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Local perspectives on tourists and other outsiders in South Nias

Dutch tourist: Which houses do you prefer – the new cement houses, or traditional houses?
Nias guide: The traditional houses.
Dutch tourist: Why?
Nias Guide: Because the tourists like them.

Tourism is integrated with other significant aspects of local social practices and cultural ideals. Therefore, this is not a study of tourism per se, but rather of a culture in which tourism is significant. The local ancestral tradition and culture (Nias: *böwö, hada*, Indonesian: adat, tradisi, kebudayaan), in the form of material heritage and cultural performances, are highly valued as means for attracting money and development from tourists and others. To be modern (moderen) and progressed (maju) is an ideal that everybody in the village hopes to achieve, young surfers and experts on ancestral tradition alike. It therefore appears that tradition and modernity, although they are locally used as contrasting terms, are not considered as opposites. The local definition of progress appears as synonymous with a general notion of 'the good life,' which is in this particular social setting understood as a harmonious integration of external forces with local ones. Approached in this way it is possible to see how tourists are understood and treated in ways that are also common in situations where no tourists are present, and how the local organization of tourist entertainment is but one variety of the micro-politics of the village. Positive keywords in the local cosmological dynamics are the attraction and controlled distribution of a flow of life that consists of words and money, and this process is believed to depend on the achievement of internal unity on various levels of social identity. These qualities, however, are not only to be traced in local discourses on culture and tradition, but in all matters of life, including those that tourists are part of.

Background

With around 3,000 inhabitants in 672 households Botohili is the third largest village on Nias. It is located on a low ridge about a kilometre from the palm-fringed bay that has attracted international tourists for the last three-four decades. The beach is today the home of around 50 families who have moved from the central village to the beach to build homestays over a period from the late 1970s, peaking in the 1990s and today gradually resuming after the two tsunamis. The tourists are mainly western surfers and backpackers, as well as other individual travellers who combine a beach holiday with visits to the villages where they can experience the local architecture, dance performances and village life in general. A single guest may add considerably to a household's annual budget, in terms of school fees, clothing and other items requiring cash.

The local history of tourism

'Before religion [i.e. Christianity] we did not have good relations to foreigners, but war. Now we can be on friendly terms as you see. This was thanks to Kefe, who came here as the first Australian surfer and opened the beach. Before that, Nias people were afraid to go to the beach where there were no houses. They said there were devils [i.e. spirits or ghosts]. But he came walking alone from Teluk Dalam, carrying his surfboard. He didn't live in a house, only in a tent — He was so brave! People gathered to watch him all day. Only because of him we have all this today!'

Despite the low figures of visitors to Nias as a whole, tourism has had great economic impact on Botohili and its neighbouring village, Lagundri, which are the only villages on the island where international tourists come to stay on a regular basis. The high significance of tourism is reflected in the many stories of the first surfers that came to the beach in the 1970s. Generally, the first tourists are described as heroic pioneers, who arrived on foot, carrying their surfboards. They lived for months in tents or huts, and thereby 'opened' the beach also for local habitation. Before the arrival of the first surfers, the beach was uninhabited and used mainly for hunting and coconut plantations, and generally considered a dangerous, spirit-ridden wilderness. Since then the beach has become a local centre of modern, material development, in terms of large cement houses, bathrooms, electricity, TVs telephones and an asphalt road with streetlights. Everybody has his or her own story of the first tourists and personal (often childhood) memories of their first apprehensive interaction with the foreigners, who were often referred to as kings and queens, as they were assumed to be (Dutch) colonizers, (German) Priests or under special protection from the Indonesian government.

The most formalized stories about the first tourists are told by village elders who are considered experts on tradition and village history. A main theme of these stories is simply to name the first homestay owners and the first tourists. This inscribes the history of tourism in the wider genre of local oral history, that states a claim to the land by mentioning the places and the first people to settle them. Typical for these stories is that they describe the locals as being not only lacking in terms of material development, but also as being 'still foolish' or 'afraid' 'not good at socializing' as 'knowing nothing of the sea,' until the new era is instigated by the surfers, who are described as helpers bringing money and advise. In this respect the story of the start of tourism reminds strongly of how the coming of Christianity is related, as a point where an 'antiquated mentality' was replaced by an awareness of the meaning of sin. In some versions, tourism is even connected directly to Christianity, in the claim that people did not know how to maintain peaceful relations to foreigners before the coming of Christianity.

