

Visit to the land of the Wana: a forest people of Indonesia



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March 2009



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Central Sulawesi, the middle part of the k-shaped island of the Celebes, remains one of the more forested provinces of Indonesia. Thanks largely to its rugged mountainous terrain and still-tenuous road network, Central Sulawesi is home to indigenous peoples who have, so far, largely escaped being forced out of their forests by development schemes. One of these groups is the Tau Taa Wana, a sub-group of the numerous people who speak variants of the Ta'a language of eastern Sulawesi,¹ in turn one of the dozens of regional languages in the Celebes.

I am here as a short term visitor to the local NGO, YMP, in order to improve my elementary Bahasa Indonesia, learn about the Wana and share some of the lessons I have learned from 30 years as an indigenous rights activist.²

Our trip to visit the Wana starts in the provincial capital, Palu. Accompanied by Amran, Deputy Director of YMP, we leave the bustling city early as we have a 10 hour ride in a mini-bus to get to the YMP's local office 350 kilometres to the east in Ampana. The paved road, relatively good by Indonesian standards, winds eastwards out of the city up the steep forested hills that run like a spine down the middle of the island. Between tropical downpours, we can see the cloud-shrouded hills emerge green and sparkling in the sunshine. Later, out of windows steamed up by a recent cloudburst, I see a relatively rare sight, three large hornbills winging between the tree tops.

Near the summit of the mountain range, the more temperate airs and rich volcanic soils and the presence of the road have encouraged quite extensive settlement and vegetable farming. The steep hills are covered with small terraced and carefully hoed fields, worryingly reminiscent of the Dieng area of Central Java which has recently experienced drastic erosion, landslides and flooding. The road clings to the hillsides and on the downhill sides of the road, clinker planked huts and shops, set on stilts, lean out precariously over the drops down to the swift-falling streams below. Not long after, we are descending again through forests and after two hours we come down the eastern side of the hills to the drier coastal plain.

Now for miles we run south past Balinese villages, migrants who were moved to Sulawesi as part of the government's 'transmigration' programme. The villages look relatively prosperous and distinctively Hindu. Temples, yellow prayer flags and palm leaf offerings line the sides of the road and between the villages there are extensive, productive-looking rice paddies, plots of cacao, vegetables and the ubiquitous Balinese red cows.

Yet such programmes of resettlement and social integration have not been without problems. As we drive through Poso, we can see the scars of an ugly outbreak of violence, ostensibly between settlers and local people, which ripped the community apart in 1999. The scorched walls and roofless houses where the clashes occurred are testimony to still unhealed wounds in the community. Amran explains, however, that although the conflict may have been sparked by fights between groups of youths – others say it was alcohol - yet it was fuelled by the vested interests of politicians and army elites, who exploited the clashes to push their agenda and gain control of natural resources. They fanned the flames by invoking religious differences which escalated the fighting into an ugly conflict between Muslim settlers who dominate the cities and Christians who predominate in the surrounding hills. As we leave Poso, we see who

the real victors are. A new well-appointed cantonment of an extra battalion of soldiers has been garrisoned by the town to keep the peace. The commander now has substantial business interests in the area, I am told.



Vegetable farming in the central uplands

Actually, this is part of a normal pattern in Indonesia, which is a highly militarised society, for two major reasons. One is that, by law, the armed forces of Indonesia have a double function (*dwi fungsi*) not only of defending the country against external threats but also of controlling the local population. So there are army units in every city, town and village.³ The other reason is that the armed forces are expected to make up as much as two thirds of their budget from private enterprise, something which encourages the proliferation of seamy deals between army commanders and the local business world. Sulawesi has long been especially prone to the independent business deals of the armed forces. Indeed, as I knew from my reading, in the late 1950s, with substantial covert support in terms of arms and finance from the CIA, the local armed forces actually attempted to seize power in Sulawesi and press for more autonomy from what they saw as an over-intrusive government in Jakarta which was trying to limit their independent 'trade' (smuggling racket) with the Philippines and other parts of SE Asia.⁴ So the redoubled garrison in Poso is just a strong expression of something which most Indonesians consider quite normal.

Not far beyond Poso, we turn east and leave the 'Trans-Sulawesi', which winds down the length of the island for nearly 2,000 kilometres from Manado, in the north, south to Makassar. Now the coastal plain narrows. The road becomes a narrow country road not much wider than one lane and it becomes bumpier as it winds along the cliff front between mangroves and forests that come down to the sea, which is on our left, and steep hills which climb up to our right. In many places the road is interrupted by rock falls and washes where the mountains and rivers are still pressing down towards the sea. Yet, after a while, the coastal plain widens again and not long after nightfall we come into the district centre, Ampana, which is our destination for the day. After sluicing off the stains of travel and resting a bit, we meet in a filthy-looking shed that somewhat to my surprise serves the best grilled fish in town, fresh from the sea - delicious with rice, vegetables, *ubi* (boiled cassava), lemon and *sambal*.

