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# Tourism in Raja Ampat: New Chances and Challenges

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# TOURISM IN RAJA AMPAT: NEW CHANCES AND CHALLENGES

Chloe King

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SIT Study Abroad Indonesia: Arts, Religion and Social Change

Spring 2017

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## Introduction

The Raja Ampat islands, located in the Papua province of eastern Indonesia, are home to some of the most biodiverse ecosystems on Earth. Literally meaning "Four Kings," Raja Ampat contains more than 600 islands within its maritime district, with the islands of Waigeo, Batanta, Salawati, and Misool being the four largest. The island communities have all retained some form of autonomy from the local government, practicing traditional forms of law, governance, and maritime management such as *sasi laut*. These rules have encouraged cycles of land and sea closures in order to promote ecosystem sustainability and growth; still, destructive fishing practices were common in the region, and many fishermen turned to using dynamite or cyanide to catch fish, poisoning the reefs and damaging future livelihoods. However, the economy of the region has changed rapidly in the past several years, as fewer and fewer people turn to fishing as a source of income. While tourism has only been in the region for just over a decade, it has already transitioned many of the islands inhabitants, some 32,000 people, from subsistence

fishing to active jobs in the growing tourism industry. This has not only provided new livelihoods, but better and more sustainable ones.

This study focuses on the ways in which the tourism industry in Raja Ampat has contributed to local livelihoods and encouraged the preservation of marine resources, looking specifically at the case of a dive operator and a volunteer tourism operation. The study illuminates the challenges that these operators face when engaging with the local community to protect the environment, and recommends more effective strategies for improving relations between tourism operators and the communities in which they reside. The study ultimately makes the case that the legacy of colonial rule in Western Papua must be a consideration in tourism planning, as this history of extraction and domination of local communities is a risk of continuing with this new industry. Ultimately, by understanding the economic, community, and environmental impacts that tourism brings to Raja Ampat, private operators can maintain the long term success of both their own businesses as well as the communities and ecosystems on which their success depends.

### *Methodology*

This study is based on empirical data from qualitative interviews, participant observation, and online surveys over a one-month period in April of 2017. A total of 17 formal interviews were conducted with volunteers, tourists, managers, workers, and owners both local and foreign from NGOs, local government, and dive, volunteer tourism, and sustainable tourism operators in Raja Ampat. Interviewees were chosen based on my personal knowledge of the field site and connection with the dive industry in these areas, and the majority of interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesian with locals and English when possible with other participants. The purpose of the interviews was to investigate four areas: 1) local perceptions of the tourism industry and

its interactions with local communities and ecosystems 2) foreign perceptions of local communities as either a researcher, volunteer, tourist, or worker 3) economic, environmental, and community impact of tourism and 4) the positive and negative effects of niche industries, such as dive, volunteer or research tourism.

Additionally, 18 tourism operators were sent questionnaires to ascertain their practices towards local communities and sustainability. All interviews and surveys were transcribed, translated from Indonesian by experienced translators, and remain anonymous.

By residing in several different communities and observing one dive shop's daily operations in detail, I was able to collect a significant amount of information and insight through participant observation and daily conversation with staff, guests, and local communities. To complement interviews and participant observation, various documents were collected including copies of presentations by NGOs, homestay brochures, press releases, progress reports, and mission statements. One three-hour meeting between a local NGO and the local government tourism office was observed.

### *Ethics*

All interviewees signed written consent documents, the contents of which were read and discussed prior to agreeing to the interview. Participants that spoke Bahasa Indonesian were given forms in that language, while all others were given an English form. All subjects personally consented to the interview both verbally and by signing the document before the interview began. Several subjects were contacted via email or text message and approached for an interview. Privacy and confidentiality was assured to the participant at all stages before, during and after the interview.

The majority of interviews were recorded using an iPhone and all recordings will be permanently deleted following the submission of this report. Interviewees were recruited using

the snowball method, leading from one informant to the next via personal networks, as well as conversation with local communities with whom I stayed. I personally approached and recruited all people interviewed in the study. All private operators, NGO names, government officials, homestay owners, and operator staff remain anonymous in this report. Undue influence was a consideration of the report as as tourist interviewing people whose livelihoods depended on tourism, and participants were reassured that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to answer. No interviewees were directly compensated, but several occasions a coffee or tea was purchased for the informant's time.

Many possible risks to participants were considered in this study, such as possible loss of confidentiality, discomfort from direct questions about personal information in surveys or interviews, risks resulting in social rejection or stigmatization, legal risk if asking questions about participation in illegal activities, and physical risk. No sensitive information that could have aggravated these risks was collected, and care was taken to ensure that all of these risks were minimized for participants and interviewees.

## The Legacy of Colonialism

### *The Search for Independence*

It is impossible to discuss the impact of tourism on Raja Ampat without first discussing the history and legacy of Dutch and Indonesian colonization in West Papua, for the two are intimately related. The cultural and societal impacts of Western Papua's struggle for independence are apparent today, in every community in which there is an interaction between a native Papuan and foreigner, either from elsewhere in Indonesia or the world. These power dynamics have deep roots in the new and rapidly developing tourism industry in Raja Ampat,

and speak loudly to both the potential and potential limitations of community based conservation initiatives in the area.

The region of Western Papua is home to more than 300 languages and over 200 local dialects. While the majority of people are taught Bahasa Indonesian in school, and in fact are often encouraged to use less of the local language, Papuans are also physically distinct from other Indonesians. They are of Melanesian heritage, and more closely relate to Aborigines than Asians.<sup>1</sup> While originally colonized by the Dutch, whose official claims to Western New Guinea were recognized in the treaties of 1885 and 1895 by the British and Germans (who also held claim to other areas of New Guinea), it was not the Dutch that left the greatest legacy in the region.

In 1942, Western New Guinea and various outer islands were occupied by Japan in World War II, and the local population was either under occupation or forced to assist the U.S. military in shepherding the wounded from battlefields, guiding and translating, and constructing camps, among many other services. When the war ended the Dutch retained control of the region, including after Indonesia's independence was officially recognized in 1949. Indonesia continued to lobby both the Dutch and the United Nations to gain control of Western New Guinea. The Dutch began intensive education programs in the region in order to prepare the population for independence, continuously encouraging Papuan nationalism so as not to allow the region to be absorbed into Indonesia.<sup>2</sup>

From this was born the Free Papua Movement (*Organisasi Papua Merdeka*, or OPM) in 1963, which was an organization aimed at gaining independence from all colonial powers, including Indonesia. OPM issued the statement that: "We do not want modern life! We refuse

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<sup>1</sup> . Harvey, Rachel. "Papua's Struggle for Independence." *BBC News*. BBC, 13 Mar. 2009. Web. 03 May 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey, Rachel. "Papua's Struggle for Independence." *BBC News*. BBC, 13 Mar. 2009. Web. 03 May 2017.

any kinds of development: religious groups, aid agencies, and governmental organizations just Leave Us Alone!"<sup>3</sup>

The Ambassador to Indonesia at the time, Frank Galbraith described the OPM to "represent an amorphous mass of anti-Indonesia sentiment" and that "possibly 85 to 90 percent [of Papuans], are in sympathy with the Free Papua cause or at least intensely dislike Indonesians."<sup>4</sup> In the end, this desire for independence and resentment towards Indonesia did not matter. In 1969, the United Nations attempted to initiate the Act of Free Choice, which would allow every native Papuan a right to vote on whether the region would join Indonesia or at last gain its independence. Instead, 1,025 men were chosen as "representatives" of a population of more than 800,000 people, and it was announced that they voted "unanimously" to join Indonesia.<sup>5</sup> The region was then renamed West Irian and became the 26<sup>th</sup> province of Indonesia.

