomads from Celebes Island. Some people from this ethnic group had lived in Komodo village because of marriage. Prior to the park's establishment, the Ata Modo considered themselves the mountainous people due to their dependency on farming despite living near the sea. They also perceived fishing practiced by the fisherman from the Bajo tribe as having a magical power. The Bajo could sail for days in the sea and even catch sharks. Eventually, driven by pressure from the park authority, the Ata Modo people learned to catch fish. Their bond with fishers from other tribes helped them to acquire this skill. Furthermore, a man from the Bajo tribe made the bagan boats for the Ata Modo people as the demand drastically increased during this period.

Interestingly, although starting with unwanted park forces, the turn to fishing led to the golden time for the Komodo people, particularly in the 1990s to the early 2000s. Hundreds of boats operated from the Komodo village and explored the sea wealth surrounding the national

park. The turn to fishery also coincidentally occurred with the arrival of a Chinese businessman from Surabaya in East Java who married a local woman and decided to live there. He bought most of the sea harvests from the fishermen (and exported sea harvest to Surabaya) and gave loans to those who wanted to purchase bagan and other fishing facilities. By the turn of the millennium (2000), many fishermen had had their own bagan. Each bagan could have up to 5 crew members. Many Komodo people stated that the sea harvest enabled them to go for the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, a costly undertaking that was beyond the reach of many locals. They could generate around 10 million rupiahs (800 $) monthly. As a result, they also could send their children to school in Labuan Bajo on the mainland of Flores and the island of Sumbawa.

The Decline in Fishing

Unfortunately, this golden era of the fishing economy lasted only two decades. It became challenging due to the development of marine protected areas, the fluctuation of sea harvest, increases in oil prices, the availability of crews, and the change in the tourism sector. While there were once hundreds of boats in the 1990s, by 2006, only six remained. When I visited the village in 2016, the locals informed me that less than 10 households relied on fishing.

The driving factor of its decline was Park's surveillance over the sea, which began in the mid-1990s. The presence of TNC in managing the park emphasized the importance of protecting marine areas in the park due to its rich biodiversity. The park's protection became stricter in 2000, when the central government, through the Komodo National Park Authority (KNPA), implemented a zoning system that allowed fishing only in designated areas. The park is now divided into nine zones, each with specific purposes and access by specific actors. As a result, under this zoning system, the Ata Modo people have limited access to marine zones for their livelihoods, leading to conflict over fishing grounds.

Fishermen have to live under the close surveillance of the park authority. This form of surveillance includes daily patrols by armed security personnel. Sanctions and fines are enforced on villagers who fish or use areas beyond the designated village use areas or forests. The surveillance also was related to the use of cyanide and blast fishing, which were prevalent. The villagers acknowledged that a lack of knowledge and market demand led to these harmful practices. Besides the pressure from the park authority, fishing declined due to its demand for hard work and seasonal nature. Fishing takes place at night and sailing in the sea for days. Using diesel engines for the boats makes fishing expensive. During the 1990s economic crisis, a surge in oil prices made fishermen difficult to afford gasoline. The crisis, triggered by a sudden shift in market sentiments among foreign investors in the Southeast Asia, resulted in monetary crisis and significant currency depreciation in countries like Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia (Thee 2009, p. 50). Meanwhile, bagan fishing was limited to the October to March season, when sea harvests were most plentiful. Furthermore, in the early 2000s, there was a crisis in squid catch, which coincided with the tsunami in Aceh on the northern end of Sumatra Island in 2004, leading to a significant decrease in fish and squid. As recounted by a fisherman (R13), many people sold their boats at this time because they were unable to pay their debts.

Internal factors also contributed to the decline of fishing activities among the Ata Modo. Fishing required a collective effort of at least 2-5 people. Some people felt the system of income distribution needed to be fairer, as laborers received a smaller share of income compared to boat owners. The total revenue was divided among workers, the boat owner, and the operational costs. A former laborer (R3) shared that their hard work only served to enrich the boat owner. Moreover, finding crew members became a challenge as more young people pursued higher education in neighboring islands; therefore, they could not help their parents catch fish. After

completing their education, they were less interested in continuing their parents' profession of fishing, opting instead to make a living from tourism.

Meanwhile, tourism has become an alternative economic pursuit for the Ata Modo people. The increase in tourist visits in the 2000s led to a rise in the souvenir business. The younger, educated generation preferred to sell souvenirs rather than follow in their parents' footsteps. The increased number of tour boats sailing in and through the park also disturbed fishing activities. Moreover, due to the zoning system, more and more areas were designated for diving and snorkeling rather than fishing. Nevertheless, the transition to tourism was not drastic. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, a naturalist guide (R20) explained that people used to work in both sectors simultaneously by crafting wooden statues and souvenirs while waiting for fishing season. The increased number of tourists has made the tourism sector more lucrative for the Ata Modo people, resulting in the abandonment of fishing.

Resistance and Conflicts

During this period, conflicts frequently arose between fishermen and the park authority. The fishermen were sanctioned and fined when they violated the zoning system. There have been many human rights violations over the years, including fatal shootings of fishermen from neighboring Islands. In 2012, there were fishermen shot dead by the park officers, causing a massive protest at TNC office. The fishermen from neighboring islands were more likely to face violence and punishment compared to the people of Komodo Island, as the park authority was stricter with outsiders. There was no charge against the officers. However, despite having this advantage, witnessing those disciplinary actions caused trauma and fear among the Ata people. Many of those fishermen were part of their families through marriage.

The fishermen's resistance at the time was linked to the implementation of the zoning system. On the one hand, the Ata Modo community recognized the marine conservation objectives imposed by the park authority. At that time, cyanide fishing and blast fishing were rampant due to the high demand for fish and a lack of knowledge. They admitted that these fishing practices were not environmentally friendly. The park's disciplinary measures and educational programs improved their knowledge and led to the adoption of positive practices. On the other hand, they did not understand the application of the zoning system. One fisherman (R8) explained that the park authority announced the zoning system without providing clear guidelines on which areas were off-limits. As one man (R8) stated, "On the sea, the boundaries are not clearly defined like in the land. We are uncertain if we already broke the core zone." Unlike land, it is not easy to demarcate sea areas. Furthermore, the fishermen from Komodo village felt that the regulations were impractical and excluded people from enjoying the sea's bounty as fish are more often abundant in the forbidden zones. As an act of resistance, locals often continue to fish in the area where they know fish can be found despite restrictions. They purposely ignore the regulations by avoiding and manipulating the presence of the park patrols.