Into the uplands: Ampana to Mpoa

Ampana hosts the local office of the NGO Yayasan Merah Putih (YMP)⁵ a grouping of social activists which commenced as a student body in the late 1980s committed to awareness-raising about pressing social and environmental issues in the province. As their own awareness grew they developed a strong critique of the development policies coming from Jakarta and overseas but after the fall of Suharto and the decentralization of power in the late 1990s they switched their attention to more local challenges. Today their efforts are focused on two groups of people: helping the Tau Taa Wana deal with the process of social change which is engulfing them and working with local farmers in the Luwuk district to get access to justice. The local office in Ampana is run by Badri, himself from Sulawesi, who oversees the relations between his team of seven fieldworkers and his office.

YMP, however, is far more than a project handler, as I witness over the next two days. The modest office off a dusty side street hosts a constant stream of visitors dropping in to exchange news and views about recent developments in the province. Sympathetic journalists looking for alternatives to mainstream stories, teachers, NGO volunteers, human rights workers, candidates in the upcoming elections for the district legislature and women activists are all evidently friends and colleagues in a shared endeavour to reform the path of development.

After a day of preparation and discussion, shopping for a plastic cape against the rain, some basic supplies and presents for the Wana, we are again ready to move on. Jeeps not being available, we decide to go in on motorbikes. I am not thrilled about this, as I am not at all confident that my office-slack, old body can take five hours on the back of a bike, but apparently it is the fastest way of getting to the Wana. After saying goodbye to Amran, our two *ojek* drivers stick our packs between their knees and the handlebars, and, with Badri and I perched behind them, we zoom off. We wriggle through the traffic and then head east again in the brilliant sunshine, through more coastal villages, rice paddies, coconut and cacao plantations. The wind whistling in my face, the bike twisting between the potholes, it is exhilarating and I decide this is much more fun than going in cars.

Apparently this coastal road was built by the Dutch in the 1930s during their short stay as a colonial power. In fact, Dutch missionaries only first set up in the area in the late 1900s and it was not until the 1910s that the Dutch actually established an administrative presence. Unlike their colonies in Sumatra and Borneo, in this part of Sulawesi the Dutch decided on direct rule so they disbanded the local sultanates which had dominated trade along the coasts from, at least, the mid-19th century. As in much of the region, these sultanates had based their power on controlling and taking levies from a complex regional trade between Bugis, Chinese and western traders whereby they exchanged slaves, spices, forest products, pearls and sea cucumbers for industrial goods, cloth, gongs, ceramics and weapons.⁶

The Dutch had done away with these sultanates and imposed their own system for extracting wealth. However, unlike in South Sulawesi, where the Dutch had moved in to the centre of the highlands to control the lucrative regional coffee trade in the land of the Toraja,⁷ in this part of the Sulawesi, the Dutch had made few incursions.

Limited coffee production, the promotion of coconut plantations and trade in forest products, like damar resin, and the exploitation of the pearl fisheries seem to have been the main economic activities they engaged in. By this time the worst excesses of the Dutch colonial system had been somewhat tempered by the still paternalistic 'ethical policy' that had been adopted after the forced cultivation system of mid-19th century had been loudly denounced. The Tau Taa Wana in the hills had thus escaped both a permanent missionary presence and any kind of direct rule and, until the 1980s, had been largely beyond the reach of the new, independent Republic of Indonesia. These were the people we were on our way to visit.

After about an hour heading east along the coast road we reach a river mouth and bridge. We are at Banggae, which is little more than a collection of shacks by the side of the road and, after a pause for refreshment and to unbend stiffened limbs, we turn off the tarmac and into the mud. The road south into the hills looks like a churned-up English farm track and it soon gets worse. The bikes skid through the mudholes, skirt the bigger pools on the edge of the road and then, where the road looks impassable without four-wheel drive, we dodge up a bank and wriggle our way through the trees on either side, the ride being like a roller-coaster at a fair ground with the added excitement of having to duck low-hanging vines. Faced with a river, the drivers are un-phased, we bounce down the bank and drive straight across, the little Hondas seeming to have no problems with the water sluicing over the engines and exhaust pipes. Wow, this is fun!

From here the road improves somewhat and for the next couple of hours we zoom along the mud and gravel track south between secondary forests on the steep hillsides. There are houses every few kilometres, evidence of a lot of small-scale logging, chain sawyers, cattle in ragged-looking pastures and, where the valley widens, homesteads and fields of soya and cacao, bananas and other crops. We stop for lunch in a wayside store which sells sweets, kerosene, rice and dried fish but also serves sugary coffee, noodles and homemade peanut cakes.

The store owner is from Java and while we eat there is much discussion about the imminent elections. The walls are festooned with posters of the various candidates, one of whom arrives in a four wheel drive, while we snack, to pin his posters on the wall. The election form looks daunting, with 44 listed parties each with their name and logo and each party fielding a selection of up to 6 candidates. It looks madness to me and the folk in the store agree that most people are wholly confused by the process of how to vote. I had read in the papers that in the last election as many as 30% of the election forms had been incorrectly filled in. It seems obvious to me that the net result is to disenfranchise the poor and worse educated.

The road gets steeper as we push on south and it switchbacks over the hills while the mountains on either side seem to press in closer and higher. Some of the hills are bare and eroded right to the summit but others are still clothed in forests. There are steep cliffs of soft-looking sediments. The mountains gather into a knot and in places the road between them is little more than a slide of rocks, which the weighed-down bikes can't handle without us dismounting. The weather, too, seems to be pressing in on us, dark clouds lowering overhead and grey sheets of rain falling in the hills ahead and around us. It is hard to believe that the government has established a transmigration settlement at the end of such a rough road, but once through the knot of hills we come

down again to a broader valley. Again there are settlements, stores, farmsteads and cacao plantations, a school and signs of everyday life. We have reached Longge just before a cloudburst and we wait it out in a shop to sip sweet coffee while the rain hammers on the tin roof.