### *Integration and Transmigration*

Following the integration of West Papua into Indonesia, the Indonesian government began to expand its transmigration program, which moved tens of thousands of Indonesians from crowded regions in Java and Sumatra to the islands of Papua. While the majority of Papuans were Catholic, Protestant, or followed various animist religions, in less than 50 years they have been nearly outnumbered by Muslims that settled in the region from Java.<sup>6</sup>

The Free Papua Movement continued as these tensions rose, and the government suppressed the movement at all stages. A report from Sydney University estimated that more

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<sup>3</sup> Kuipers, Ludo. "Photos from West-Papua." *West-Papua | Photos | History | OzOutback*, ozoutback.com.au/West-Papua/index.html. Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>4</sup> "National Security Archive at George Washington University, Document 8". Gwu.edu. Retrieved 2014-06-28. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB128/index.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Elmslie, Jim. "West Papuan Demographic Transition and the 2010 Indonesian Census." [sydney.edu.au/arts/peace\\_conflict/docs/working\\_papers/West\\_Papuan\\_Demographics\\_in\\_2010\\_Census.pdf](http://sydney.edu.au/arts/peace_conflict/docs/working_papers/West_Papuan_Demographics_in_2010_Census.pdf). Accessed 3 May 2017.

than 100,000 West Papuans have been killed as a result of this government opposition and violence; many have estimated the toll even higher, at 500,000 people.<sup>7</sup> The OPM continued, until modern day, to reject the idea of Indonesian integration, and many people remained sympathetic to the cause. Attacks continued on both sides, such as in 2012 when a West Sumatran transmigrant was shot and killed by members of OPM.<sup>8</sup> West Papuans continued to resent Indonesia for taking independence away from a people who felt distinct from the rest of the country, and the consequences of this continue till today.

### *Economic Implications*

On many of the islands that I visited in West Papua, the shops and economic system run as one would expect for a blooming tourist destination. Yet on other islands, most children have not yet seen paper money, and do not understand the concept of it. As one interviewee said, “So many tourists come to the islands and want to do something for the villagers, so they give money or candy to the children. They haven’t even seen this stuff before. It’s completely new to them.”<sup>9</sup> In the same way that tourism brought a tentative economy to the region while also dramatically changing traditional life, so too did the Dutch and Indonesian colonization of West Papua, and the companies that came along with it.

In 1967, President Suharto passed a foreign investment law intended to open up Indonesia to the Western world and attract new investment to the resource-rich country. Freeport Sulfur, an American mining company, immediately took advantage of this new law and West

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<sup>7</sup> Gawler, Virginia. “Report Claims Secret Genocide in Indonesia.” *University of Sydney News*, University of Sydney, 19 Aug. 2005, [sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=651](http://sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=651). Accessed 1 May 2017.

<sup>8</sup> “OPM Gunmen Kill Civilian in Kurilik, Papua.” *Berita Terkini Antaranews*, Antara News, 21 Jan. 2012, [www.antaranews.com/en/news/79364/opm-gunmen-kill-civilian-in-kurilik-papua](http://www.antaranews.com/en/news/79364/opm-gunmen-kill-civilian-in-kurilik-papua). Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Interview 4, Operator 1 Staff (personal communication), April 15 2017.

Papua's vast copper and gold reserves.<sup>10</sup> Today they run the largest and most profitable gold mine in the world. As a perpetuation of the colonial legacy, Freeport began extracting precious metals that benefitted the company and its investors but did little for the local communities except pollute their land. *The New York Times* reported in 2005 that Freeport paid military and police officials nearly \$20 million between 1998 and 2004 in order to bypass regulations, while Freeport claimed this money was for security purposes.<sup>11</sup> Another report estimated that 3.2 billion tons of waste rock, which generates acid runoff known to damage coral reefs, were generated and more than 11 square miles of rainforest had been "severely impacted."<sup>12</sup>

Despite these issues and controversies, as one interviewee noted, who was working for an environmental NGO in the region, "They have the best facilities there. If I was offered a job there I would take it."<sup>13</sup> The economic potential of this industry in not only employing locals but investing in their economy is enormous. However, near the vicinity of the Freeport mine, as with the capital city of Jayapura, many local tribes have become extinct and poor Indonesians given jobs above local Papuans.<sup>14</sup> This legacy did not end with the opening of new businesses or as a result of more economic expansion. In fact, this exact problem has been exacerbated by tourism, perpetuating an economic situation in which native Papuans are given fewer opportunities to take advantage of their own land.

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<sup>10</sup> Simpson, Brad. "Document Release Marks 35th Anniversary of Controversial Vote and Annexation." *Indonesia's 1969 Takeover of West Papua*, National Security Archive, 9 July 2004, nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB128/index.htm. Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Perlez, Jane, and Raymond Bonner. *Below a Mountain of Wealth, a River of Waste*. New York Times, 27 Dec. 2005, www.nytimes.com/2005/12/27/international/asia/27gold.html. Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Bryce (September 1996). "Spinning Gold". Mother Jones Magazine. Retrieved April 4, 2015. <http://www.etan.org/news/kissinger/spinning.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Interview 6, NGO staff (personal communication), April 17 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Gawler, Virginia. "Report Claims Secret Genocide in Indonesia." *University of Sydney News*, University of Sydney, 19 Aug. 2005, sydney.edu.au/news/84.html?newsstoryid=651. Accessed 1 May 2017.

## *Modern Legacies*

For many native Papuans, the period of colonization never truly ended. The region belongs to Indonesia, but many of the people feel themselves entirely distinct and still long for independence. In Raja Ampat, the potential conflict for this is especially apparent. Since 2004, international NGOs and organizations such as Conservation International, the Nature Conservancy, the World Wildlife Fund, and the World Bank have maintained a presence in the region in order to conserve its natural beauty. Coral reef surveys in 2001 and 2002 indicated that these reefs contain the highest level of biodiversity on the planet, making conservation a priority for all organizations involved.<sup>15</sup> According to Conservation International, various fisheries had been reporting a decline of 90% catch per unit by the 1990s.<sup>16</sup> Conservation was needed to benefit the environment as well as the local communities reliant on the health of these fisheries.

During my time in the area I did not encounter any local Papuan personally resentful of these organizations, but several foreigners who had resided in the area as business owners for many years described the efforts of the organizations as quasi-colonial.<sup>17</sup> The goal of protecting the incredible biodiversity and beauty of the region came before ensuring that local communities would benefit from this protection; marine zoning plan had potential to limit access to food, income, and a longstanding sense of cultural identity, as telling communities not to fish was a direct assault to their way of life.

Here, international organizations that settle themselves in an area and declare it must be preserved for the sake of nature, that tribes who have fished in the sea for thousands of years no

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<sup>15</sup> Vera N. Agostini, et al. 2012. Achieving fisheries and conservation objectives within marine protected areas: zoning the Raja Ampat network. The Nature Conservancy, Indo-Pacific Division, Denpasar. Report No 2/12. 71 pp.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.conservation.org/where/Pages/Birds-Head-Seascape-coral-triangle-papua-indonesia.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> Paraphrased from Interview 13, Operator 1 Staff (personal communication), April 20 2017.

longer have the right to do so, assume an even more foreboding meaning to the local communities. While at the root of their tradition many of these communities have always understood the importance of conservation, they also understand the ways in which outsiders have disturbed their tradition, whether from Dutch colonizers extracting precious metals or Indonesian transmigrants outnumbering the local population.