In some cases, the patrol police were less strict with them due to their close relationship. A police officer I met in 2016 told me he had experienced a change in perspective after living on the island. Having previously lived on the main island of Flores and joining the patrols on occasion, he admitted that they had been harsh on those who broke the rules. However, after being stationed on the island for seven years, he realized their previous approach was a mistake. He built relationships with the locals and understood their way of life. He preferred to resolve conflicts and violations through open communication and persuasion. He said this strategy is much more effective, even though he also became permissive of their violations.

On some occasions, the confrontation between the Ata Modo people and the park authority was inevitable. One notable story from the villagers recounted the bravery of the head of the village in the 2000s. Upon hearing a report from fishermen that the park officers threw their gear into the sea for fishing in the wrong zone, he reportedly confronted the officers, even engaging in a physical fight. Regarding the park's officers' excessive control and intimidation tactics, another villager and fisherman, (R8) expressed his frustration. He often feels puzzled by how the officers impose so-called "conservation awareness." "They always warn me about using my net. They warn me not to touch the reefs and corals. I told them. My gear is expensive. Without telling me, I should be the first to worry if my net touches the corals."

Despite the potential resources in the marine area, the Ata Modo people finally moved to the tourism sector in the early 2000s. Fishing is no longer profitable for them, considering its internal and external challenges. However, in 2020, the Ata Modo people returned to fishing due to covid-19 pandemic (shown in Figure 4.6).

Figure 4. 5 . The number of bagan fishing boats increased in Komodo Village during the COVID-19 pandemic (Afioma 2020)

4.1.3 Late 1990s-Present: Turning to Tourism

During my visit to Komodo in 2016, I had the opportunity to meet a couple who produced souvenirs. The man (R17) was busy creating a mold of a medium-sized dragon in the lower verandah of their stilt house, while his wife was refining some of the statues before painting them. Their skillful hands amazed me. The man (R17) explained that he generated around 4 to 5 rupiah per month (USD 300), enough to meet their basic needs and support their children's education.

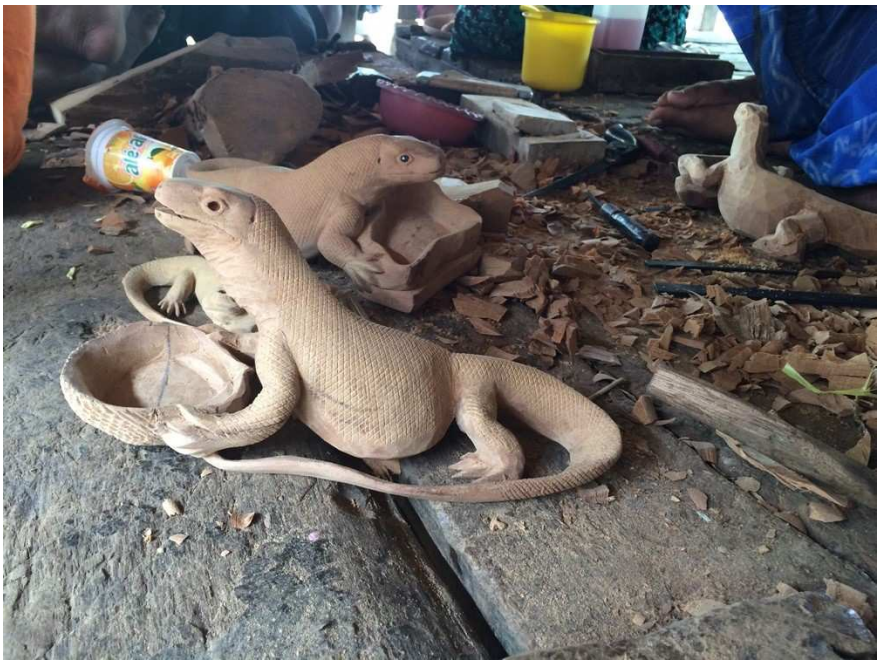


Figure 4. 6 Komodo statue made by the Ata Modo people under the stilt house (sunspirit, 2016)

Crafting small Komodo statues for tourists has become common among the Ata Modo people. In 2016, there were 40 wooden statue crafters in the village. Some locals have become vendors in Loh Liang, a tourist entrance in the park about 3 km from their settlement. In total, 120 vendors sold the products and around 10 food vendors who sold beverages. The park provided a facility near the entrance where they displayed their products and offered them to

tourists. In addition, 10 people work shifts for 15 days (about two weeks) as naturalist guides in the national park. Over the past two decades, the Komodo people have heavily relied on the tourism sector, transitioning from fishing, where only 10 families remain working as fishers.

The history of involvement in tourism has become a familiar story among the Ata Modo people. While the transition to tourism was related to the limitation of sea-related livelihoods and the economic incentives of the tourism sector, the Ata Modo people also mentioned the influence of certain figures. One of them was an elder (who had already died) who was regarded as the first woodcarver in the village. Talking with him in 2020, he explained that his self-training craft began in 1970 when he was asked to make a statue by a well-known researcher, Walter Auffenberg, who wanted to bring it home. After that successful experiment, he continued making statues to supply to the park cooperative which monopolized the souvenir business then. In the late 1990s, many people learned to make statues from him. He used to craft a statue under the stilt house, an open space. A younger wood crafter (R15) said, "When he took a break for lunch, we went home and returned to see him after lunch."

People also mention the role of the first generation of souvenir sellers, consisting of 10 people who struggled for the marketplace at the tourist entrance gate. They were initially not allowed to sell the product in Loh Liang. The park cooperative took control and monopolized the souvenir business at that time. The first generation of vendors resisted this domination by secretly offering their souvenirs to visitors. One of the 10 initiators (R17) stated that they were often caught by the officers, who ran after them. One day, he (R17) threw his souvenirs away because of fear of the park officers. The seller (R 17) eventually confronted the park officers, arguing that selling souvenirs would be the perfect fit for the conservation area rather than fishing. He said this argument was accepted when they eventually had a marketplace in the park.