After half an hour, the skies clear and we make the final run through to Bulang, the transmigration settlement established in the heart of the Wana's territory by the government in the mid-1990s. Before arriving we have to ford a full river and this time we take the packs off the bikes and I hump our packs across wading through the swift waters while the drivers race their bikes across the river, bouncing from rock to rock. A final run and we arrive. It's taken us six hours from Ampana.



The end of the road

The transmigration settlement of Bulang includes a wide mixture of migrants and people of different religions. While waiting for Badri who has been delayed, I chat to people who have come from Flores (Christians), Bali (Hindu), Lombok and Java (Muslim). Once Badri arrives, I buy 2 kilos of dried fish from the store and then we make another push through to Mpoa our destination for the day. The road has ended but there is a bike trail of sorts, little more than a muddy slot through the tall siliceous grasses. We bump across a couple of streams but then give up as the mud and the roots have made the laden bikes almost uncontrollable. After paying off the *ojek* drivers we shoulder our packs - mine seems unnecessarily heavy - and walk the final two kilometres, for most of the way sloshing our way up the creek that gives Mpoa its name. Beyond the secondary growth and some swidden plots, the forest rises up on the hills about us, green in the slanting rays of the evening light.

Mpoa: indigenous life on the frontier

At first sight, Mpoa looks sad: void of culture or any signs of wealth. Although it is only an hour before nightfall, there seems to be absolutely no-one about. The village

consists of two strings of double-room, planked buildings on stilts with tin roofs set about 15 meters apart along a path overgrown with grass. A sad-looking mosque about eight metres square sits in the middle of the settlement but it too looks overgrown and unused. The door is broken and hens scuffle in and out. After scouting about, Badri finds some people in one house who have obviously just come in from the fields and they welcome us with bananas and friendly chatter. In another house we hear a baby crying and a young couple arguing about what to do about it. Not long after some young girls appear and there is shouting for keys and we are installed in the village store. Then, after a welcome bathe in the river and handshakes and welcomes, we settle down to chat while I try to patch my trousers which have burst through at the knee. The girls, who seem painfully shy, are at the back of the shop busily making up supper – boiled rice and some of the salt fish I have brought fried up with chillies – but a much more forthright teacher turns up who makes lively conversation and then, as others join us by the storekeeper's kerosene lamp, I start to learn something of the village's story.



At first sight Mpoa seemed forlorn

It turns out that indeed the village is largely abandoned. The southern part of the village is made up of local Tau Taa Wana who have been settled into one place as part of a project of the Department of Social Affairs (DEPSOS). Most of them are, at the time of our visit, living in a scatter of isolated houses about half an hour south of the settlement in traditional huts set in their swiddens. The northern part of the settlement was made up of another group of Tau Taa Wana who gave up living in the project area and have gone back over the mountain from whence they came, the place we plan to visit later in the week. The middle part of the village is what has caused the most problems, as the Social Affairs officials without consulting the locals filled up the village with 'surplus' transmigrants from Bulang and elsewhere. Land conflicts between these transmigrants and the Wana led to the community breaking up.

One root of the problem is the fact that the Bulang transmigration project itself was installed on the indigenous peoples' lands without any consultation and with no recognition of the Wana's land rights. I am told that the National Land Bureau (BDN) went ahead and issued land titles to the transmigrants, but made no effort to

compensate the local people for the use of the land, much less do anything to ascertain their wishes. Of course, this led to land conflicts between the settlers and the Tau Taa Wana. However, interpreting the Wana's objections as resentment against the settlers getting services which the locals did not, the DEPSOS scheme at Mpoa seems to have been conceived to bring the same kind of 'development' to the local people.

DEPSOS' official policy towards what it calls *komunitas terpencil* – very isolated communities – is to move them from their dispersed traditional dwellings and relocate them in larger settlements where they can be provided with services.⁸ The Mpoa scheme thus combines these relocation plans with long established transmigration policies of '*translok*' and '*transmigrasi sisipan*' – local transmigration and slipping people in to transmigration settlements.

Yet, even in terms of its own objectives, the DEPSOS project looks forlorn. There is no road to Mpoa. No efforts have been made to regularise lands or title the farming areas. There is no clinic. Once the new village had been built and filled up with people, the officials from DEPSOS left, although even by then many of the Tau Taa Wana had already moved off. The one evident success in the scheme is the school, which was installed later by the local government not DEPSOS and which has a full complement of teachers. This seems to be the main thing that keeps any of the Tau Taa Wana in the village.

After our simple supper, we spend the night on the hand-woven leaf floor-mats which are the universal substitute for beds in the more traditional parts of Indonesia. Going out for a pee in the middle of the night, I note that the sky is brilliant with a glittering display of clear stars against a black sky. A shooting star streaks across the firmament and a chill wind flows down off the mountains. We are all cold under our *sarongs*, which is all we have brought as bedclothes.