It can be notably observed in the Raja Ampat islands today that while many local Papuans work within the tourism industry, the majority of high-paying, high-skilled jobs such as dive guide, captain, or even cook are often occupied by Indonesians not native to Papua. While in all of the interviews conducted, no verbal complaints or obvious tension was uncovered, this economic competition between native Papuans and Indonesian outsiders is the product of Western Papua's own colonial legacy. For the region's colonizers were not truly the Dutch, but rather Indonesia itself.

As international organizations, foreign-owned tourism operators, and thousands of Indonesian and foreign outsiders continue to move into Western Papua at a rapid pace, attracted to the untapped potential of the last great Indonesian paradise, these colonial legacies must be at the forefront of cultural consideration. For the older generation of Papuans, the persecution and denial of freedom is a fresh and still open wound. Freeport is considered a way to generate jobs and income for local Papuans, but it does little else to give back to the community as it sucks away expensive minerals and ships them abroad.

Through observations of tourism operators in the region, there is a very real risk that these operators could go the exact same direction in this post-colonial legacy. While they are not physically extracting precious metals from Papuan land, they are using the land and sea to benefit themselves in a way that can be perceived as a continuation of colonial oppression. While

many Papuans are employed by these companies, and the majority of interviews conducted in this region did not hint at any tension between locals and these operators, people are still left in the dark of the potential of their own land that a foreigner may now sit upon.<sup>18</sup>

The rest of this paper will argue that, although tourism has the potential to continue this colonial legacy in a way that is harmful to native Papuans, the way the tourism industry has thus far developed has largely empowered locals to take ownership of their own land and economic futures. Still, private operators have a responsibility to respect and work with these communities in order to actively combat this legacy of extraction. This study observed that, with over 100 homestays scattered across the islands, communities are beginning to understand that they can take advantage of foreigners wanting to come to Raja Ampat, rather than the foreigners taking advantage of them.

## The Introduction of Tourism

### *The Colonizers New Industry*

While tourism has only been active in Raja Ampat for the past decade, it has already changes the communities and ecosystems in the region dramatically. The various private operators in the region each differ in the service they offer and the mission they are trying to achieve, and each one has its own unique impact on the communities with whom they work. This study observed both traditional tourism operators, such as scuba diving or snorkeling shops, as well as volunteer and research tourism operators in which guests stayed for extended periods of time to assist in a community or conservation project. These different categories of operators interact with communities and conservation work in distinctive ways and have different histories

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<sup>18</sup> Raja Ampat Homestay

in the Raja Ampat region. Yet both are players in the power dynamic left in the region post-colonization.

The volunteer tourist operator in this study, whose name and location will remain anonymous, was allegedly active in community engagement and conservation projects, as well as biodiversity monitoring and scientific research. These activities are typical of volunteer or research tourism operators, yet in recent years the term “voluntourism” has received a bad reputation due to reports of foreigners taking away jobs from locals or else encouraging practices that are detrimental to communities. Previously, research has shown how volunteer tourism “can be considered to have the potential to act either as catalysts for positive socio-cultural change or facilitators of neo-colonialism and dependency (Palacios, 2010).”<sup>19</sup> This operator was not observed to be facilitating any dependency, but rather focusing exclusively on profit with little benefit or interaction with the community, despite advertising so.

Likewise, introduction of tourism in any form to remote and isolated regions has the potential to cause problems. On the island of the volunteer tourism operator, visitors were not allowed to wear bikinis and had to abide by a community dress code whilst on the island. As most tourists came to visit to dive or lie on the beach, this was certainly resented to a small degree. I observed very few tourists leaving the program base at the end of the small island. When I interviewed a community member about their relationship with the company, they said, “The people stay in the organization and never leave. We don’t know who they are, and they don’t know who we are. When they leave its just to buy beer.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Wearing, Stephen, and Nancy Gard McGee. “Volunteer Tourism: A Review.” *Progress in Tourism Management*, vol. 38, Oct. 2013, pp. 120–130., [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261517713000745](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261517713000745). Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Interview 12, Homestay Owner (personal communications). April 13 2017.

The community members seemed to view those in the organization as a separate entity from the rest of the island, which was not unexpected; however, locals could recall a time when “they would help us clean the beach, play with our children, cook with us...”<sup>21</sup> Whereas once volunteers were actively promoting this sense of community, operations became gradually more focused on profiting from short-term volunteers, most of whom were not interested in this interaction. Additionally, within the organization this sense of “us and them” was perpetuated, where locals were viewed skeptically when they appeared on the property or discussed in a way that identified the community as the source of the problems, rather than hopefulness in engaging them in possible solutions. All of this was observed and is the author’s sole opinion, based on interviews with local community members and discussions with volunteer staff.

### *The Development of Sustainable Tourism*

Given the profound natural beauty of the Raja Ampat region, as well as the discovery of such high levels of biodiversity, sustainable tourism was seemingly introduced to the region as a natural development. When private investment began, government reform in 1999 allowed district-level government more autonomy and authority, which then enabled more outside investors to deal with district-level authorities and partner with local communities.<sup>22</sup> NGOs such as Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, and WWF began actively promoting sustainable tourism in the area. These NGOs also began partnerships with private businesses in the area such as fisheries, pearl farms, and dive and snorkel operators.

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<sup>21</sup> Interview 17, Local Resident (personal communications). April 20 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Steenbergen, Dirk J. 2013. The role of tourism in addressing illegal fishing: The case of a dive operator in indonesia. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 35, (2) (08): 188-214, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/1437254362?accountid=11243> (accessed April 17, 2017).

Of the 18 dive and volunteer tourism operators surveyed in this study in Raja Ampat in April 2017, 15 included some message of sustainability in their marketing. Three included the word “eco” in the company name. Some of these “sustainable” activities were reported to include assisting in diversifying local livelihoods, through methods such as dive guide or hospitality training, giving conservation talks or showing documentaries, partnering with local homestays, employing locals, monitoring biodiversity in local reefs, or engaging in other conservation research programs. As one well-known scientific researcher put it during an interview, “Conservation isn’t about biology, it’s about people.”<sup>23</sup>

So how does one define “ecotourism” or sustainable tourism? The Ecotourism Society’s (1992) definition is the most widely accepted and formally outlines ecotourism as: “travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing opportunities that make the conservation of the natural resources beneficial to local citizens.”<sup>24</sup> Generally, conserving the ecosystem, providing economic opportunities for locals and an educational experience for guests, and avoiding cultural or social conflict or disturbances are all important aspects of sustainable tourism or “ecotourism.”

Further study is needed to better understand how sustainable tourism operators are engaging with local communities and promoting conservation efforts in this area. The rest of the report highlights different aspects of how the two operators most closely observed achieved this, or else where they have room to grow. Ultimately this study makes the case that by actively working against the colonial legacy of extraction, oppression, and “othering” of local

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<sup>23</sup> Interview 16, Marine Scientist (personal communications). May 1 2017.