Adding to this the park cooperative could not meet the high demand for souvenirs during the high season and cruise schedule. They eventually asked the community to supply and sell the products.

In later development, government and NGO programs further accelerated this tourism sector. TNC, in collaboration with the park authority, provided training for villagers to transition into the tourism sector. Some people were sent to follow the advanced training on souvenir crafting in Bali. They were also trained to become "naturalist guides" and dive instructors (TNC and BTNK, 2004; Goodwin, 2002). The main goal was that the tourism economy would prevent the communities from over-exploiting marine biodiversity in and surrounding the park. Tourism has become an alternative livelihood for people who live in the conservation zone. In 2010, almost 60 percent of Komodo Island's villagers already worked in the tourism sector.

Compared to fishing, the tourism sector has several positive characteristics. One of them is the quick generation of cash income and various opportunities. One of the initiators of the souvenir business (R17) was surprised when he received dollars from tourists. He was surprised by the amount in rupiah when exchanging it in the bank. By working in tourism, he saved money and carried out the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca thanks to his souvenir business. Compared to fishing, he said that shares in fishing often depend on the market and take some time to receive their shares. Meanwhile, the young people (R27, R29, and R30) felt thankful for the tourism through which they became the first generation of the Ata Modo people who could graduate from the university. For this achievement, they often compared it with Rinca Village, another village inside the park, which still has fewer young people attending the university. Unlike the Ata Modo people, the Rinca inhabitants still rely on fishing as their main economic source, which is considered insufficient to support school tuition.

Regarding workload, tourism is considered relatively easy and more productive than fishing. While waiting for tourists, the sellers could spend time refining the half-made products. The vendors bought the half-made product at a cheaper price from the crafters, then they furnished it. This is the way they could gain a higher profit margin. Meanwhile, working in tourism does not require group work like fishing. Each person can handle one work on their own. In addition, fishing is gendered work with male domination, while souvenir crafting and selling souvenirs could involve family members (wives, children) in making the products.

Finally, the Ata Modo people recognize that tourism helps them better understand conservation objectives imposed by external actors and institutions. Rather than opposing conservation, they appreciate its contribution to their economic, social, and political life through tourism activity. For instance, they became aware of the relationship between protecting the marine areas and the tourist visits. Therefore, the Ata Modo people often become the safeguard against destructive fishing practices. They have also not taken abalone (*mata tujuh*), which was rampant before. They realized that this practice would destroy corrals.

Conflicts and Challenges

The tourism sector is not without problems. In its early stages (1990s-2000s), it was promising and less competitive due to the lack of people working on it. The condition has now changed as most of the community relies on tourism. The Ata Modo people recognize that the tourism sector is a complex and interrelated sector that involves local, national, and global actors over which they have limited control. In 2016, problems related to craft production, market competition, and policy and regulation were prevalent and discussed in the community.

The sculptors and artisans raised their concerns about the raw materials for wooden crafts. Since they were not allowed to cut the trees within the park, sculptors and craftsmen have

relied on logs supplied from the main island of Flores. Only one kind of wood is suitable for the wooden statue. This dependency poses risks to the sustainability of their work on wooden craft-making. A young man (R21) shared his concern about the supply, arguing that it would be a crisis in the supply. He said, "If one day the trees where wood would be protected, it would be difficult for us to have the materials." He began thinking of alternative skills for making a living.

The vendors highlight the competitiveness of the souvenir business among themselves. There are several reasons. First, the marketplace provided by the park is not enough to accommodate the growing number of sellers over the years. During the cruise visits, the sellers must add an extension area using tarpaulin to accommodate more sellers. Secondly, they offer similar souvenir products, such as komodo statues, shell crafts, necklaces, and printed t-shirts. As a result, there is fierce competition among them to sell the souvenirs. Some of them, for instance, approach tourists using small boats or sell souvenirs in other tourist spots in the park. This practice is considered illegal by the park authority. Thirdly, they compete with the Park Cooperative, which sells souvenirs. The park's cooperative occupied the most crowded tourist traffic in the park and well-designed building. While the Ata Modo people are aware of how badly this competition affects the image of tourism, they feel they have no other options under the pressing competition.

Figure 4. 7 The souvenir sellers from the Komodo village have to share a limited space for their products (Afioma 2020).

The naturalist guides also complain about their work under the management of the park cooperative. Over the years, they have questioned their daily wage allocated by the park's cooperative management. Their main task is to guide tourists around the park, and they are paid around IDR 80.000 (USD 5) per visit. The problem lies in the fact that only half of the total-fee goes directly to the guides, while the cooperative management claims the other half. The naturalist guide had no idea of the reason behind the cut the cooperative took from them. Therefore, they often raise the problem of transparency and even accuse the management of corruption. However, instead of confronting problems directly with management, the naturalist guide often asks other people, such as journalists, to raise this problem. On the other hand, the naturalist guide fears being fired by the management.

In addition to those local dynamics, tourist visits also rely on a number of factors. Tourism is considered a seasonal sector with numbers of visits high from May to October. This period is associated with the summer season in European and American countries, which makes

the biggest composition of the park's visitors. For the Ata Modo people, the most profitable time is during the cruise schedule, which includes two visits a month. Other than that, villagers rely on daily touring vessels. In dealing with the low season, vendors tend to sell products with high profit margins during the high season. Moreover, while the number of visits tends to increase yearly, the number of visits to Komodo Island is fluctuating. The government opened various sites in the park to be explored. For instance, tourists who have already visited Rinca Island (another entrance gate for the park) to see komodo dragons will not visit Komodo Island anymore.

The most challenging time in the tourism-related economy was during the relocation issue in 2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic. The government announced the plan to raise the entrance fee to USD 1000 and give privatization permits for the Loh Liang area in 2019. Part of the plan was to relocate their settlement and selling point to another island. The tourism activities were disturbed as the Ata Modo people consolidated the collective mobilization to protest against this plan. They stopped working on several occasions to organize rallies in the city of Labuan Bajo, which is located on the western tip of Flores Island and the village. Amid the dynamics of this problem, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in 2020. All tourism activities were halted. It was a devastating blow to the local economy. I stayed in the village in 2020 for two weeks, witnessing how the Ata Modo people immediately returned to collect tamarind and fish.