Money is modernity, money is tradition, money is life

The person most people accredit for opening the beach was an Australian called Kefe who came to Nias twice in the 1970s.[1] Kefe's very name reflects the era of progress he instigated. Some say that his real name is Kevin, but, as one explained, 'here we always call him Kefe.' The name holds an important meaning, since *kefe* means 'money' in Nias language. The name of the surfing pioneer is highly appropriate, since not only did the first tourists bring money, but also the general move towards a cash based economy has been vastly intensified simultaneously with the increase in tourism. Money is essential for life itself as this is defined locally, and being without money or indebted is regarded as mere survival, but not life.[2] This applies even on the most basic bodily level, in terms of being able to eat good food and buying medicine.

It should be noted that money is not only a means to become modern; it is also the basic requirement for practicing tradition (*böwö*). Money has almost entirely replaced gold as an exchange medium in customary transactions, first and foremost the bride price. It is thus commonly explained that a young man who wants to marry must first 'earn enough money to follow tradition.'

In short, money is the essential resource for all aspects of the good life, in terms of personal consumption of food and goods, participation in the customary exchange and good health. This basic life resource is clearly one of external origin, making life a matter of attracting money either from others in the local network, or directly from visiting representatives of the external sources. Tourists as direct bringers of cash are naturally a very powerful manifestation of the local ability to attract wealth. The status of tourism as a means to achieve progress is further reinforced by the way government development aid is linked to tourism, making ancestral heritage a magnet for development.

Tourism, development and unity

'They only have traditional houses and stone monuments. We have that, too, but we also have the international surfing contest, so we should have the high school.'

In these words the village head explained why Botohili, rather than one of the two larger villages in the district, should be the place for a projected new high school. His words express the intimate relation between development and tourism in the local understanding, and how the ancestral tradition and heritage (including the surfing area) is the local magnet attracting tourists and development. Old stone monuments and traditional houses are thus commonly referred to as 'attractions' (atraksi), stressing that today their main function is to serve as tourist objects, as expressed by the words of the local guide introducing this paper.

Due to tourism, the village as a whole has received increased government attention. The number of tourists on Nias peaked during the last two decades of Suharto's New Rule government, which was an era marked by development in the form of new roads, schools and health clinics in rural districts. These development projects were often directly linked to tourism, so that the areas with most visitors and tourist attractions were first in line to receive improvements.[3] In the early 1990s Botohili was thus designated 'exemplary village' (desa contoh), implying that it was given high priority by the district government for receiving new roads, electricity, as well as subsidizes for the restoration of traditional houses, stone monuments and other tourist attractions.

In short, progress is a matter of attracting tourists and government projects, and ancestral heritage ('atraksi') is one means to do this. But progress can only be achieved if the local side maintain a harmonious unity, which was instigated by the founders of the village, as well as by God in the form of Christian virtue, as a precondition for his blessing of local activities. In other words, progress is understood as the successful incorporation of external wealth in the form of money and external knowledge/attention from God, tourists and government into a local community organically connected to its ancestors.[4]

The local notions of tradition and culture are thus not only defined in temporal terms as something of the ancestral past, which is still partly maintained. Just as importantly they are implicitly defined in spatial terms as 'here,' and in terms of identity as 'us,' in contrast to the external forces that are necessary for local life, but which must be incorporated and circulated locally, in order to be of value.

Now turning to the direct interaction with tourists and the local organisation of tourism, the next sections discuss the village culture groups and the local homestays, both from the perspective of how they approach the tourists, as well as the role they have in village politics. Also in these contexts a similar logic of attraction and incorporation, which has been outlined above, is an inherent aspect of local life strategies.

Culture groups and the power of attraction

Botohili has two 'traditional arts and culture groups' performing music, dances, songs and stone jumping for tourists. Both groups were established in the 1990s with the explicit aim of attracting tourists and earning money, as well as educating young people on tradition. From this perspective they could be seen as examples of commoditized culture. However, a narrow focus on the explicit local discourse of culture and tradition will not account for the meaning of the tourist performances in a wider logic of entertainment, or for the groups' position in the internal political life of the village.

Tourists attending a performance by either of Botohili's two cultural groups are greated with a *maena* song-dance and a spoken *hoho* dialogue in Nias language. There is no local distinction in terms of authenticity between newly composed songs as the one following here and older songs and dances performed by the groups. The new songs are described as culture *maena*s (*maena* kebudayaan) and are perceived as genuine parts of the tradition, stressing the non-exclusive relation between new and old, progress and tradition.