Pak Inse

We spend the next day visiting the Wana in their fields and dispersed houses. It turns out that as many as 30% of the Wana now live in and around Mpoa. Government efforts to concentrate the Wana in one place have been partially successful, it seems. The rice harvest is in full swing and a second crop of rice is also being sowed in some places. Some Wana are now also sowing quite extensive areas of soya for which there is a ready local market. The upland rice-fields look quite large and almost continuous and we discuss the extent to which the people retain self-sufficiency in basic foods and materials. One of the village leaders, Pak Inse, takes us to see his grand-children who are passing the day in one of the field houses while their families are tending the fields and we then climb up through steaming hot, humid, steep fields to the hill-top house of one of the community leaders.

While eating more rice and vegetables, washed down with spring-water kept cool in long bamboo tubes filled from the springs down below, we chat about the Wana's traditional land tenure system which, given that the government has done nothing to address the land issues of the Wana, remains the prevalent system for ordering their land use where it has not been pushed aside by other interests. Like so many customary law communities in Indonesia, the Wana have a 'nested' system of rights. They conceive their whole territory as belonging to them as a people. Within this large vaguely bounded territory, each cluster of huts with shared leadership, what the Wana call a *lipu*, sees itself as owning and controlling a clearly bounded area in which all members of the *lipu* share rights. Within this *lipu* territory, the cleared fields and house plots, as well as the secondary vegetation which grows up after the fields revert to forest, are owned by the households and can be inherited. All the other resources within the *lipu* territory are held in common, even valuable things like damar resin trees.

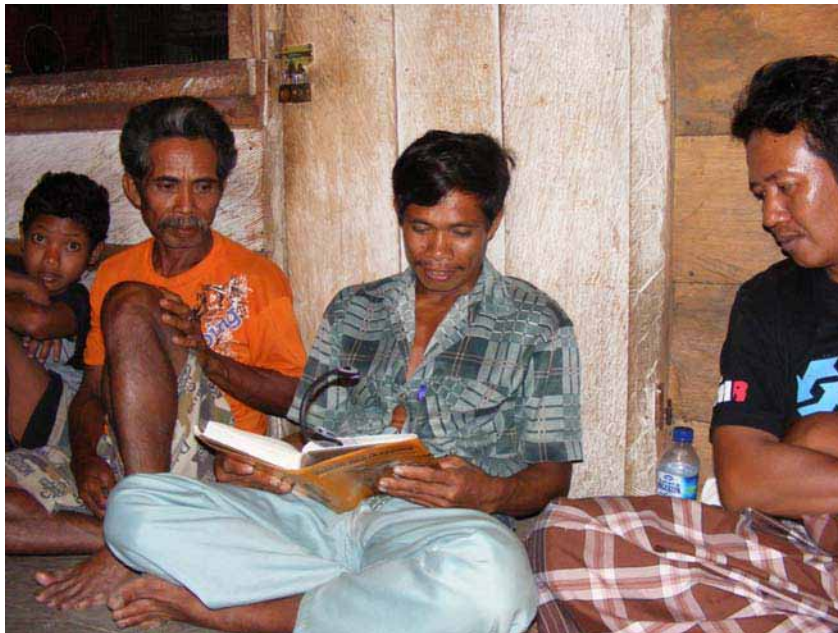


Upland rice fields

In talking with the Wana in the field houses and then later in the evening back at the store, I soon realise that the somewhat pathological first impression I got of Mpoa – the tired, uniform, planked huts, the overgrown tracks and decaying mosque - obscures the vitality and strong identity that still pervades Wana social life. The language is vital and spoken not only by the Wana but some incomers. Customary law

still orders land use and all social relations. Traditional institutions continue to function in allocating land, resolving disputes and arranging marriages and funerals. Community meetings are still the norm for generating community consensus. The State may be trying to integrate the Wana into the national mainstream but the Wana maintain their commons and their culture in their own way.

These are the most interesting aspects of the discussions for me, but for the Wana it seems the best part is just the curiosity of having a foreigner come to visit, not a unique event but still rare enough to be intriguing. In the evening, the shop soon fills up with people come to have a look and many of them stay long into night to chat with me in my faltering Indonesian. How long does it take to fly from England to Indonesia? Do I have a swidden? Is there rice in England? Where is my wife? How many children have I got? What do they do? My answers if precise seem baffling. As I slip towards sleep, they continue to talk at length among themselves especially as I had brought with me a copy of the main ethnography about the Wana, written 20 years ago by an American anthropologist.⁹ The weighty academic tome includes not just photos of the Wana of the Bungka river further west, actually taken in the mid-1970s, but also extracts of shamanic chants written in evidently excellent Taa. There are murmurs of excitement as people examine the photos which are of individuals still known and remembered, some of whom are still alive today. There are also gasps of appreciation as I read out the chants, somewhat haltingly, and then even greater interest as one of the shamans reads them out, slowly and clearly, and begins to chant the words with great delight.



A young shaman chants the songs of the spirits with great delight

Even though it is a legal requirement in Indonesia for people to register as members of one of the five major world religions acceptable to the government - and so most Wana have Muslim, Christian or Hindu on their identity papers - in fact the traditional shamanic beliefs of the Wana remain a vital part of their social life. These beliefs not only express and shape the relations the Wana have with their natural world but also draw on and reinterpret their history and their social order. The shamans recruit their spirit familiars to assist them in curing disease, to heal social fractures and to look into

the future. Such men of knowledge gain both prestige and authority from their canny interpretation of community life through the lens of the spirit world. Men of spiritual authority are also those trusted and charged with handling community affairs and applying customary law.