To summarize, the tourism sector has led the Ata Modo people to integrate into wider economic networks and actors. The production of goods and services requires other networks and market availability. Meanwhile, tourism is inexorably linked with political and natural aspects, that are beyond their control. Despite these challenges, the Ata Modo people's response

toward COVID-19 and the relocation plan underlies actions and engagement in tourism. I will describe this dynamic in the following section.

4.2. Renegotiating Ways of Making Living

The threat of relocation and the COVID-19 pandemic marks a new turning point for the Ata Modo people. These circumstances have prompted the Ata Modo people to reflect on their participation and pathways in the tourism economy and, more broadly, their livelihood in relation to conservation and tourism. For this purpose, I will address two observations. First, the Ata Modo people articulate their perceptions of their identity and their perception of tourism and conservation. Second, the Ata Modo people become actively engaged in political movements. The Ata Modo people view political engagement as expanding their economic opportunities.

4.2.1. Perceptions Toward Conservation and Self-Identity

In opposing the relocation plan in 2019, the Ata Modo people explicitly acknowledge the benefits of tourism and conservation. The Ata Modo people also underline their dependency on tourism and how their conservationist knowledge has been improved over the years. These claims they expressed during the rally in the city of Labuan Bajo and the audiences with the officials with various ministries in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, in August 2019. A young leader (R 29) always stated, “The government taught and forced us the way to protect the environment. We have already become what we want to be. But we face this inhuman threat in our own land.” With five representatives from the Ata Modo people, I visited some ministries.

In contrast to the early establishment of the park, the Ata Modo people feel that they today have positive perceptions and attitudes toward conservation and tourism. In the early development, although they accepted the conservation, they resented the park authority due to

the agrarian conflicts. The positive perceptions stem from the socioeconomic benefits of tourism activities. Their revenue from tourism could allow them to purchase modern electronic devices (TV, phone, etc.), afford higher education, and build concrete houses. The Ata Modo people emphasize that economic improvement led them to achieve similar social status with neighboring ethnic groups. For instance, a teacher (R1) states that the Ata Modo people did not have university graduates until the 2000s. It was considered way behind compared to people from the main island of Flores. The situation is now improved as many young people as possible from Komodo Island are pursuing higher education.

The indirect impact of the economic benefits also shapes their attitude toward conservation. While conservation has long been rooted in their indigenous belief system, most of the community members admitted that past fishing practices were harmful. For instance, they took abalone by turning over the corals. Even more, some acknowledged that they used cyanide fishing and blast fishing. However, various educational training from the parks increased their awareness of the environment. It is further reinforced by the benefit they receive from tourism activities.

Another factor in shaping their positive support of conservation is related to their geographical significance. Komodo dragon's popularity worldwide gives the Ata Modo people credit and a sense of pride. In the regional context of East Nusa Tenggara province, the Ata Modo often exaggerates this recognition. A souvenir seller (R 10) said, "If it is not because of komodo, the province might not be known to foreigners." In Indonesia, the East Nusa Tenggara Province is known as the poorest province. The increased popularity of Komodo National Park in recent years has made the province popular across Indonesia. For the Ata Modo people, this

international title and recognition have made their status leveraged among other places. With this respectful title, they feel obligated to protect and safeguard the island.

Meanwhile, as a result of participating in conservation and ecotourism, the Ata Modo people have changed their perception of their collective identity. The Ata Modo people used to view themselves as a poor, backward, and marginalized group. In recent years, while education, inclusive access to information, and economic improvement have largely contributed to the change in their perception of identity, they also value their "natural gift" as a quick learner. The "natural gift" is the way the Ata Modo people describe their ability to quickly learn how to craft wooden statues and adopt new skills. For instance, the Ata Modo could speak English despite the absence of formal training. They also value the ability to make statues with its difficulties. They also learn to catch fish from the neighboring tribes. Thus, this process led the Ata Modo people to change their perception: from poor, uneducated, and marginalized groups to more progressive and educated.

During the 2019 protest, the Ata Modo people felt that they needed to express their perceptions aloud to counter those stereotypes attached to them. From what they knew from the media and people's reactions, the government and many people being influenced still view them as backward and threats to conservation. When the provincial government in 2019 accused the community of degradation of the park, a young local leader (R13) protested and said, "Our ancestors already gave them this land in the past. They had been managing it for years while we were losing everything. But when it failed, we were asked to be responsible. It is not fair. They should accuse one another (government institutions)."

4.2.2 Political Mobilization

On August 15, 2019, the Ata Modo people gathered and staged their protest against the government's plan for the relocation and the development of the exclusive destination. On that day, an ad hoc team consisting of officials of various ministries, local governments at the provincial and regency levels, developmental NGOs, and private companies formed by the Ministry of Forestry and Environment visited Komodo Village. The agenda was to communicate the government's plan in Komodo and to discuss the aspirations and demands of the communities (Dale and Afioma 2020, p. 11). This visit was also a response to the previous demonstration carried out in the town of Labuan Bajo on the western tip of Flores Island and our visit to Jakarta.

This day is considered one of the biggest days in the life of the Ata Modo people as a community. It was because this was the first time they openly confronted the government officials in the village. Prior to their visit, there was a group consisting of 20 people (I was part of the group) tasked by the community to prepare the scenario and points of demand. The scenario on that day was to not allow the officials to enter the village, instead stopping them at the edge of the wooden port. The group feared that the discussion would persuade people and trick them with many options. When dozens of officials came with two speedboats, they could not enter the village and stayed at the edge. The Ata Modo people already crowded the port. A young leader (R26), as a representative of the Ata Modo people, came forward to the edge of the bridge and read a statement before the officials that goes as follows.