Welcome, we say to the guests – Welcome [lit. 'be blessed']
Let's dance the *maena* to enjoy to the hearts
I'll sing a *maena.* Ae ho! Elder brothers and sisters
A surprise of the heart, heard about and famous all over the world.
Ho! Siblings and relatives who travel on the one road
Let's unite our hearts and guard the land, which the Lord has put in order for us forever
A lot attracts the heart on the southern people's land
There is tourism on the land of [South Nias]
In Hilinawalö is a tall stone, placed in front of the traditional house
In Bawömataluo is a huge traditional house
In Nonaya is a ship that was turned into coral stone[5]
Let's go and see it
The place of tourism, the place of surfing/swimming in Botohili, Sorake, Lagundri
Let's increase our unity, like the front yard connects the two sides of land
Hu! Hae! Let's play today. He! We who are at the height of our strength
May it happen that we unite the hearts
Like the *baruzö* fruit which has only one seed, like melted silver
Let's increase the sign of our unity

The song expresses a wish to unite with the tourists as well as internally among the dancers, 'like melted silver,' 'like the *baruzö* fruit with only one seed,' and like the front yard connecting the two rows of houses in South Nias villages. The similes derive from old songs meant to raise unity in the village, in particular between soldiers preparing for war. As yet an expression of positive unity the guests are addressed as siblings[6] walking on a single road with their hosts.

A. The tourists are described as being attracted and astonished by the local material heritage. Culture/tradition, in the local definition, thus works as the local force pulling in the tourists from afar by 'attracting and surprising the heart'. This function is an instance of Gell's art function, namely to fascinate, captivate, and demoralise the spectator (1998: 71). In other words, to dazzle the spectator is to control him. This logic also applies to local feasts, where entertainment is likewise a matter of attracting as many guests as possible, in order to increase the host's renown and social position. The controlling position of a person staging a feast was locally described to me in very explicit terms as the host's ability – through providing food and entertainment – 'to hold back/restrain' (mentahan) his guests 'so that they cannot go anywhere else.'

B. Even more important than the tourist performances are the occasions when the culture groups are hired to perform for visiting politicians and at election campaigns. Here the standard repertoire of songs is extended with songs that praise the party and its candidates and may include a veritable wish list of new roads, schools and an airport, as yet an example of how the ancestral heritage works as a local force pulling in development.[7]

C. The culture groups are frequently called to entertain at weddings and funerals of wealthier families, both in the village and in other parts of Nias. Also on these occasions the groups are paid for their services[8], and generally speaking, payment is an essential part of all honourable relationships. The very term for culture/tradition, *böwö*, first and foremost refers to financial transactions, particularly the bride price.

Culture groups and village politics

Focusing on the culture groups' internal position in village life it becomes clear that their work is at the very core of local life, rather than being detached from it. Although established for the sake of tourists, the groups are important platforms for establishing positions in the wider system of village politics. Even in 2004 when there were nearly no tourists, both groups trained intensely three times a week, testifying to the great importance they hold to the villagers themselves. The earnings from the groups are very low compared to the efforts, time and money (for the costumes) the members invest.
Also the founder of a culture group, who functions as a sponsor for the group, generally has more expenses than income from it. He is expected to share the income with all the members, to directly assist them buying equipment and to make high contributions to his group's new years party. His main reward lies in the political influence he gains through leading the group. A group leader is acknowledged for his ability to secure a government license for his group, attracting financial donations from public or private cultural funds, and arranging shows for tourists, politicians and at local feasts. As long as he is able to fulfil these expectations, he can count on his group members as followers, who will support him as a leader in other local matters. During election campaigns for a new village head, each group thus supports the preferred candidate of their leader. The loyalty of the low-ranking members is, however, conditioned by the leader's success rate, and they commonly move to the competing group, whenever this appears to be the strongest and most successful. Therefore the low income from the shows in no way leads to the conclusion that the number of members must be reduced, contrarily the two groups are in constant competition of being the largest. Although earning money from the shows is indeed an important aim of the groups, this aim is thus subsumed to more general local power strategies in the village. In other words, the culture groups were born within an already existing political structure in which leadership is a matter of attracting external funds and attention. So made for tourists, yes, but within a local form of social organisation.

The competitive relation between organization leaders is locally described as an anomaly countering desired unity, but, in fact, rather represents the long-term working of the local political system, where power is defined as a matter of catering for supporters and making public speeches.

To sum up, the culture groups have specialized in using ancestral tradition to attract money and development through charming government representatives and tourists with local forms of entertainment. In this sense tourism has clearly led to a revival of customary art forms and a renewed trust in the value of ancestral heritage, which has been partly redefined as a marketable product called culture. Apart from their specialization in tradition, however, the culture groups have the same function as other local organizations that also work to attract funds and development projects from external donors. The culture groups do not represent a segment of traditionalists in the village. They have the same government sanctioned organization structure as other important political institutions in the village, and the culture group leaders are prominent figures in these as well. The culture groups thus have their place in the overall political life of the village and they are organized according to the same principles of connecting to external sources and converting these relations to internal position of the leader, through his ability to care for his followers. The logic of attraction is not more prominent in relation to the local notion of culture/tradition than in other local contexts, but represents a more general life strategy, which is also practiced by the more successful of the homestay owners.