<sup>24</sup> “What Is Ecotourism?” *What Is Ecotourism?* | *The International Ecotourism Society*, [www.ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism](http://www.ecotourism.org/what-is-ecotourism). Accessed 3 May 2017.

communities, conservation of natural resources and better relations between all actors are the natural outcomes of this effort.

## Economic Impacts

According to research by the World Travel and Tourism Council, Travel and Tourism grew by 3.3 percent in 2016, generating US\$7.6 trillion worldwide, contributing to 10.2 percent of global GDP, and supporting 1 in 10 jobs around the world.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, Conservation International estimated that tourism represents one of the top five exports for 83 percent of countries.<sup>26</sup> In 2016, Indonesia derived 6.2 percent of its GDP and nearly US\$60 billion from tourism, and is thus a crucial aspect of its economy that is marketed heavily by the government, both internationally and domestically.<sup>27</sup> Raja Ampat is an area of incredible natural beauty, with remote islands and endless blue seas, and this image is not lost on government marketing efforts.

Before coming to the area, I heard many Indonesians describe Raja Ampat as “the last paradise” or claim one must be very rich to go there. By Indonesian standards, it is the ultimate dream destination, an idea that has been perpetuated with government marketing since 2004. In Indonesia today, tourism directly supports more than twice as many jobs as the mining sector.<sup>28</sup> Thus rapidly, the government interest in Raja Ampat shifted away from extracting from the landscape but rather utilizing, and often exploiting, its beauty to attract visitors and investors.

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<sup>25</sup> *Tourism Supports 1 in 10 Jobs, Outpacing Global Economy for 6th Consecutive Year*, World Travel and Tourism Council, 23 Mar. 2017, [www.wttc.org/media-centre/press-releases/press-releases/2017/tourism-supports-1-in-10-jobs-outpacing-global-economy-for-6th-consecutive-year-wttc/](http://www.wttc.org/media-centre/press-releases/press-releases/2017/tourism-supports-1-in-10-jobs-outpacing-global-economy-for-6th-consecutive-year-wttc/). Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>26</sup> “Sustainable Tourism Concepts: Module 1.” *SUSTAINABLE TOURISM CONCEPTS*, sanctuaries.noaa.gov/management/international/pdfs/day1\_concepts\_manual.pdf. Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>27</sup> “Indonesia - Travel & Tourism Total Contribution to GDP.” *World Data Atlas*, KNOEMA, [knoema.com/atlas/Indonesia/topics/Tourism/Travel-and-Tourism-Total-Contribution-to-GDP/Total-Contribution-to-GDP-percent-share](http://knoema.com/atlas/Indonesia/topics/Tourism/Travel-and-Tourism-Total-Contribution-to-GDP/Total-Contribution-to-GDP-percent-share). Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>28</sup> “Indonesia.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 21, no. 5, Bibliography of Asian Studies 1961, 1 Sept. 1962, pp. 697–705., [www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/benchmark-reports/country-reports-2015/indonesia--benchmarking-report-2015.pdf](http://www.wttc.org/-/media/files/reports/benchmark-reports/country-reports-2015/indonesia--benchmarking-report-2015.pdf). Accessed 3 May 2017.

According to a presentation from the Office of Culture and Tourism in Raja Ampat (*Dinas Kebudayaan Dan Pariwisata*), the number of tourists visiting Raja Ampat grew by more than a million per year, from 998,000 in 2007 to 7,759,000 in 2015.<sup>29</sup> Private operators and investors are taking advantage of this growth, and today there are 40 liveaboard boats, 12 resorts, and over 100 homestays, whereas in 2004 there was only one dive operator.<sup>30</sup> These daily operations have a direct impact on local communities, despite the fact that many of the resorts are run by foreigners and employ few local Papuans.

### *Boat Fees*

All villages in Raja Ampat are economically impacted by tourism in some way, despite few hosting dive shops or tour operators near them. One of the managers of a dive resort said that all the villages near dive sites collect money in three to five day rotations from local liveaboards and day trip boats that come to dive near the village.<sup>31</sup> Later, another homestay owner said of this: “I offer them to join night diving, in front of the village. It is famous here that many ships coming here and doing night diving here and the income goes to the village.”<sup>32</sup> Most villages charge 500,000 RPH per large liveaboard and 300,000 per speedboat; several interviewees said that 70 percent of the income went to the church and 30 percent to education in local schools.<sup>33</sup>

This is an important contribution to the local communities, as many villages receive less tourism traffic from people wishing to stay on the island. It also increases the awareness of the economic importance of conservation. One staff member working on a liveaboard boat described

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<sup>29</sup> Meeting between NGO and Government (PowerPoint Presentation). April 20 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Interview 9, Operator 1 Staff (personal communication). April 10 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Interview 3, Homestay Owner A (personal communications). April 14 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Interview 3, Homestay Owner A (personal communications). April 14 2017. AND Interview 9, Operator 1 Staff (personal communication). April 10 2017.

an instance in which the boat was approached by a local fishing boat from a nearby village; they claimed to know of an area where manta rays congregated and encouraged the divers to go. Sure enough, the site was full of mantas, and the villagers seemed genuinely happy to show them the site and they understood the importance of inviting more tourists to the region. Manta ray focused tourism operations are present in 25 countries, and that number is growing; one study estimated that the total economic impact of these operations at US\$140 million.<sup>34</sup> These communities are poised to take advantage of this, but operators in the area must work with them to ensure this happens.

### *Future Investments*

Tourism is a fairly new concept to many local Papuans; it has only been truly present in the region since 2004, and in the period for 2009-2012 Raja Ampat experienced a 22 percent growth in resorts and 70 percent growth in local homestays.<sup>35</sup> Growth is restricted due to lack of infrastructure and the relatively high cost and long travel distance it takes to get to Sorong, the main regional airport and point of access to Raja Ampat. However, one interviewee described how the cost of a one-way ticket from Bali to Sorong was nearly 7 million IDR just two years ago; now it is just over 1 million. Additionally, during my time there I heard on several occasions that Sorong was in the process of being turned into an international airport; that would mean significantly easier access to what was once one of the more remote regions in Indonesia.

For nearly everyone in the region, this is good news. More tourism means more money, and more money means more possibilities for future generations, as many locals have already discovered with the new ability to send their children to school in Java. One story was described

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<sup>34</sup> Simpson, David. "Regulation of Manta Ray Tourism Urged." *Travindy*, 28 Sept. 2016, [www.travindy.com/2016/09/regulation-of-manta-ray-tourism-urged/](http://www.travindy.com/2016/09/regulation-of-manta-ray-tourism-urged/). Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Meeting between NGO and Government (PowerPoint Presentation). April 20 2017.

to me by the owner of a dive shop, who had sat in a meeting with a local government official, “He [the government official] said when he drives home at night it’s all dark. He doesn’t like that. ‘I want to see lights everywhere on the road.’”<sup>36</sup> Another official from a regional NGO also described a government official saying that environmental conservation was bad for growth; in essence, he wanted mass tourism in the region as it would bring the most amount of money and investment to Raja Ampat. One homestay owner agreed: “People say—Raja Ampat is number 2 after Bali, and in couple years, Raja Ampat will be in the 1<sup>st</sup> position.”<sup>37</sup>

The potential consequences of rapid development in a region with such fragile ecosystems should be considered, but the consequences of this decision for local livelihoods should also receive more attention from the government. There have been instances already of resorts tricking locals into leasing their land in unfair agreements (as a foreigner cannot buy land in West Papua), and with further investment this could become more of an issue. One homestay owner noted: “Now the local people are prohibiting foreign people to build resorts and hotels on their land because they are now aware of the tourism potential of Raja Ampat and they are building their own homestay instead.”<sup>38</sup> This type of mentality, while now common, should continue to be promoted by the government, in order for the locals to be receive the economic benefits of the land that has belonged to them for thousands of years.