Later in the trip when we are further up in the hills and while I lie awake at night shivering under my inadequate sarongs with t-shirt and trousers still on and tucked into my socks, I hear the shamans chanting for long hours from midnight to dawn. It makes me wonder: how can a government whose slogan is 'Unity in Diversity' and which has signed on to UN human rights treaties guaranteeing freedom of religion, not even *allow*, let alone comprehend, the belief systems of its diverse peoples?

Impacts of development policies:

Since the 1950s, the express purpose of the Government's policy of transmigration has been to integrate the country's diverse peoples into more malleable forms, apt to the nationalist and development goals of its rulers.¹⁰ Yet, as I learn from our discussions, the Wana's resentment of transmigration comes not just from the way they have been shunted about to make way for others and to make them conform to an imposed social order, but from the direct threat that it poses to their own system of land use. Transmigration threatens to undermine their forest-dependent livelihoods.

When the Bulang site was established during the Suharto era there was no chance of protest. Development, they had already learned, came at the point of a gun, and men with guns tell you what to do, they don't come to consult you about your needs. Some Wana lost crops, fruit trees and even small cacao plantations to the scheme. Later, corrupt transmigration officials even tried selling houses and attached land holding to the Wana, as if they were not already the owners of the land. However, in late 1999, after the fall of the Suharto dictatorship, some Wana decided to speak out. They wrote to the regional NGO, YMP, asking for help and expressed concern that the Transmigration Department was planning on extending the settlement towards Mpoa including areas they use for their system of rotational farming.¹¹

It was this appeal for help which brought YMP into the Wana area and since then, with long-term support from the Rainforest Foundation Norway, YMP has provided continuous assistance to the Wana. They got hold of the official documents setting out the planned expansion of transmigration. They helped organise the Wana. They held community meetings to share information and ensure a shared understanding of the threat and what should be done about it. They organised negotiations with local officials. Then they helped mediate dialogues between the migrants and the Wana to defuse resentment as far as possible. The result was that the push to extend the transmigration scheme towards Mpoa was checked.¹²

However, this has not really solved the problem. The land has not been given back. There has not been any compensation. There are still cases of transmigrants extending their fields towards the remaining community lands. Moreover, the transmigrants themselves have their own problems. Their cacao crops have suffered outbreaks of disease and this has triggered some to enter the Wana's forests to collect damar resin and rattan, the Wana's main sources of cash. About two hundred migrants have given

up farming and have moved deeper into Wana lands to pan in the headwater streams, using mercury to better sediment out the heavy grains of gold.



Government land use plans leave no room for customary rights

YMP sees a common problem behind these conflicting sets of issues, that the Government prioritises large-scale, capital intensive enterprises above the welfare of the people, yet puts the needs of the peasantry above the needs of the indigenous peoples. As Badri explains:

They give out land by the thousands of hectares to companies and investors, they give out land for the settlers in small plots but they don't recognise the rights of the indigenous peoples at all. They don't understand indigenous peoples' way of life and they don't recognise their rights.

Since the mid-2000s the situation has again worsened. Although the extension of the Bulang site eastwards towards Mpoa was halted, the regional government has decided, again unilaterally, to extend the transmigration site south, west and northwest. As is common in Indonesia, project implementation ran ahead of the law. The extension schemes started being implemented years before the environmental impact assessments were completed and these assessments barely mention the Wana.¹³ Mysteriously too, as if to hide these irregularities, the land titles issued to the settlers in 2005 by BPN, the National Land Bureau, were backdated to 2002. In any case, the Wana were again not consulted. On top of this, the local government now plans a whole new transmigration site further west in the middle reaches of the Bungka river, near the heart of what remains of Wana territory.

The main area of Wana lands not yet affected by such schemes is still further west in Morowali District. Yet, even here, the presence of the Wana has been made illegal by the unilateral imposition of a nature reserve (*Cagar Alam Morowali*) as Indonesian conservation laws do not allow any residence or use of natural resources in such strictly protected areas. Luckily, it seems, the law is not being enforced so the peoples' livelihoods are, so far, hardly affected.

Flipping through the regional development plans for Tojo Una Una district before coming into the interior, I had noticed that while the local government does not wholly ignore the needs of indigenous peoples, it does indeed give pride of place to big development.¹⁴ As a result, the whole Wana area is caught between a hammer and anvil of mining, oil and gas interests. To the north, three mining companies are now actively exploring for minerals with plans to move in on the Wana's territory: PT Artha Prima Nickelindo,¹⁵ PT Trinusa Aneka Tambang¹⁶ and PT Ina International Company.¹⁷ Some way to the south of the Wana, the huge transnationals, PT Inco and Rio Tinto, already have large-scale mining operations underway, while a major Indonesian corporation, Medco, is now exploring for oil and gas in two blocks on the southern coast just next to the main Wana area. The perception of many government officials and activist NGOs is that Central Sulawesi is now considered to be a 'mining province', 'though each draws quite different conclusions about whether this is a good thing or not.