Big men and big houses

Similar to the culture groups and other village organizations, the locally owned homestays are also political platforms for ambitious and successful individuals, in accordance with local ideals of wealth, influence and status. Involvement in tourism has been a means to gain or retain a privileged position in the village. In most cases been an objective for the already privileged, as the proportion of nobles (*si'ulu*) and title holding commoners (*si'ila*) is much higher on the beach than in the village as a whole.[9] The homestay owners are extremely well represented in the village council, firstly because the *si'ulu* and *si'ila* automatically have seats in the village council, and secondly because three out of four leading members of the council (including the present village head) are homestay owners. The same overweight of homestay owners also applies to the leading positions in the churches, culture groups and other village organizations, making the successful homestay owners key figures in village politics despite the fact that they live outside the main village.

The means to gain status as a prominent person through attaining a leading position in the village council or an organisation is first of all good oratorical skills, as well as knowledge of tradition or a higher education. Secondly, it is a matter of having the financial means to stage large weddings and funerals, and to make higher than average donations for churches and organizations, that all make up the present day opportunity for public distribution of wealth, whereas title feasts and public donations of pork only play a minor role today.

The more successful of the homestay owners have not only converted their cash income from tourism to achieve position in exactly this way, but also use their own produce to participate in the local circulation, as most homestay owners own rice fields and raise pigs along with their involvement in tourism. ...the staging of large feasts and also the participation in the customary house-to-house food exchange at harvest and Christmas. The fact that the homestay owners are also farmers does not necessarily mean that they cultivate the land and raise the pigs themselves, as expressed by a homestay owner: 'When I say I like to be a farmer, I mean a farmer wearing a tie.' If financially able, they pay others to work for them as day labourers or they have poorer relatives carrying out the work in exchange for a certain share of the yield. Oratorical skills are a defining feature of leadership, which is locally contrasted to manual work in the opposite end of the status scale. Doing manual work for oneself is considered unpleasant, but not degrading, whereas offering low paid work and services to others is basically humiliating.[10] Tourism is locally described within this basic opposition as a profession where 'you only talk, and don't work hard,' something which adds further to the position of the homestay owners.

Behind the position to talk, or as it is often expressed locally, the ability 'to make other people listen to your words' is the financial capacity to provide for others. Just as the village and organization leaders are expected to make public contributions, so the family head is expected to provide for his household and guests. The very size of a house is seen as a reflection of the owner's capacity as a provider, not only at festive occasions but also in everyday life. Therefore having a big house is not considered showing off, but an expression of distributable wealth, as opposed to buying a parabola or other 'dead valuables' (harta mati). The largest homestays are among the biggest houses in the village, not only in terms of the size of the building itself, but also in terms of its quantity of farming land and the number of household members and guests. Children of poorer relatives often live in the homestays where they do housework, serve the tourists and help in the rice fields in return for food and school fees. The guests not only comprise the tourists, but also people from the village dropping in and expecting to be catered for, or relatives from afar, occupying every vacant hotel room and helping themselves from the stock of tourists' food and drinks before departing.

The position of the homestay owners in the village thus reflect their role as having access to local as well as external resources which are then distributed in the local network. Ideally they are free from manual work, and hold the position as public speakers. They thereby establish a position in the village in much the same fashion as the leading nobles did in precolonial times, as will appear in the final section on historical continuity. First, however, I will go into more detail with the strategy of care, control and incorporation as it is practised on household level towards tourists as well as other members of the house.

Hosts and (the incorporation of) guests

The closest contact between locals and tourists exists in the homestays on the beach. The tourists mainly stay in separate bungalows, but come and go in the host family's living room to order food, book tickets and watch TV. The homestay owners commonly describe the tourists as personal guests of the house or even as relatives, and they feel great responsibility for the well being of their guests during the stay.

According to the 1995 edition of *Lonely Planet's* Indonesia Travel Survival Kit, the bay in South Nias is 'ringed by dozens of ridiculously cheap [homestays], all very similar in price and style, costing from around [USD 0.40-0.80] for a single room.' Furthermore 'the cheap accommodation is subsidised by the food, so [homestay] owners can be justifiably peeved if their lodgers eat somewhere else' (Turner et al. 1995: 534). The words of this budget traveller's bible clearly indicate that tourism in Nias is at the low extreme of the price range and that competition is hard. In fact it is not uncommon that tourists are offered accommodation totally free of charge, provided that they take their meals in the hotel where they stay, and arguments or even fights between homestay owners occur as often as not, when guests from one homestay have been seen eating in another.