## Community Impacts

### *Homestays*

One of the most economically impactful aspects of tourism in Raja Ampat thus far has been through local homestays. Run by native Papuans, with most members of the family often

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<sup>36</sup> Interview 13, Operator 1 Staff (personal communications). April 21 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Interview 11, Homestay Owner C (personal communications). April 15 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Interview 7, Homestay Owner B (personal communications). April 8 2017.

participating in some form, building and running homestays for tourists to stay in is often the most effective way for locals to earn money, as it gives them direct access to a market that otherwise only resorts or larger hotels take part in. Overall, there are more than 100 homestays currently in Raja Ampat by official government records, but there could be more not officially recognized by the government (one interviewee claimed there were 107).<sup>39</sup>

One organization in Raja Ampat seeking to assist in the training necessary to the success of these homestays is the Raja Ampat Homestay Association (RAHA), a non-for-profit organization that coordinates visiting tourists with local homestays all around the archipelago. Over four years they have seen livelihoods improve dramatically and watched as local communities took ownership of their futures in not allowing land to be sold to resorts, thus cutting them off from future employment opportunities. According to their 2016 report, “In four years, the Association’s members have built an ecotourism sector consisting of over sixty, family- run homestay businesses, with an annual turnover of USD 1.5 million.”<sup>40</sup>

The organization provides English language, hospitality, and culinary training, but they are strategic in limiting their presence and allowing community empowerment to grow naturally. In many ways, the association is actively cultivating a working relationship with locals that goes against the colonial legacies of the past. The report noted that, “Real community organisations start with how people wish to organise themselves, not with how outsiders think people should be organised.”<sup>41</sup> Much of the methodology used in establishing the Association was to allow locals to identify their own problems and own solutions, rather than relying on outsiders to do it for them—something that many communities in Indonesia have become accustomed to, due to

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<sup>39</sup> Interview 9, Operator 2 Staff (personal communications). April 11 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Elson, Dominic, and Adrian Wells. *Redefining Conservation*. Seventy Three Pte.Ltd. , May 2016. Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the scars of lingering poverty and outsider interference.

This dynamic is evidence of the impact that history has left on Western Papua, and the danger that it poses when outside organizations interfere in areas that are still exploited and in desperate poverty. Locals expect solutions to be given to them, but lack ownership of those solutions unless they are created themselves. In the communities that were observed nearby or working with the two private tour operators, many members had taken ownership of their own solutions—opening homestays or organizing beach cleanups themselves—and did not rely on any form of volunteer tourist project to assist them.

The creation of local homestays has encouraged the revival of traditional practices that are critical to the success of homestays. In Raja Ampat, unlike many other areas of Indonesia, communities have control over the ocean as well as the land. Conservation has been practiced for centuries, if not millennia. The ancient practice of *sasi laut* (the sea's taboos) encouraged the closure of certain areas in order to promote the regeneration of fish stocks and coral reefs. The local government in Raja Ampat designates the rights and responsibilities to the seas surrounding their communities to the communities themselves, recognizing the traditional marine regulation systems (*Hak Adat*) that the 132 villages of Raja Ampat still employ.<sup>42</sup> Another one of the grievances identified by community members was “Loss of culture and traditional arts, which has led to a loss of identity.”<sup>43</sup> By utilizing traditional cultural practices, the community is both respected and encouraged to revive other traditional cultural practices as well.

What is more, the church is often the one maintaining these regeneration areas. One

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<sup>42</sup> Heinrichs, Shawn. “The Guardians of Raja Ampat: Community-Driven Conservation in...” *Human Nature – Conservation International Blog*, 9 June 2014, [blog.conservation.org/2014/06/the-guardians-of-raja-ampat-community-driven-conservation-in-indonesia/](http://blog.conservation.org/2014/06/the-guardians-of-raja-ampat-community-driven-conservation-in-indonesia/). Accessed 3 May 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Elson, Dominic, and Adrian Wells. *Redefining Conservation*. Seventy Three Pte.Ltd. , May 2016. Accessed 3 May 2017.

interviewee was able to identify six churches that employed *sasi laut*—three in Mansuar island, and one in each Arborek, Wayag, and Fam Island. When I visited Fam island to interview local homestay owners, three more churches were identified in the area that all employed this practice. The area tended to be closed for 3-4 years where no fishing was permitted; because this came from the church, the community followed. As one local homestay owner said, “Nature was created by God, and thus we must protect it.”<sup>44</sup> Utilizing traditional practices and beliefs to encourage conservation efforts is the most effective way to maintain these efforts over the long term, put less pressure on the government to enforce, and ensure local ownership of these practices.

Additionally, many people have reported a significant decrease in practices such as dynamite fishing around areas with concentrated homestays, saying “Who would dare dynamite the reefs now?”<sup>45</sup> With so much money going directly to locals, people have felt empowered to take action, not only protect their reefs but their communities as well. They have also developed and promoted an application, Raja Ampat Environment Watch, that allows anyone to monitor the MPAs and report suspicious activities anywhere at any time. All of these aspects are critical to the future of local communities throughout Raja Ampat, and the majority of these communities have already taken action into their own hands. It is up to the private operators in the area to further support them.

### *Risks of Exclusion*

One issue that was observed during this study was that tourism is unevenly distributed across the islands of Raja Ampat. The majority of homestays are on the islands of Mansuar and

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<sup>44</sup> Interview 10, Homestay Owner D (personal communications). April 15 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Elson, Dominic, and Adrian Wells. *Redefining Conservation*. Seventy Three Pte.Ltd. , May 2016. Accessed 3 May 2017.

Gam, but more have been developed in places such as the Fam islands, western Waigeo and Batana.<sup>46</sup> However, developing homestays in more remote village locations requires existing infrastructure to support tourists coming to the islands. While the relatively high cost of transportation in the area limits this to an extent, the lack of internet or cell service in more remote locations is also an impediment to the potential. RAHA provides helps homestay owners overcome these barriers, which are possibly the most impeding for growth, by maintaining a web-page in which people can book a property in English and the owner receives a text message in Bahasa Indonesian.

Still, many homestays receive significantly less traffic than others in more frequented tourist areas. The dive operator in this study came up with a unique solution to help improve this problem, by offering “safari” trips to customers that wished to see more of the park but did not want to pay the expense of or spend a week on a liveaboard boat. The company offered three to five day trips with the traditional three-dive-a-day package, but each night was spent on a different island in more remote locations around the park. On Pam island, the visitor book at the local homestay was filled with customers solely from the dive company. The customers that joined on the safari trip all had glowing reviews. The operator hopes to expand the trips to run regularly, in order to explore more islands and give back to more homestays around the park.

Certain islands have developed a great deal of infrastructure to support tourism, and its impact shows. Arborek island is one of the smallest inhabited islands in all of Raja Ampat, often called the “tourism village” on marketing sites, yet already has two dive centers and fourteen homestays, five of which are currently under development. Several villagers clean the beach and town every day, and every afternoon tourists walk through the small island. While other islands

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<sup>46</sup> Elson, Dominic, and Adrian Wells. *Redefining Conservation*. Seventy Three Pte.Ltd. , May 2016. Accessed 3 May 2017.

may not reach the level of tourist traffic as Arborek in the coming years, private operators in the area should continue investing in their future, for the sake of customer's enjoyment as well.