Walk to Ueviyau: the legacy of logging

After a morning bathe and another meal of the eternal boiled rice and dried fish, we sling our packs and, accompanied by Apa Lisna, a Wana from Mpoa who has agreed to act as our guide, we trek south, out of the village. The settlement peters out after half a kilometre and we wade up the Mpoa stream a little way before climbing the bank and heading into the forest. We are in typical tropical rainforest – a bit battered by extraction by the look of it – but cool, verdant and humming with insect life and bird calls. The path is steep and slippery but not long after we find we are back in dense, hot, secondary forests - old Wana gardens. I regret not putting on my hat as the sun burns down on my head and neck. Whose gardens are these? The people of Ueviyau, I am told, the people we are going over the hills to visit. They had these gardens while they lived in the Mpoa resettlement scheme.

The track continues upwards, back into forest, but gets steeper and steeper and, after a bit, it stops wriggling and seems to go straight up. My old heart is hammering fit to burst. Am I imagining things? This seems like a washed out overgrown, ridiculously steep **road** that we are climbing up. Why would anyone build a road here? This makes a good excuse to stop, catch my breath and ask questions. What **is** this track? Badri and Apa Lisna explain that this was indeed an old logging road. It dates back to the early 1990s. At that time almost a third of the Wana area was handed out, as three logging concessions covering 95,270 hectares, to an Indonesian company, PT Bina Balantak Raya, and the concessions are still valid. The company has now logged through the forests in the northern and eastern concession blocks but is still operating the third block in the middle of the Wana's territory further south-west.



The old logging road provides a good excuse to take a break

No, of course, we were not consulted before the concessions were issued, Apa Lisna confirms. And, yes, it did badly affect us. The logging depletes the game, even fish, and the logging roads overrun fields and crops. The worst impact though is that the loggers fell the damar resin trees (*Agathis* and *Shorea* spp.), the resin of which the Wana tap to provide their main cash income.¹⁸ People also blame the extensive floods in Bulang in 1999 on the forest damage caused by the logging. The migrants were so cut off by the waters that the government had to airdrop food supplies to them.

But, no, we are not able to resist the logging, Apa Lisna goes on to explain. Company personnel are almost always accompanied by armed soldiers and there are strong links with local army commanders. In fact, quite a number of Wana were employed by the logging company. Apa Lisna himself ruefully admits that he worked for years for the loggers as a tractor driver. He shrugs, as if to say ‘Well, what else can you do?’ The damar trees are now regrowing, they acknowledge, but they are still small. The big valuable trees which we used to tap are gone, they recount, and though you can tap the small trees you get less and it slows their growth. Big trees are now rare and further afield. That’s tough, as humping the heavy packs of resin back to the river, where they are rafted down to the coast for sale, is not easy. Life has got harder.

It takes us about an hour and a half to scale the two high hills between Mpoa and Ueviyau, but as we come over the crest of the second we immediately get a clear view of the *lipu* up ahead. It is made up of a cluster of huts set in a swidden on the other side of a narrow valley, while there are other huts in newer fields this side, down below us. Higher hills rise up beyond. Yes, there are tracks through to the south coast. It would take us three days trekking, they say: more like three weeks with me, I joke. The valley looks serene and unaffected by the frontier closing in. We slip and slide down the hillside to the first huts to be welcomed by the community leader, Apa Wis, and his soft-spoken wife. They give us a welcome lunch of boiled maize cobs, rice and vegetables, with the inevitable dried fish.

As we sit chatting through most of the afternoon, and they ply me with glasses of sour but very palatable rice wine, I learn more about their view of the DEPSOS scheme. They agreed to join the scheme in 2000, says Apa Wis, after being persuaded that

there would be recognition of their rights and the provision of services. So why did you leave, I ask. Apa Wis hesitates and then replies cryptically ‘many problems’. After a pause and some encouragement from Badri, he explains, that the DEPSOS officials brought in outsiders to settle the site and this provoked many conflicts, mainly over land. Government officials then suggested that, if the Wana were not happy in Mpoa, they could move further east outside their territory to work as labourers on an oil palm plantation, something they all refused outright. So, after four years, no recognition of their rights and no services, only problems, the Ueviyau people decided to pull out and move back over the hills.



The traditional houses in Ueviyau are well kept and seem hopeful

We conclude our discussions before dusk, make our way down the hill, across the Ueviyau stream which gives the *lipu* its name, and scramble up through the fields on the other side of the valley to the main part of the village. To my eyes, the traditional houses look bright and hopeful, such a contrast to the forlorn feeling in Mpoa. The huts have well-kept gardens around them. There are flowers planted on both sides of the track and trimmed grass under the coconuts and other fruit trees. After installing ourselves in one of the huts, I take a delicious shower under a cleverly directed gush of spring water that is piped into the air from the steep hillside down a bamboo pipe.

Alternative community development: the YMP programme

In the morning, we see some evidence of the YMP assistance programme which has now been going for many years.¹⁹ As we are having breakfast, people are in and out of the hut to talk on one of the solar powered ‘handie-talkies’ that allow 8 of the larger *lipu* to chat with each other and make common plans. Mpoa and two other big villages also have two-way radio links with Ampana and Palu.