The low room rates and the importance of the guest eating in the homestay where he lives are two specific features of tourism in the area. A basic market economic explanation of the situation would state that the vast overcapacity of rooms results in underselling accommodation, and a following insistence on earning a profit on the meals. This explanation is perfectly valid and it is fully acknowledged by the homestay owners. They are the first to agree that their accommodation charges are ridiculously low, and they consistently describe the low room rates as their main problem, caused by 'unhealthy competition' from their neighbours. However, this explanation does not account for the wider meaning of eating in somebody's house, or for the fact that the feeling that one's own lack of success is generally experienced as the result of other villagers' attempts to destroy one's livelihood.

Food is the essential means to maintain family relations and incorporate new members into the family, especially in relation to weddings, but also in the form of food exchanges between related houses. The same principle of food sharing is acted out at at community work projects where the ceremonial distribution of pork to all households in the village is the essential symbol of village unity.[11] The smallest pieces of pork offered to someone at a feast may be only ten grams, but it must be given and received, otherwise the relation would fail to exist, as it is constantly explained locally. Distributing food is thus, first, a matter of creating family and village unity by repeatedly sharing the same substance. Second, caring and providing for someone is to incorporate the receiver and exert control over him by making him susceptible to listen to one's words. The insistence that tourists eat in the homestay where they live should be seen in this light. The guests are treated as potential insiders, after the same standards as local people and by the same means, namely through caring and providing for them.

I am not asking you to be loyal to this house, I know Europeans are very individualistic — that's your culture, and even if we would like the tourists to be part of the family, I have told my family that this is business and we cannot do like that.

Establishing a commercial relationship is explained as an adjustment to the wants of the tourists. In case the tourists show any signs of interest in their local hosts, the host family is always ready to make stronger ties to their guests, and not so few tourists have in fact developed long-lasting ties with their local hosts. The village is rife with stories of these tourists, stories that are always centered on how much financial help the tourists have offered freely to their local hosts.

What is common is that tourists who pay more than the fixed price are seen as showing an interest in making local connections. In other words they are understood as paying, not according to the rules of 'business', but to local principles of investing into a longer exchange relation. Therefore one gift is a promise of *more* gifts, it is a sign that the guest is proving susceptible to his hosts' words of persuasion, i.e. that the hosts are able to incorporate the guest into their own network of alliances by local means. In this case the hosts will also make investments into the relation by offering more flexible conditions to the guests, in the form of eating with the family instead of from the menu, borrowing rather than renting motorbikes and so on. To see this as a strategy of mere extraction of the tourists' money would miss the point of incorporation, which may be illustrated with the following example of a young teenage girl's suggestion to her older brother who had fallen in love with a European girl: He should go with the girl to Europe, stay there for a couple of years, earn a lot of money for the family business and then take her back to Nias. Here the family would take her passport so that she could not leave again.

To sum up, the relation to tourists may be understood and explained in terms of purely commercial exchange, as it is also the case with local trade or wage work. However, if the tourists appear susceptible to enter into more personal relationships, they are basically treated in the same way - and with the same precaution - as are locals with whom one does not already have a close relationship. The means to enter a closer relationship is by incorporating the outsider through caring and feeding, a strategy containing a strong element of control.

Historical continuities

The following is meant to illustrate how the contemporary local strategies of incorporation of outsiders show significant parallels to the treatment of foreigners in the late 19th century, a few decades before South Nias came under full Dutch control in 1909.

Europeans travelling to South Nias in the late 1800s commonly describe how local village chiefs treated them as guests of honour. They were invited to sleep in the chief's house, they were served feast food and the local chiefs praised European power and kindness in public speeches. Performances of war dances and warrior mock fights were arranged to entertain and impress them, and to convince them of the number and fighting strength of local soldiers. Dutch forces took part in local inter-village warfare, and the enemies of their local allies expressed strong anti-Dutch sentiments. This attitude, however, was not extended to Europeans in general, as the sources reflect a great wish to engage with the Europeans all over South Nias in this period of time.