> "We, the people of Komodo, the citizens and the sovereign owner of the land and sea in Komodo, herewith reject the government's plan to evict and relocate us from our ancestor's land to a different island. We know conservation better. We have done it long before the arrival of the national park." (Dale and Afioma 2020, p.11)

The statement also demanded the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the Ministry of Tourism to acknowledge their active contribution in conservation efforts and tourism development in the islands. It says,

> "We demand the recognition of the Komodo Indigenous Council as an Advisory Member and/or Steering Committee in the structure of the National Park Authority. We demand the role of the Komodo Indigenous Youth Council as a conservation taskforce (garda konservasi), and not simply as a partner of forest rangers (polisi kehutanan) and park tour guides. We categorically reject all forms of leisure facilities, such as hotels, resorts, restaurants, and other facilities inside the Komodo National Park. We demand the government not to grant any permit to corporations to erect any physical constructions inside the park, as it will endanger the natural ecosystem of Komodo and its whole habitat. We demand an exclusive right for the community to run economic activities, such as food provisions and souvenir kiosks in strategic tourist areas such as in Loh Liang" (Dale and Afioma 2020, p.11)

Two months later (in October 2019), the government stated that there would be no relocation of Komodo villages. The Ata Modo people not only celebrate this decision but also realize the importance of this collective determination. The head of the vendors association (R 18), said, "Over the years, we have been like komodo, just staying silent. But now, it is time to speak up." Youth (R27, R28, R29, R30) state that they want to be assertive and courageous in speaking about their rights.

In following up on this statement, the Ata Modo people clearly highlight their positive standpoints toward conservation. They do not reject and oppose conservation and tourism, instead, they resist the exploitation of the park. The Ata Modo people emphasize how they have been actively engaged in protecting the park despite the formal commitment from the park authority. For instance, when there is a fire in the park, they would altogether shut it down. They also oversee the marine area from destructive fishing practices. In Ata Modo's view, the park authority has become more focused on the management of tourism rather than conservation itself. Unlike in the past, where conservation values were strictly enforced, park officials today seem to prioritize business over conservation.

Their cultural identity also underlies their demands. Their cultural identity is not only related to the Ata Modo's past life as a hunter and gatherer society before the park establishment, but also their engagement in fishing, tourism, and conservation. As stated in the statement, their knowledge of the marine area in the park during the fishing period has constructed their identity. They use it as the basis of their claim and authority over surrounding areas. The Ata Modo people also claim that they become more conservationist compared to the park officials themselves. By allowing the expansion and appropriation of private companies, they accused the officials of trading off the conservation values for money.

4.2.3 New Pathways for Resilient Livelihoods

Reflecting on these new challenges, the Ata Modo people seek to engage in many pathways for their sustainable livelihoods. What underlined those pathways is the awareness that greater access and control over the resources go hand in hand with political determination. I will describe various yet interconnected ways in which the Ata Modo people are navigating these challenges.

First. After the COVID-19 pandemic, livelihood diversification became important to reduce the overdependence on tourism and have multiple sources of income. Many of the Ata Modo people, especially the older generation, return to fishing using the bagan fishing technique. Starting during the pandemic, the number of bagan fishing boats increased.

Second, younger generations explore more opportunities in tourism services. They are involved in guides, travel agents, photographers, boat crews, captains, and dive masters. These opportunities become widely open after the 2019 dynamic. Alongside their movements, the Ata Modo people developed more extensive networks such as tourism associations (guide, travel

agents, boat association, photography club), which are based on the mainland of Flores. They also become well-connected to tourists. A local man (R26) managed a phinisi boat owned by a Jakarta businessman. The owner who had become aware of the Ata Modo people's news and visits, entrusted a local man (R26) to manage the boat and recruit a captain and all crew members from the native people.

Third. The Ata Modo realize the importance of knowledge production and political activism to assert their tribal claim over the Island. While the Ata Modo people welcome journalists and researchers to the village, they also become actively engaged in building networks with civil society groups and in knowledge production. In 2020, I was involved in community-collaborative work to document the history of the community, resulting in a series of documentary films entitled “Komodo for Sale” in 2023. A youth group developed a cultural center to collect all documents, books, and other materials related to the community's history. There has also been a cultural festival held every year in collaboration with the universities since 2021.

Fourth. The youth group develops and organizes community-based tourism in the village. The idea is to make the village a tourist destination. The youth group has taken charge of management, storytelling, and the trek where they can guide the visitors around the village including komodo sightings. This initiative started in 2022 when there was a clash between the provincial government and central government in taking control of the park’s management in Loh Liang. For sometimes, the travel agents and visitors did not want to visit Loh Liang. The Komodo village became an alternative spot. Within two to three months, the initiative became popular and an alternative spot for tourists to see komodo. In 2022, the village received around 8,000 visitors.

Fifth. the Ata Modo people "take over" the management of the tourist entrance gate in Loh Liang on Komodo Island. Previously, the tourist park area in Loh Liang was managed by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. In 2022, the management transitioned to the provincial government after a heated conflict regarding the authority over the park between the provincial and the central government. In its initial operation, the new management faced challenges due to a shortage of trained naturalist guides. The only available trained naturalist guide was the Ata Modo people, who were initially hesitant to join the new management in order to respect their long-standing relationship with the park's cooperative. However, the new management persuaded them with better terms and incentives. The Ata Modo people occupy a higher position, not only as naturalist guides. They receive a monthly stable income instead of daily wages. A naturalist guide (R 12) said that although their option was considered betrayal, that was the way they could take control of the park, a condition that had never happened before.

Sixth. The Ata Modo people successfully negotiated with the park authority to have more spots in the park as their selling points for souvenirs and culinary business. The community now has marketplaces in Loh Liang, Pink Beach, Long Beach, and Padar Island. It was partly a result of the weakened position of the park authority due to the conflicts with the local government and the local community.

In summary, the Ata Modo people navigate conflicts over the natural resources in the park by simultaneously strengthening their political articulation and gaining economic opportunities. Rather than backward and isolated communities, they have demonstrated strong political agency towards controlling and managing the resources.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter explores how the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people shapes and reproduces the discourse on the political ecology of livelihood. The previous chapter offers the empirical realities of the transformation in livelihood, governance, and the place of the Ata Modo people. It also emphasizes the political agency of the Ata Modo people in negotiating power, meaning, viable economic strategies, and social institutional change in response to the development. In this part, I will demonstrate the political dimensions of the livelihood of the Ata Modo people in discussion with some theories. First, I will examine the political economy of livelihood. Second, I will delve into the political agency of the Ata Modo people and resistance. Third. The discussion of livelihood sustainability. The chapter will close with the conclusion.