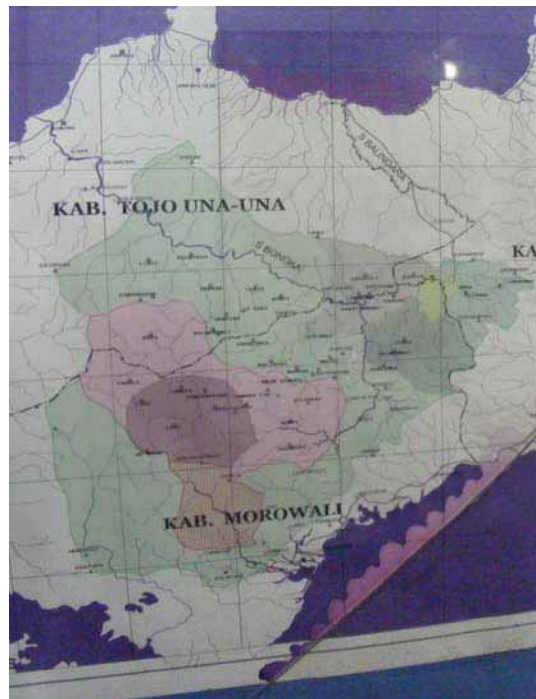
Shortly after breakfast, some of the adults and most of the children gather in the YMP-sponsored ‘*sekolah lipu*’ (village school) for lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic led by Sensi, a 16 year old orphan, who has volunteered as an unpaid

teacher. The government's education programme still does not reach into the hills, only their logging and mining programmes.



The 'sekolah lipu' teaches the basic 3 Rs

One of the adults, Apa Esna, explains how, because of the school, he has learned to read and write and that they are now trying to develop a cooperative system to better market their rattan and damar. Before, they had to accept the prices offered by the middle men without question and they feel that they often got defrauded. Now, equipped with mathematical reckoning and alternative information about the market, they can bargain for better deals.



The Wana territory overlaps three districts

A core part of the YMP project with the Wana has been to help them define their territory and press for recognition by the local government. A map of the whole territory was completed in three months during 2005. There was then a long process of meetings with government officials and members of the legislature in Ampana and Palu to develop a draft legislative act (*Perda – Peraturan Daerah*) for the local parliament to approve which would give formal recognition of Wana land rights. That process has got stuck, as too many of the politicians have links with the private sector and others are fearful that recognition of collective rights means the creation of a State within a State.

As we sit together chatting during the day, Apa Lisna, tells me something of his life. Although he is originally from the area, for 20 years he left the communities and went to work for the private sector on the coast and in the logging camps. He had no hopes for himself or his people, could see no way of defending their lands and he took to drink. It was only once YMP came in to help, that he again became more hopeful. He moved back to the Mpoa, gave up drinking and started life anew.

I am really happy now. Even though we still have not got recognition, we have done a lot to improve our situation. We have got a map. We have started dialogues with the government. Even in Mpoa we have managed to stop the takeover of land. It is true we still have problems with the transmigrants but I am very happy with the gains we have made.



Apa Lisna has found new hope

I press the point a bit. How will the Wana get their lands secured if the *Perda* is stuck? Badri and Apa Lisna agree that this is a challenge but express the hope that after the new elections they can re-engage with the members of the local legislatures to reassert their case. Hmmmm, maybe so, I think, but it will take quite a push to convince enough of them.



Indo Wis, Apa Wis' wife. Although all Wana have their own personal names parents tend to be known as the mother or father of their named child

Facing the future: rethinking Wana politics?

It rains heavily in the night with thunder echoing in the valleys and lightening flashing to reveal the mountain tops around. Afterwards and during the night, wet cool clouds flow in through open sides of the house. In the dawn, the sun rises through the mists which stream upwards off the hill tops in great coils and shreds.



Reflecting on the way forwards

Apa Wis comes to say goodbye as we prepare to depart. I say I want to have a last conversation with him about my impressions, so we settle by the fireside while munching plantains roasted on the coals. I can now see, I explain, how the Wana lands are being taken over bit by bit. Mining is coming in from the north, oil and gas

to the south, nature reserves hem them to the west, transmigration is still expanding in their central valleys and, who knows, maybe next it will be oil palm. Underlying this is the lack of legal recognition, while the local legislative act they have been pushing for seems to be stuck. What response do the Wana have to this challenge? Apa Wis agrees that the situation is troubling.

I explain that I was reading the American anthropologist's book in the night,²⁰ and based on Dutch accounts she recounts how the Wana had got caught up in the trade networks controlled by the coastal sultanates during the late 19th century. At that time, the Wana had responded by developing their own hierarchy of chiefs, *makole* and *basal*, who while they had exploited their own people to advance their personal positions may also have protected the Wana against worse depredations. So we could see that the Wana social system was both flexible and responsive and could group separate *lipu* together. If you look at the history of the indigenous peoples' movement in the Americas or in the Philippines, I said, you can see that the people there only got their lands in the end by strong mobilisation, which often meant creating their own, new organisations. In the Amazon, this process took 40 years and is still ongoing but substantial gains have been made. The Wana now face a similar challenge, but as every people is different I could not say what was the best way forwards for them.

Apa Wis, who, I had already learned, keeps his own counsel, is quiet and thoughtful in reaction to this. After some reflection, he agrees that a stronger response is needed but that the people do not want to revive the old chiefdoms. At the same time they do recognise that they need to organise above the level of the *lipu*. With the help of YMP, there are now meetings among the communities of the three administrative districts, but they have not yet made a decision about the way forwards together. As we say goodbye Apa Wis says he is really happy to have had this visit and that he hopes I will return soon. Such visits are important, he says, as they help the Wana feel they are not alone with their problems. When I come back, he says, he hopes to have an answer to the question I have posed.