Even in the leading anti-Dutch village of Bawömataluo the chief in 1887 criticized the Dutch not for assuming power in the area, but for acting as 'a bad, an uncaring father [Rabenvater],' pursuing a selfish form of politics, only helping when it was their own interest, not coming enough to the area, and thus leaving the locals exposed to famine and poverty[12], as well as to the Chinese and Malays. He contrasted the Dutch to the British, whose time of influence ca. 1795-1824, he described as a golden age, where the British had acted as elder brothers, helpers and trading partners of the locals, coming to visit them often. Another village chief claimed that the English had founded his village. The Austrian Baron Von Brenner-Felsach who reported the two chiefs' words was himself praised as a brother and encouraged to send battleships and other ships and to assume a position of father and king to the locals. (Mittersakschmöller 1998: 83-92).

In similar fashion, Thomas, the first leading Protestant missionary, was encouraged to establish a relationship of 'brotherhood' with a local chief, who wanted the German cleric to assist him in his warfare against local enemies, and to stay permanently in his village as a source of trade goods and magic charms. The chief had no want of adopting Christianity, and also tried to prevent the priest from bringing the word to other villages (Thomas 1892: 27, *passim*).

What appears from the historical sources is that the Europeans were highly desired, especially as trading partners, but also as allies and protectors, who should come often or stay permanently. They were even acknowledged as rulers, in so far as they supplied what they the locals wanted from them. They were thus described in very similar manners as the first tourists who were also likened to kings, bringing help to the locals. The acknowledgment of the English as village founders brings to mind how the first surfers are today being credited for having opened the beach.

In the strategy of incorporation and control the guests are flattered and persuaded, entertained with dances and catered for with feast food, as well as being tactfully encouraged by their hosts to stay away from his local competitors.

The logical connection between foreigners as bringers of import wealth and import knowledge is indicated by the following extracts of a song composed by villagers to celebrate the arrival of missionaries to their area around 1900:

The men, the great, to us have come
From distant countries they came here
They've left friends and parents behind
To teach us the good customs
Wonderful people to us have come
They have much gold and much property
They know the way to golden wealth
And have come to show it to us.
(Bawalia village ca. 1905 in Bieger 1916: 15)

Foreign guests slept, ate and were entertained in the 'big house', ie. the house of the village chief. He was the leading noble of the village and was entitled to the largest type of house, as all house sizes were strictly graded, according to the social position of the owner. His house was not only large in terms of the building size, but also in terms of the number of household members, guests and others that he was able to cater for at everyday or feasts. The chief had at his disposal a workforce of slaves (debtors and war prisoners), enabling him to manage extensive land cultivation and thereby generate a surplus production of pigs, rice and coconuts. This surplus was used for export in exchange of gold and trade goods, as well as for title feasts where the chief distributed pork to everyone in the village, thereby increasing his rank further. Today, although there are no formal entitlements to certain house sizes, the size of the house still reflects the owner's economic capacity in terms of distributable wealth, and therefore his status in the village. The more successful of the homestay owners may be said to carry on this principle of the big house. As described earlier they also own farming land and pigs, they have other people to carry out the heavy work of cultivating the land and feeding the pigs, enabling them to participate in the feasting economy of the village. Thus, they too, combine their access to external wealth with local surplus production for feasts and other food exchange.

Today's importance of organization work in the culture groups and other village groupings, likewise accords with older forms of leadership. Although descent and inherited wealth to a wide extent accounted for a man's position, people in earlier times also followed the leader who was deemed the wealthiest and cleverest, and the risk of loosing position was ever present, if one could not afford to stage the title feasts (Schuring, c.1850: 23). The leading noble ruled in cooperation with the other nobles (siu'lu) and the village elders of rank (*si'ila*) (Schröder 1917: 353). In practice it was the *si'ulu* with most influence who took over the leading position, and 'among the *si'ulu* prevailed the greatest jealousy; each strived after the highest number of followers, the most prestige and authority' (Van den Broek in Schröder 1917: 353, cf. Laiya 1983: 30).

Conclusion

In the previous I have sought to place tourism in a context of local strategies of status, politics and life in general, in order to show how tourism is understood and organized in accordance with values and practices that are much wider than what pertains to tourism alone. I do not to claim that tourism does not bring along changes in the local society, but that within a broad anthropological notion of culture, the local culture of tourism cannot be described as objectified, commoditized or detached from other aspects of life.

Local life and prosperity have long depended on foreign resources and the attention from foreigners is now as before secured through hosting and entertaining representatives of the foreign sources of wealth. Establishing relationships to these sources is still a basic aspect of the present local notions progress and modernity. Now as before central social institutions are based on import wealth, which may be converted into local status and influence through feast giving and other forms of distribution of wealth in the local network.