## Environmental Impacts

### *The Dangers of Mass Tourism*

On March 4, 2017, a British cruise ship ran aground on a coral reef in Raja Ampat, destroying more than 18,000 square meters of reef off the island of Kri, one of the many in Raja Ampat but among one of the most visited areas by divers and tourists. The outrage from the local community was largely in response to the loss of revenue that the destruction of the reef could bring, in addition to the destruction of the natural environment so cherished in the region. While the owner of the cruise ship, Noble Caledonia, is expected to pay more than \$2 million in fines, this money cannot make up for the loss of revenue over the next several decades that it will take for the reef to recover. This is an example of tourism gone wrong in a region that is becoming increasingly dependent on it. Not only did the cruise ship damage a large area of coral reef, but it was never able to give anything back to the communities in the first place.

As discussed in the previous section, locals who are able to engage in the tourism industry, whether as a homestay owner, bird or dive guide, or boat driver, benefit greatly from it. However, the cruise ship customers are neither staying in local homestays nor paying for local dive guides, and thus all they are giving is the marine park entrance fee of one million IDR. Is that enough to justify the potential destruction these boats bring to the area? Just as harmful fishing practices or pollution runoff can damage coastal ecosystems, so too can tourism. So how much is too much tourism? How much is enough?

In one interview at second dive operator, one of the staff members described the change in the reef: "People who came here just one year ago can already see the reef changing,

becoming worse."<sup>47</sup> Likewise, another community member on the island who was also a dive guide said, "Five years ago we would go diving just off the shore, we would find nudibranchs and ghost pipe fish... Now it's all just rubble."<sup>48</sup> Another interviewee claimed that the destruction of reefs close to shore came from speedboats that park on the beach, breaking coral and dragging sand out over the reefs when they leave.<sup>49</sup>

Yet the solutions to these issues are not simple. For instance, one interviewee complained of the lack of mooring lines available in the park; these lines are attached to a cement block on the sea floor so that ships don't have to anchor and potentially damage a coral reef. When I asked one organization why they did not install moorings in the area, one staff member replied, "We actually removed the last mooring because it dragged through 200 meters of soft coral. Manta rays also get caught in them sometimes."<sup>50</sup> The organization takes pictures of boats that anchor in coral and report them to the government, but unless a mooring is properly (and expensively) installed then there is no easy solution to this issue.

I was able to join on dive trips for several days and personally observe the ways divers treated the reef as I snorkeled from the surface. Beyond general carelessness with touching the reef or accidentally breaking it, interactions with large animals were not regulated or reprimanded when they proved consequential. Several divers were seen chasing after manta rays or turtles until they disappeared, the animals visibly agitated. During one dive, I witnessed over 25 divers spread out over the reef, some of them hooked into live corals so they did not have to strain against the current. The site was a known manta cleaning station, where manta rays come

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<sup>47</sup> Interview 5, Operator 2 Staff (personal communication). April 7 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Interview 15, local dive guide (personal communication). April 19 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Interview 13, Operator 1 Staff (personal communications). April 21 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Interview 8, Operator 1 Staff (personal communications). April 8 2017.

to have reef fish clean their bodies of parasites. After 45 minutes the majority of divers left, some leaving long scratches on the coral behind, and only moments later four large oceanic manta rays swooped into the reef, as if they had been waiting all the time for the divers to leave.

Ultimately, more tourism has the potential to aggravate these issues and threaten the very fragile ecosystem that is in need of protection from these often preventable problems. However, the local government only sees more tourism as beneficial to the region. In an economic sense, they are absolutely right. One official noted that conservation was bad for the economy and that more tourism was the only way forward. Still, other government officials seemed to understand the importance of conservation while still being proud of the growth so far, and homestay owners and local communities also understand the importance of putting conservation before profit.

Further research must be done on the environmental damage done by tourists in the region. Additionally, further research must inform the scale of damage caused by tourism relative to the ways in which communities are being encouraged to care more for the environment due to tourism. Despite some of the negative impacts that tourism has brought to Raja Ampat, tourism has also contributed to the overall protection of the environment, as both local communities as well as government actors understand that conservation is critical to future economic investment in the region.

### *Dive Operators*

While some dive operators were seen to perpetuate environmentally detrimental practices, and any boat with an anchor or divers will naturally contribute to the degradation of coral reefs, these operators are also valuable environmental protectors. The normal operator in Raja Ampat runs day trips and often also has a “liveaboard” boat in which customers spend around one week or more on the boat. These daily operations include three or four dives a day on

different dive sites. With 40 liveboards and somewhere around 25 day trip boats, this means there are often boats spread across the park at any given moment, acting as watchdogs against any illegal fishing activities in the area. As one study of another dive operator in Raja Ampat noted: “Consequently, illegal fishing enforcement has intentionally or unintentionally morphed into local fishers' cognitive perception of what the role of a "dive operator" is.”<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, dive operators are also sometimes held responsible for reporting any park violations, such as touching sea life or anchoring on the reefs, to the appropriate authorities. Both of the operators in this study claimed they had reported violations or were otherwise encouraged to report them, but neither knew what the consequences for the other operators were, if any. During a meeting with the local government, one official said, “People are supposed to report violations and follow the rules, but this doesn’t always happen.”<sup>52</sup> Better communication between the local government and private operators is necessary to clarify the duties of both actors and better enforce consequences for violators in the park, as private operators have a unique opportunity and vested interest in assisting the government in enforcing the rules.

### *Outside Threats*

While Conservation International sites a 90% decrease in illegal fishing activities over the past decade, the threat has not been eliminated despite the various stakeholders engaged in the protection of the MPAs. Several interviewees noted that the illegal fishing activity, such as

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<sup>51</sup> Steenbergen, Dirk J. 2013. The role of tourism in addressing illegal fishing: The case of a dive operator in indonesia. *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 35, (2) (08): 188-214, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/1437254362?accountid=11243> (accessed April 17, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> Meeting between NGO and Government (personal communications). April 20 2017.

reef bombing or cyanide fishing, is done by actors outside of the Raja Ampat area. One homestay owner is quoted below in full:

“Since they built resorts and home stays – people cannot use potas [chemical substance used for catching fish – usually illegal], cannot use bombs. In 1970’s people still used bombs because there were no resorts and no tourist coming. We thanks to tourists, because of their coming, we can keep our nature well. If there were no tourists coming, the nature here would be damaged. People from other islands still come here fishing using bombs and other chemical substances, and they sold the fish in markets. People from here just did fishing without using bombs. So, we thanks to tourists coming here.”

This narrative was consistent across nearly all local Papuans interviewed for this study.

During a meeting between an NGO and the regional government tourism office, one official also stated, “Illegal fishing comes mostly from outside areas.”<sup>53</sup> It is a view that maintains the idea that all environmental damage is committed by outside actors, and that is thus not local responsibility. Kortschak and Sala (2010) also note that it is a common theme in Indonesia for communities to blame destructive fishing practices on poorer communities or suppressed ethnic groups.<sup>54</sup> Clifton (2015) notes that not only does this possibly clear local residents of responsibility in maintaining ecosystems, but this narrative “may also absolve the district government of responsibility, since it is not 'their' fishermen that are causing the problem.”<sup>55</sup>

Focusing on outside perpetrators as the sole source of illegal activities and environmental degradation is just as detrimental as focusing on tourism as having only benefits for the region.