5.1 Encountering Critiques of Development

In this part, I discuss the limitations of the political economy critiques on the development of protected areas and the neoliberal conservation in Komodo National Park. Derived from the Marxist theory, the political economy tends to criticize the development of the protected area as a form of dispossession and social exclusion for capital accumulation. Furthermore, the notion of pristine nature in conservation is associated with Western hegemony and has its roots in the Enlightenment era. In the context of neoliberal conservation, this scheme is exacerbated with the green market economy through which the new valuations of nature legitimize the new appropriation of nature (Fairhead et al. 2012, p. 255).

In the political economy critiques, the development of protected areas is understood as quite negative. The process of enclosure and dispossession of nature results in the exclusion of the native people. Exclusion is defined as a condition when a large number of people lack access to land. Adams and Hutton (2007) portray how displacement of the local communities leads to a multidimensional crisis, such as an uncertain future and impoverishment (p. 157). Exclusion is also understood as a process that highlights large-scale and often violent actions in which the poor are evicted from their land by and on behalf of powerful actors (Hall et al. 2011, p. 4). Hall et al. (2011) mention four exclusionary powers that lead to exclusion: regulation, markets, force, and legitimation (Hall et al. 2011, p.8). Peluso (1993) underlined how using force and violence was justified as morally good in the formation of the park in Indonesia (Peluso 1993, p. 216). Thus, the political economy leaves little room for alternatives and dialogues.

The political economy framework has been used in the study of the establishment of Komodo National Park. Conflicts are often underlined and viewed as inevitable due to different ideas and practices of the protection of nature. Erb (2012) sheds light on the conflict between the government, conservation organizations, and rural communities because of different agendas about environment and the how it should be preserved, and commoditized (Erb 2012, p.11). Erb (2015) views locals as weak actors whose expectations and interests are not fulfilled in the development agenda (Erb 2015, 143). Likewise, Pannell (2013) tends to emphasize conflicts between global and national entities and local communities as cultural wars (Pannel 2013, p. 53). Dichotomy is the main feature of this analysis. In the context of neoliberal conservation, although co-management was introduced, the failure of the TNC intervention in 2012 is recognized as a problem of power relations. Gustave and Borchers (2008) mention the lack of participation of the local communities in the decision-making (Gustave and Borchers, 2008, p.

10). Similarly, Cochrane (2013) sees power relations as the main cause of the failure of the TNC's market mechanism in Komodo National Park (Cochrane 2013, p.127). While those critiques are important to addressing the imbalance of power and injustice, those studies lack attention to lived experiences and the local dynamics.

To what extent do the Ata Modo people lose their land ownership, access to, and benefits in the protected area? Are the Ata Modo people being dispossessed from Komodo National Park? Is accumulation by dispossession absolute or other outcomes possible? Although the Ata Modo people have experienced disclosures and dispossession, they have not been completely excluded from the island and dispossessed of the resources around them. In fact, although the state put them in a marginal position in the 1980s, the Ata Modo people were able to turn to fishing livelihoods. In their early exposure, the Ata Modo people found success in sea-related livelihoods. In the waves of neoliberal ecotourism, they have even integrated themselves into the capitalist economy. They assert their political agency to strengthen their claim and hopefully enjoy the benefits of the ecotourism industry. Despite the process of enclosure and dispossession, native peoples can still use resources in the park through traditional (fishing) and non-traditional resource uses such as tourism economy. This includes exploiting the sea, using eco-friendly technology, and fishing in designated zones (Dale and Afioma 2020).

Rather than being viewed as a process and condition, I posit that exclusion creates long-standing tension and contradiction, allowing the local people to determine outcomes. Building on Hall et al. (2011), exclusion ~~as~~ is a discursive power relation, where the intention to exclude the local people can result in both positive and negative effects (Hall et al. 2011, p. 8). About that, the definition of power is important. Foucault (1991) asserts that power in the modern state so-called governmentality is the conduct of people through rational calculation and tactics. He

states, "rationality is the intrinsic principle of governmentality (Foucault 1991, p.89).” However, he also notes that this rationality has limits and can be critiqued. As Li (2007) argues, governmental rationality not as a totalizing and homogenous power, but rather entails contradiction and tensions between what is promised and what is actually done (p.257)

Meanwhile, aside from conflicts, the livelihood change has shown the mundane activities of the Ata Modo people. Conflict can portray differences and distinct identities within the community. However, in the case of the Ata Modo people, they have also integrated into the tourist economy and development in their daily lives. Their interest is to build and improve their livelihood, give meaning to their lives, and maintain control of the resources around them. The capitalist economy permeates their economic activity. This reality that the Ata Modo people have actively engaged in the capitalist economy demonstrates what Cousins (2013) called “accumulation from below (Cousins 2013, p. 136). It means that the Ata Modo people, on the other hand, compete with long-established and large-scale capitalists. The Ata Modo could also be successful in capital accumulation, not necessarily through a targeted, top-down program, but through spontaneous local responses to propitious conditions (Cousins, 2013, p. 134).

By demonstrating this, I argue that what we see is not merely about resistance toward development but also accommodation of development. In the context of neoliberal conservation and ecotourism projects, it is less a critique of accumulation by dispossession; rather, it is a critique of domination. The Ata Modo people do not reject all forms of modern development, but they reject exploitation and domination. How the Ata Modo people engage and disengage in development depends on how much it benefits them. As Bebbington (2000) argues, encountering development is “not necessarily resisted but is more often taken, transformed, and used

(Bebbington, 2000, p. 513)". Thus, the Ata Modo people's practices in development are primarily to build their own agenda and interest.

5.2 Resistance and Indigenous Politics

Political ecology examines the production of power and resistance as discursive power relations. Therefore, another important discussion is the resistance of the Ata Modo people. I will examine how individual and collective political determination arises.