For the locals there is no inherent contradiction between real life and staged life or between custom and tourism. Joining with the tourist is a proof of the strength of tradition and a means to increase local power by incorporating. But the tourists' interest in the old local heritage, in the form of Nias houses, megaliths and the surfing area, works to confirm the continued value of local tradition in the eyes of the villagers. To follow the taste of the tourist does not involve some higher degree of cultural construction or consciousness that would otherwise be the case. Although local preferences are shaped by tourists and government tourism policies, these preferences are part of a wider logic of self-reproduction through attraction of the Other, that does not only pertain to tourism. In earlier times as well as at present, the means to incorporate outsiders – food, talk and entertainment – are the same applied to incorporate locals into one's network in order to gain their support. The ambivalence between Self and Other, expressed in a mythical definition of selfhood: Myth of origin: Coming from 'there and them' but becoming the essence of 'here and us.' The same ambivalence is inherent in the local forms of exchange, which may in fact be defined more as sharing than exchange, as it is aimed at incorporating others in one's own network and turning outsiders into insiders. The attempts of incorporation of foreigners thus follow the same cultural principles of incorporation as are characteristic for local exchange forms. In this sense of culture, tourists can be said to be part of an authentic local culture with long roots in history when they surf the Nias waves.

AFTER TSUNAMI AND EARTHQUAKES:

In eyes of locals: NGO's say they come to help. Do bring money (but spend it in wrong ways). Do not eat/stay with locals. Treat people as their helpers (ie. reversed of the ideal), spit in the food before serving to a starving person.

They [The Delegates from international NGO X] are the kings of money. They act as if money is like water – that it will never finish.

Today the standard explanation in South Nias of the origin of Nias people: The myth tells of a king's daughter from the Foreign Land who became the ancestress of all Nias people. Her father sent her away on a boat, when he found that she had become pregnant out of wedlock. She was cast away on Nias and here gave birth to a son. When the son grew up and after he had found the island completely deserted, he married his mother. All Nias people are said to descend from this incestuous union. The local self-definition expressed in this myth is that everybody is connected to the same original unity, deriving from an external source, but being locally integrated.[13] In other words, the foreign source is necessary, powerful and life giving, but it is nothing in itself, since it must be incorporated in the local sphere, in order to be of local value, and this local sphere ideally makes up an harmonious unity. Within this understanding the local notion of progress and development can be likened to a tree growing from its old root, but needing new external nourishment, in order to grow healthily and reach its full potential.

Rather than looking at this as an instance of commodified or objectified culture, I here explore how the relation between the modern and the traditional is defined locally. To be modern (moderen) and progressed (maju) is an ideal that everybody in the village hopes to achieve, young surfers and experts on ancestral tradition alike. It therefore appears that tradition and modernity, although they are locally used as contrasting terms, are not considered as opposites. The local definition of progress appears as synonymous with a general notion of 'the good life,' which is in this particular social setting understood as a harmonious integration of external forces with local ones.

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[1] Kevin's own version of his trips to Nias may be found at http://grantland.com/lagundi/.

[2] Apart from money, a house, heirs and other close relatives are just as fundamental for being alive. The meaning of *auri* was for example explained in the following way by a newly married, low ranking public servant, who was heavily indebted from paying brideprice for his wife: '*Auri* means, that if I have debt with people and the bank, and after I've paid it back then my salary is clean, and I then get a house, children and basic property, it means I am living*, auri.'*

[3] Tourism also related to ideology of unity in diversion, culture politics etc. (Cf Adams 1997#: 157-8, 163 development).

[4] The trinity of progressive forces – God, tourists and government, is reflected in the choice of higher education among the villagers. The most popular studies are theology and tourism, as well as disciplines leading to public employment in the administration or the army/police force. Subjects like agriculture or technical studies are much less sought and far less prestigious.

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[5] This coral formation is in itself an instance of incorporation of external force, converted to local power. According to a still common myth, this ‘rock’ was originally a ship belonging to a Chinese trader, which was turned into coral by the goddess Silewe. The place is said to contain extraordinary powers for those who have the right knowledge.

[6] The fact that the guests are called ‘elder siblings’ does not imply any actual ranking, in terms of seniority between the two parties, but is part of a tradition where hosts politely humble themselves and praise the guests as superiors.

[7] Conveniently the songs are written so that one party/candidate name may easily be replaced with another, as there is no particular local loyalty to either of the external bringers of wealth. The situation is very similar to what Volkman has described from mortuary# rituals among the Toraja. Here foreign tourists have become an integrated part of local rituals and ‘charge the ritual with importance’ (1984: 164), but they are of less importance than Indonesian government officials who are the primary bringers of development (1990: 107). Both tourists and government officials testify to the sponsoring ‘family’s close link to centers of power, especially Jakarta, and their ability to draw prestigious guests from distant centers into the Toraja sphere’ (ibid.).