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<sup>53</sup> Meeting between NGO and Government (PowerPoint Presentation). April 20 2017.

<sup>54</sup> von Heland, Franciska, and Julian Clifton. 2015. Whose threat counts? conservation narratives in the wakatobi national park, indonesia. *Conservation and Society* 13, (2): 154-165, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/1713994598?accountid=11243> (accessed April 17, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> von Heland, Franciska, and Julian Clifton. 2015. Whose threat counts? conservation narratives in the wakatobi national park, indonesia. *Conservation and Society* 13, (2): 154-165, <http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/1713994598?accountid=11243> (accessed April 17, 2017).

Both of these threats must be assessed in order to continue promoting both the environment, communities, and enforcement in Raja Ampat.

### *Waste Management*

Everywhere in Indonesia, waste from plastic and packaging is an almost insurmountable issue. The majority of Indonesians have no access to waste management infrastructure, and thus either burning trash or throwing it into a river or ocean are the only options. Decades ago plastic packaging was almost unseen on most islands, thus packaging was biodegradable and disposed of in the same way. A lack of education has not exposed how it is harmful to throw away plastic in this same way, and combined with the lack of infrastructure it is rapidly becoming an enormous issue. In February of 2017, Indonesia pledged US\$1 billion per year to reducing plastic waste in the oceans, recognizing the importance of this goal not only for the environment but for the future of the economy as well.<sup>56</sup> Many Indonesians have already realized this as well, and this mentality is especially apparent in West Papua.

In Raja Ampat, plastic has rapidly become an issue only in recent years. One owner of a dive resort, who had been in Indonesia for more than 18 years, described how just 10 years previously plastic was almost unseen in the waters of Raja Ampat; now it is everywhere.<sup>57</sup> Every single day spent in or near the ocean during my time there resulted in handfuls of collected trash—mostly plastic bags, small plastic cups, chip or candy wrappers, and straws. It is an enormous issue, but one that many local Papuans are committed to solving or at least assisting.

Several homestay owners noted that they were not committed to keeping their islands free of trash until tourism came. I stayed for several days on an island that held the title of

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<sup>56</sup> Langenheim, Johnny. *Indonesia Pledges \$1bn a Year to Curb Ocean Waste*. The Guardian, 2 Mar. 2017. Accessed 4 May 2017.

<sup>57</sup> Interview 13, Operator 1 Staff (personal communications). April 21 2017.

“Cleanest Island in Indonesia” and spent one afternoon helping a local woman clean the beach. This involved raking all organic and non-organic waste into small piles, taking the majority of the plastic (but not all) from the pile and burying the rest in the sand, and burning the plastic in one large fire. When I asked her why she cleaned the beach every day, she replied simply, “Because tourists come here every day.” Another homestay owner noted, “So many foreigners are always concerned about the trash, so it makes us concerned as well.”<sup>58</sup> While local Indonesians may not see the damage caused by plastic waste to the environment, they certainly understand its impact on the local economy. In many ways, the more an environmental issue can be related to a positive economic output, the more people will begin to care.

While there is serious local consideration in keeping trash from the beaches, many interviewees claimed the majority of trash came from outside the area. “We clean the beach every day,” one interviewee said, “but still every day more plastic comes to our island that we have to clean.”<sup>59</sup> While this notion perpetuates the idea of blaming an outsider or unknown actor in causing these problems, much like illegal fishing, many locals are still active in combatting the issue. The Raja Ampat Homestay Association reported that one of the greatest problems locals identified was “Overwhelming volumes of plastic waste from Sorong, on the mainland of West Papua Province, and Waisai, the district capital of Raja Ampat.”<sup>60</sup> These are stopover cities for many people on their way out to the islands, but are not destinations of natural beauty and residents appeared less committed to keeping it free of plastic—they do not see the importance of it in attracting tourists as those in the islands do.

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<sup>58</sup> Interview 10, Homestay Owner D (personal communications). April 15 2017.

<sup>59</sup> Interview 12, Homestay Owner E (personal communications).

<sup>60</sup> Elson, Dominic, and Adrian Wells. *Redefining Conservation*. Seventy Three Pte.Ltd. , May 2016. Accessed 3 May 2017

Ultimately, when communities feel that conservation results in local empowerment and allows further investment in the future—whether sending children to school or facilitating more economic opportunities—then they will become wholly invested in it. Well-meaning NGOs in the region have been successful in implementing MPAs and emphasizing conservation to local businesses, but the end goal must lie with empowering local communities to take advantage of tourism coming to the islands to experience their natural beauty. As one homestay owner put it, “When the tourists are happy, we are happy.”<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusions and Recommendations

As tourism continues to develop in Raja Ampat, all of these impacts will continue to expand and leave more of a mark on the region—from the economy to communities to the environment. Private actors investing in Raja Ampat, and thus in the future of the region, have a vested interest in ensuring that development is beneficial for all stakeholders. While the majority of operators surveyed in Raja Ampat included some message of sustainability in their marketing, the extent of which this message is carried out remains unclear. For one operator that did not advertise sustainability, community involvement and environmental practices were paramount to operations. Yet for the one that claimed to be active in community projects and conservation work, little of it was actually observed—the focus was, ultimately, on diving and earning profit.

Why do so many dive operators lack any commitment to the communities in which they are working? Why does it have to be the case that when an organization becomes more focused on diving, the message of conservation and community involvement becomes overshadowed?

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<sup>61</sup> Interview 11, Homestay Owner C (personal communications). April 15 2017.

One report by Travindy indicated that “the percentage of consumers who are willing to pay more for sustainable brands that showed commitment to social and environmental values went up from 55% to 66% between 2014 and 2015.” Additionally, 73 percent of Millennials and Generation Z are more likely to pay for additional sustainability practices, in contrast to just 51 percent of Baby Boomers.<sup>62</sup>

At the conclusion of this paper, I would like to suggest several recommendations for how these private operators can continue emphasizing sustainability and working with communities to promote conservation, to the betterment of all people and places in the Raja Ampat archipelago.

#### *Dive Guide Training*

Several years ago, I worked as a Divemaster for a dive company that advocated community engagement, ecotourism, and a small share of overall profits going towards training locals to become dive guides. While I witnessed many of these things happening during my time working for them, soon after I left it became clear to the majority of employees that many of these missions were only half true, and the image of a "sustainable operator" was extremely falsified. I used this research opportunity to return to the same company that is now under a different name and different management, but where many of the local dive guides trained under the previous program now work.

An issue with training local dive guides is that the company often provides the training at no expense to the local trainee; the company ensures full training, from Open Water to Dive Guide, and incurs all expenses, except for some books, equipment or training materials.

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<sup>62</sup>*Responsible Tourism Growing Faster than Wider Industry Claims Report*. Travindy , 15 Apr. 2016, [www.travindy.com/2016/04/responsible-tourism-growing-faster-wider-industry-claims-report/](http://www.travindy.com/2016/04/responsible-tourism-growing-faster-wider-industry-claims-report/). Accessed 4 May 2017.