Understanding poststructuralists' critique of development is essential to be addressed. The development is seen as a process of cultural destruction and homogenization, with the state serving as an aggressive agent of modernization and domination (Bebbington 2000, p. 496). In contrast, poststructuralists underscore self-autonomy and the political determination of the community based on their differences. Bebbington (2000) has criticized this approach, arguing that it oversimplifies grassroots economy and political actions and places the community as an isolated entity (Bebbington 2000, p. 496). Poststructuralist critique overlooks the diversity of development processes and outcomes (Bebbington 2000, p. 496). In the context of the Ata Modo people, Bebbington's critique is relevant. While the Ata Modo people use their cultural identity as a means of political claim, they also do not essentialize their indigeneity. The Ata Modo people do not want to live like in the past. They also find a common ground between the conservation project and their notion of caring for their twin. Moreover, the Ata Modo people today support conservation because of its economic impact on their lives.

To understand local community resistance and participation in the development simultaneously, it is important to see the formation of perceptions and attitudes toward development. According to Agrawal (2005), those living in protected areas become

environmental subjects whose perception is shaped by environmental politics (Agrawal 2005, p. 165). People's beliefs and thoughts are formulated in response to experiences under environmental politics. This perception is aligned with Foucault's view of the body as the site of power, where political beliefs colonize human imagination (Foucault 1978, p. 170; Agrawal 2005). Despite being subject to environmental politics, Foucault recognizes the inherent indeterminacy of the body that can lead to resistance and subjugation (Foucault 1978, p. 115; Agrawal 2005). While Foucault did not fully explain the mechanism of this indeterminacy, Agrawal contends that the indeterminacy of the subject is constituted from practical experience and shaped by historical, socioeconomic, and cultural contexts.

In the context of the Ata Modo people, the subject-making process has been reflected in their form of resistance and livelihood practices. There are two features of changes that we can see from their resistance. First, before the massive protest in 2019, the Ata Modo people opposed conservation rules. Protests were not collective, organized protests but conducted by individuals on a daily basis. Similar to what Holmes (2007) describes about the protest in the park, these protests are characterized by little planning and their avoidance of confrontation (Holmes 2007, p. 184). Second, since 2019, their resistance has become open and collective. At the center of the Ata Modo resistance, they have not only evoked their tribal rights as the primary owners and guardians of the ecosystem but also strategically have used the language of conservation and eco-tourism to oppose privatization and dispossession and defend the park as a new common (Dale and Afioma 2020, p. 11; Dale 2024). The Ata Modo people have changed from being people who were disinterested in the efforts of conservation to being the safeguard of the park. They accept the governmentality of the park but want to be active partners and want to be involved more in conservation.

Rather than emphasizing their differences, the Ata Modo people bring together their cultural identity of the human-animal relationship and "new" identities shaped through engagement in conservation and tourism. The tribal claim of the human-animal relationships, which the Ata Modo people contested during the 2019 protest is not trying to bring the past time back or anti-development. Instead, the human-animal kinship is the means of negotiating power, which I underline as indigenous politics. This indigenous politics is a form of articulation that opens new possibilities for asserting multiple forms of self-determination (Li 2000, p. 151). As Tania Li argued (2004), self-identification as Indigenous is neither natural nor simply an invention (Li 2004, p. 339). Instead, it is "a positioning which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle" (Li 2000, p. 339; Dale 2024).

The Ata Modo also utilize their deep understanding of their surroundings through their livelihood practices as vehicles of struggle and position in relation to capitalist expansion (Li 2010, p. 385). The Ata Modo people claim their fishing practices have made them know the sea marine area better than the park officials. By threatening to destroy the marine water area the park's authority, the Ata Modo people implicitly claim their authority over the sea area. The Ata Modo people have also used the material culture through crafting activities to re-crafting their local identities. While crafting the komodo statue provides them with skills, it also changes the way they define themselves in relation to other ethnic groups and the forces of globalization. Drawing on Adams (2006), who examined the relationship between art and identity politics in Toraja, Celebes Island, material culture is seen as an active strategist and political agency in challenging unequal ethnic and regional relations or a resource for imagining ways to harmoniously engage with other groups, encounter with the forces of globalization (Adams,

2006, p. 211). In Komodo village, most of the people can learn and make statues. Therefore, almost all people could know how to craft a statue. They perceive themselves as intelligent people, which symbolically counter stereotypes made by politicians, tourism operators, and NGOs who considered them “wild” and “lack of knowledge”.

To sum it up, the Ata Modo people resist and actively participate in development efforts. Through revitalizing their cultural identity and different practices of livelihoods over the years, their sense of self has been constantly negotiated and imbued with new meanings, which lead to their actions. It is a co-production process (Bebbington 2000, p. 514), where the local community resistance reflects their political agency to influence the outcome of the development into their own agenda. Through livelihood changes and reflection upon it, implemented programs require negotiation, accommodation, compromise, and resistance (Li 2007, p. 279).

5.3 Sustainable Livelihood and Resilient Livelihood

In this part, I discuss the sustainable livelihood of the Ata Modo people: are their livelihood sustainable? Using a sustainable livelihood framework, Lasso and Dhales (2018) conducted a study on the sustainability of tourism of the Ata Modo people. The sustainable livelihood framework suggests that sustainability of livelihood could be achieved through securing access to natural, financial, human, social, and institutional resources (p. 474). Based on the tourism activity of the Ata Modo, Lasso and Dhales (2018) argued that tourism livelihood is not sustainable, although it generates satisfactory income (p. 483). The reason is mainly because of their dependency on tourism as a single source of income. Tourism is subject to disruption, seasonality, and consumer volatility (rapid changes in taste and preferences affecting tourist arrivals to destinations), which creates fierce competition (p. 483).

The political ecology of livelihood criticizes the framework of sustainable livelihood. Beginning in the 1990s, within the context of the rise of modernization approaches in development, livelihood became an object of research to design aid for the global poor (Carr 2015, p. 334). Economic perspectives are dominant in development thinking which affects the way of seeing livelihood. Livelihood is merely about the maintenance and improvement of the material conditions of life (Carr 2015, p. 335). Thus, livelihood approaches tend to construct communities and individuals as passive and simply reactive to the influences and impacts of events and external processes (Carr 2015, p. 336). It overlooks structural and bigger contexts. Political ecology brings back the political question of livelihood. Livelihood in political ecology raises questions on how particular people in particular places mobilize environmental, economic, and social resources (Carr 2015, 332).