[8] Local hosts pay for the show in food, and often also in cash, in addition to the payment from other feast participants who join the dance and shower the dancers with bank notes.

[9] The *si’ila* are often described as being public advisors on customary village law, bride prices and kin relations. In precolonial times both noble and commonor had to distribute pork at series of feasts of merit, in order to maintain (nobles) or achieve (commoners) their titles and positions. Although this feasting system only plays a minor role today, a person’s title in most cases still indicates that his parents or grandparents were people of relative wealth and position.

[10] People doing low paid work for others may be referred to (or insulted directly) as ‘slaves’ (*sawuyu*) or as ‘the one who eats the asshole’ (*siambawahogo*). The distinction between talk and work organises public as well as family life. At community work projects the village leaders give their words of blessing to the project in the morning and then gather in the council house to make speeches on unity and community work for the rest of the day, while others carry out the work. In the family, the juniors are supposed to work for their seniors, whereas words flow downwards in the form of blessings and advise – the essential gift to the younger relatives from the family heads. In practice, there is a thin line between receiving an honourable payment for one's services and slaving for an employer, and the homestay owners who do not make much profit may be scorned as ‘slaves of the tourists.’

[11] The customary food exchange between related households and co-villagers is extensive. In the family it takes place at marriage, childbirth, death, harvest and Christmas, always following a principle of the closest relatives and the highest ranking guests receiving the largest shares, which *they* then distribute further in their own network. The size of the portions decreases gradually according to kin proximity or rank of the receiver. On a village level pork is distributed to all households with the highest ranking *si’ulu*, *si’ila* and the village head receiving the largest shares. The most extensive food exchange takes place in connection to weddings, starting at the engagement feast and continuing weeks after the wedding. The wedding consists of two parallel feasts, one in the bride’s house where the groom and his followers eat, and one later in the day in the groom’s house where the followers escorting the bride to her new home eat. Likewise, a young man must eat daily in his fiancée’s house in the months between engagement and wedding, thus demonstrating his submissive position in relation to his wife’s family. In the weeks following the wedding the new couple is called to eat and receive advise in the houses of all those relatives of the newly wed couple who have received raw pork at the wedding feast. The couple must always stay ready for the invitations that come only when the food is already cooked, and they may be given as many as ten feast meals on a single day, without being able to turn down the invitation.

[12] The chief was clearly not referring to his own situation, as in the 1880s, the head of Bawömataluo owned gold equivalating 60,000 Dutch guilder and had around 500 slaves (Thomas 1892: 21, 7, see also Rosenberg 1878:172, Lett 1901: 69).

[13] There has been several myths explaining local origin during history, but this story is the only one common the in the village today. I have heard it from people of all ages, by experts on tradition as well as young university graduates with public employment. Everyone seems to know his own version of the story, and origin of Nias people has been described to me as being from China, Europe, India and Madagascar or a combination of two of these, e.g. the first woman being a German and her illigetimate spouse a Chinese. Apart for these differences, the different versions are very consistent, and when the story is told in local language the place of origin is often defined much less specifically as ‘the foreign land’ (*tanö ndrawa*). In other versions the first woman (or, in one case, a brother and sister marrying in Nias) is said to come from Turkey (Marschall 1976: 70), ‘the Land of Asia’ (*Tanö Asia*, Hämmerle 1990: 6, 8-12), Baros on Sumatra's west coast (Donleben 1848 cited in De Zwaan 1914: 2), ‘the opposite coast’ (‘overwal,’ Schröder 1917: 525-26), the Batak on North Sumatra (Rappard 1909: 510), or in the form of a sister and brother from Pageh Islands/Mentawai (Schuring c.1850: 25-26[13]). Thus, in older versions the first ancestors are described as originating from areas that are much closer to Nias in geographical, rather than mythical terms. The common meaning of the various places is that they are all the ‘Foreign Land’ (*Tanö Ndrawa*), and this ‘place’ is situated beyond the horizon of the local sphere. With Nias people’s increasingly common visits to other parts of Indonesia, the place of origin has ‘been moved’ further away and thus maintained as foreign. Peake (#) has rightly notes that several of the foreign placenames today reflect 20th century scientific theories of the origin and early spread of Austronesians. Still, the myth itself and the cosmological principles it describe long precede the theories. The myth is also known in other parts of the Austronesian world, e.g. the Nicobars, indicating a much longer historical continuation of the story than what written sources can document.