According to one local dive guide trained under this program, dive guides can make anywhere from 3 million to 10 million RPH a month, depending on the company and number of days worked.<sup>63</sup> In many areas, this is easily the most profitable vocation available, as is evidenced by the number of people from all over Indonesia that now work in popular dive destinations such as Komodo National Park and Raja Ampat. In many cases, these Indonesian workers often outnumber the locals in the area, who are offered less training in areas that are less developed, as many locals have a more limited knowledge of English than areas in which tourism has been around for longer. After the repercussions of the transmigration program, this problem has the potential to become more aggravated in Raja Ampat over the coming years.

This training is not only valuable to the local who can begin working in the dive industry, but also extremely valuable to the dive operator. From personal experience as well as several studies, it can be shown that most companies employ many locals, but very rarely do these locals occupy the more high-paying positions such as Dive Guide, Divemaster, Instructor or Trip Leader. These are usually occupied by foreigners who have the privilege of affording more training, as well as the ability to speak English and other languages. However, it is common for many of these foreigners to be working illegally, considering the high turnover of jobs in the dive industry and, especially in Indonesia, the high cost for a company to provide a KITAS, or work visa, for a foreign worker. In Indonesia, the average KITAS costs approximately \$2,000 for one foreign worker for one year (this is region based and depends on whether one works on a boat or land). Thus the more locals a company employs, the fewer KITAS it has to buy for foreign workers, or the fewer risks it has to take with immigration discovering illegal employees.

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<sup>63</sup> Interview 14, Operator 1 Local Staff (personal communications). April 22 2017.

The dive operator observed in this study did not employ a specific program that dedicated some amount of profits to the training of local dive guides as the previous company claimed to do. However, it made an effort to take everyone who worked at the resort diving if they wanted to go, and several of the crew had already earned their Open Water certification. Through a relationship that was built more on friendship and trust than business needs, several of the instructors did most of this training for free. One of the chefs was being trained to dive guide, and the instructor was taking time off without pay in order to train him. This sort of relationship is not always common among the dive industry; it is more likely that local staff are not given this kind of opportunity.

As one local dive guide said, “Before I started diving, I didn’t know anything about marine life. I just threw trash into the ocean.”<sup>64</sup> Training local dive guides is one of the most effective ways to not only provide sustainable livelihoods, but to also ensure that locals are stewards of their own environment and take ownership of the ecosystems on which their futures depend. This study observed that way in which Operator 1 trained dive guides, by forming a working relationship and friendship rather than sponsoring a specific program, was an effective way to train locals where there would not otherwise be the funding or opportunity to do so in an area that has seen little development so far.

### *Community Engagement*

One of the biggest aspects of an ecotourism or volunteer tourism operation is engagement with the local community. One research and volunteer organization advertised its efforts online and claimed to run education projects, beach clean ups, conservation lessons, and many others. When I interviewed community members about these efforts, no one was able to identify a

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<sup>64</sup> Interview 14, Operator 1 Local Staff (personal communications). April 22 2017.

specific instance in which the organization had been beneficial. “Better to just call themselves a dive shop,” one local said, “than to say they are really helping us.”<sup>65</sup>

Yet these types of operations can be valuable to communities when successful, especially in areas where there is little available infrastructure to support investment in a larger tourism industry. Clifton argues that guests assign priority to the research aspect of such operations, rather than a high standard of food and lodging, and thus developing a research or volunteer tourism operation requires significantly less infrastructure than those catering to the traditional tourist.<sup>66</sup>

It is often more important for the profit-driven private actor to satisfy its customers, the volunteers, than the local community. However, this is a missed opportunity, as studies of volunteer or research tourists have indicated a deeper desire to interact with communities, give back to them in some way, and experience a different culture. For the volunteer tourists attracted to this organization for those reasons, the lack of community involvement seemed to be detrimental to their experiences as well as the host community’s. Volunteer tourism has been promoted as a form of tourism with elevated cross-cultural understanding and respect for local cultures, yet in this particular instance there appeared to be a distinctive divide between volunteers and local residents. Learning about and encouraging community knowledge was not a priority; teaching residents about topics they did not yet know (or were perceived not to know) was more important.

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<sup>65</sup> Interview 12, Homestay Owner E (personal communications). April 13 2017.

<sup>66</sup> von Heland, Franciska, and Julian Clifton. 2015. Whose threat counts? conservation narratives in the wakatobi national park, indonesia.

*Conservation and Society* 13, (2): 154-165,  
<http://proxygw.wrlc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.proxygw.wrlc.org/docview/1713994598?accountid=11243> (accessed April 17, 2017).

## *Education*

Teaching English was an important component of this volunteer program as well as many others in the surrounding area. Yet with education often comes expectation. There is a danger in either pushing teachers aside or having the teacher step back because they feel it easier for foreigners to teach, or otherwise want to find a different profession. “There are more homestay owners than teachers,” one dive staff member noted.<sup>67</sup> Several interviewees recalled times when NGOs in the region had given out pens; they stopped years ago, but children still ask for pens when foreigners come to the island.

Creating this dependency can be dangerous, and it is better to teach locals to create educational materials out of available objects, such as cardboard, sand or rocks for spelling words or making signs. Books are valuable and needed, but to further education goals it must be empowering the community rather than making them dependent upon outsiders for such materials. Facilitating relationships between tourists and local villagers is the single most important way to engage a community in education, as simple interaction between English speakers and English learners can prove invaluable to learning. The dive operator observed in this study made weekly visits to a nearby village, and several residents commented on how important it was that the same faces returned week after week in order to promote a relationship rather than an expectation.

Ultimately, while tourism has the potential to lead to tension or disruption in communities as well as environmental degradation, it is also the main source of economic income for many and has the potential to employ and support many more. In Raja Ampat, the

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<sup>67</sup> Interview 13, Operator 1 Staff (personal communications). April 21 2017.

effects of tourism thus far were overwhelmingly positive, as demonstrated by almost every local interviewed viewing tourists and tourism in a positive and hopeful light. The dive industry has a responsibility to engage with local communities in order to work together to preserve the marine environment in which they both depend. Furthermore, the volunteer and research tourism industry has great potential in Raja Ampat due to its remote location and unique cultures, but it must be operated in a way that clearly outlines its contribution to the community and ecosystem so as not to deceive volunteers, damage local relationships, or create dependency.

At the conclusion of this study, the future of tourism in Raja Ampat looks to defy all expectations of rapid tourism development, environmental degradation, and dependency on foreign powers. This is quite simply because, despite difficulty faced in West Papua throughout colonial periods that never allowed people full independence or ownership of what belonged to them, communities understand that their futures depend on the health of their ecosystems, and they are at last looking forward to welcoming foreign guests in their own land.

## Recommendations for Further Study

This study was carried out over a three-week period spent in Raja Ampat, and while this was not nearly enough time to even begin to understand the challenges and opportunities present in the region, it began to scratch the surface of the ways in which tourism can promote sustainable growth in remote regions of the country that were previously dependent on destructive livelihoods.

This study will be expanded upon over the next two months, when I will spend two months in the villages of Lamakera and Lamalera in the East Solor regency of Flores. I will be working with the Misool Foundation, as well as other international organizations and NGOs, to

begin transitioning local livelihoods from manta ray fishing by introducing a research or volunteer tourism industry.

Further research will first involve a survey of all research and volunteer tourism operators in Indonesia to assess the best strategies for initiating this operation. All contact information must remain confidential at this point in time, but I am grateful to have had the opportunity to understand how tourism has developed in Raja Ampat and look forward to watching its development with the same success in East Solor.

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