In contrast to Lasso and Dhales (2018), the political dimension of the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo rests on a multifaceted process, encompassing a range of factors not just access to material resources but also intangible factors, such as cultural dynamics, social interactions, and even personal emotions can also play a significant role. Drawing on Bebbington (1999), we underline the significance of social capital in mobilizing economic and political capital instead of material conditions. Social capital is a social structure and network, such as family and kinship connections, social networks, cross-sectoral linkages (state, market, civil society), political capital, institutional policy, social norms, and values (Bebbington 1999, p. 400). Social capital facilitates human agency. The ability to forge relationships between these forms of social capital would lead to greater economic, political, and cultural determination. Social capital has a political dimension as it encompasses governance of resources rather than economic survival (Bebbington 1999, p. 403).

The livelihood change of the Ata Modo people shows how their social capital underlies their agency which enables them to explore different livelihoods. For instance, their kinship relations with other clans have helped them pursue fishing skills. Building relationships in the tourism networks has helped them to access different opportunities related to tourism. In their history, they shifted from fishing and then tourism, but now they diversify their income resources from various sectors, such as fishing and various jobs in the tourism sector. This process did not happen overnight, rather it involves a long process of experiment and negotiation. On the other hand, they realize that political activities can expand economic opportunities. The process of livelihood changes is not necessarily based the material conditions, but their ideas which are constructed through social interaction and engagement in the development, could influence their way of making a living.

Another critique is that while sustainable livelihood is deterministic, in the case of Ata Modo, it is crucial to recognize that the livelihood strategy involves complex and long-term adaptation and negotiation. It is not a fixed outcome, instead, as Scoones (1998) suggests, sustainability is negotiated by people in a particular place within a structural driver of changes. Sustainability is negotiated within opportunities and constraints (Scoones 1998, p. 72). A sustainable pathway is a choice, depending on the power to negotiate pathways to sustainability. These pathways are strongly linked to knowledge, context, access and control resources, market relations, and agency capacity (Scoones,1998, p. 72).

Meanwhile, instead of using sustainability, Carr (2020) emphasizes resilient livelihoods in order not simply to address material conditions. According to Carr (2020), resilient livelihood brings together the way to achieve material well-being and preserve the existing system of meaning and social order (p. 6). Resilient livelihoods are the reproduction of human-environment

relationships where the negotiation of power, meaning/difference, and agency are at the core of these dynamics to address the question of how to live in one place (Carr 2020, p.6).

It is difficult to argue whether the livelihood of the Ata Modo people is sustainable or resilient. While this thesis might highlight the adaptability of the Ata Modo people in the short-term, the political dimension of livelihood challenges the long-term scenario. The livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people only shows incremental adaptation and being constantly negotiated.

5.4. Conclusion

The thesis delves into the political dimension of livelihood changes of the Ata Modo people in Komodo National Park in Indonesia. Utilizing the political ecology framework, these chapters shed light on the political aspects of the park formation and neoliberal ecotourism project and the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people. Through my analysis, I contend these two processes are ongoing and relational power dynamics. The livelihood adaptation of the Ata Modo people is best understood as the active yet political response to external intervention, ranging from the park establishment to the current waves of neoliberal conservations.

However, the problem is that both processes are unequal in academia and public discussion. The protected area in Komodo National Park remains the main venue for natural scientists, who historically have intentionally ignored the human presence in their attention. Within the new political configuration in Indonesia, this way of thinking and knowing is not only reproduced but also provides the basis of the development imperative to coerce and exclude indigenous people from their native island. On the other side, social and critical studies on local

communities in the Komodo National Park primarily centered around a discursive critique of the political economy of the development with little attention paid to local dynamics. The local community is seen as a passive agent in the face of globalization with livelihood change being viewed as the inevitable consequence of development.

Using an ethnographic approach emphasizing political activism, this research rethinks the dynamics of the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people. It attempts to provoke a new discussion about human and environmental relationships. The livelihood transition of the Ata Modo people from a hunter-gatherer society to a fishing livelihood and tourism-related economy has shown a complex and dynamic process of human-environment relationship in the protected areas. Through these changes, it is evident that the Ata Modo people have a strong political influence to drive changes in their own community and the protection of nature. However, the significance of the presence of the Ata Modo people on the island has less been appreciated and acknowledged by the powerful actors, park authorities, and corporations.

This study aims to contribute a constructive outcome. The Ata Modo's livelihood transformation reflects the diverse yet rich understanding, knowledge, and practices of conservation and livelihood. However, it has often been not recognized. Therefore, it is essential to conduct further study and gain deeper understanding of the Ata Modo people's lived experience. Meanwhile, looking at the livelihood transformation of the Ata Modo people, this thesis is oriented to address critical thoughts and practicality. Knowing that the Ata Modo people have become environmental subjects and integrated into the market economy, it is crucial to establish a common ground for constructing a mutually human-environment relationship in the Komodo National Park.

As I consider the intricate dynamics of livelihood change, it becomes clear that politics plays a crucial role. While continuously marginalized by fortress and neoliberal models of conservation, the Indigenous Ata Modo continue to define and build their livelihoods through everyday and spectacular acts of resistance, occupation, and incorporation. All these dynamics show that local communities have crafted their vision and paradigm of conservation and ecotourism, to safeguard the park as a new common, secure access to and benefit from the tourism business, and prevent new waves of accumulation in the name of conservation and nature tourism development (Dale and Afioma 2020, p. 14).

Within this process, drawing on Scoones (1999), there are several interrelated elements underlying the political dimension of livelihood: politics of opportunities, politics of individuals, and politics of knowledge and politics of ecology. The political dimension of livelihood examines how the Ata Modo people's livelihoods are shaped by wider political economy structures and the privilege that emerges from location, ethnicity, access to resources, and other factors. The political dimension also reflects in the individual and human agency in the community, observing how they think, feel, and make choices. It also reflects the diverse knowledge of how people in particular places make a living out of particular ways. Additionally, it reflects the dynamic of livelihood opportunities within the ecological context and boundaries (Scoones 1999, p. 106).

In conclusion, I argue that this thesis is dedicated to closely pay attention to the local struggle and appreciate the complexity of the livelihoods of the Ata Modo people. While it intentionally advocates for the marginalized Ata Modo people, its primary goal is also to contextualize discussions on livelihood transformations within a broader political framework.

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