Endnotes:

- ¹ The language is referred to as Ta'a as speakers use the word Ta'a instead of Tidak to say 'no'.
- ² I would like to take this opportunity to thank the YMP team for facilitating my visit. First to Azmi Siradjudin for inviting me; to Nasution Camang for making it possible; to Amran Tambaru for setting up my work plan; to Badri for accompanying me; to Wiwi for helping me organise; to Jaka for hosting me in Palu; to Sandi for all the logistical support; and to all the rest of the team for a multitude of kindnesses and goods spirits.
- ³ Carmel Budiardjo, 1986, The Politics of Transmigration. *The Ecologist* 16 (2/3):111-116.
- ⁴ For detailed studies of the US role in the so-called PEMESTA movement see: Audrey R. Kahin and George McT. Kahin, 1995, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: the Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debacle in Indonesia*. The New Press, New York; Baskara T. Wardaya, 2007, *Cold War Shadow: United States Policy Towards Indonesia 1953-1963*, Galang Press, Yogyakarta.
- ⁵ www.ymp.or.id
- ⁶ James F. Warren, 1986 (republished 2001), *Sulu Zone, 1768-1898. The Dynamics of External Trade, Slavery, & Ethnicity in the Transformation of a Southeast Asian Maritime State*, Singapore University Press, Singapore.
- ⁷ Terance William Bigalke, 2005, *Tana Toraja: a Social History of an Indonesian People*. Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore University Press, Singapore.
- ⁸ Marcus Colchester, 1986, Unity and Diversity: Indonesian policy towards tribal peoples. *The Ecologist* 16 (2/3):61-70; Marcus Colchester, Martua Sirait and Boedhi Wijardjo, 2003, *The Application of FSC Principles 2 & 3 in Indonesia: Obstacles and Possibilities*. WALHI and AMAN, Jakarta.
- ⁹ Jane Monnig Atkinson, 1989, *The Art and Politics of Wana Shamanship*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
- ¹⁰ Marcus Colchester, 1986, The Struggle for Land: tribal peoples in the face of the Transmigration Programme. *The Ecologist* 16 (2/3):89-98.
- ¹¹ Nasution Camang, 2002, *Tau Taa Wana Bulang: bergerak untuk berdaya*, YMP and Rainforest Foundation Norway, Palu.
- ¹² Carol Yong and Lili Hasanuddin, 2009, *An Evaluation of Yayasan Merah Putih (YMP)*, Report for Rainforest Foundation Norway.
- ¹³ PKLH, Fakultas Pertanian, University Tadulako, 2008, *Eksekutif Summary: Rencana Pembangunan Kawasan Transmigrasi Uetangko SP-1 Dan SP-2 di Kecamatan Ulubongka Kabupaten Tojo Una Una*, Pemerintah Kabupaten Tojo Una-Una, Dinas Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi, Ampana; PKLH, Fakultas Pertanian, University Tadulako, 2008, *Rencana Pengelolaan Lingkungan (RKL): Rencana Pembangunan Kawasan Transmigrasi Uetangko SP-1 Dan SP-2 di Kecamatan Ulubongka Kabupaten Tojo Una Una*, Pemerintah Kabupaten Tojo Una-Una, Dinas Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi, Ampana; PKLH, Fakultas Pertanian, University Tadulako, 2008, *Rencana Pemantauan Lingkungan (RPL): Rencana Pembangunan Kawasan Transmigrasi Uetangko SP-1 Dan SP-2 di Kecamatan Ulubongka Kabupaten Tojo Una Una*, Pemerintah Kabupaten Tojo Una-Una, Dinas Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi, Ampana.
- ¹⁴ Pemerintah Kabupaten Tojo Una-Una, Dinas Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi, 2006, *Strategi Daerah Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal (Strada PDT) Kabupaten Tojo Una-Una 2007-2009*, Ampana.
- ¹⁵ PT Artha Prima Nickelindo, 2008, *Dokumen Analisis Dampak Lingkungan (ANDAL) : Rencana Penambangan dan Pengelolaan Bijih Nikel di Kecamatan Ampana*
- ¹⁶ PT Trinusa Aneka Tambang, 2008, *Analisis Dampak Lingkungan (ANDAL): Pertambangan Bijih Besi dan Mineral. Ikutan di Kecamatan Tojo, Kabupaten Tojo Una-una, Propinsi Sulawesi Tengah*, Ampana.
- ¹⁷ PT Ina International Company, 2008, *Analisis Dampak Lingkungan (ANDAL): Pertambangan di Kabupaten Tojo Una-una*, Ampana.
- ¹⁸ There are two kinds of damar resin trees in the Wana area. The most common, *Agathis* spp., is quite plenteous. The other more valuable type, *Shorea* spp., referred to as *silo* by the Wana, is less common and its resin is used by the Wana for candles. Both types of resin are sold commercially for making paints, varnishes and cosmetics.
- ¹⁹ For details see Nasution Camang op. cit. note 10 and Yong and Hasanuddin op. cit. note 11.
- ²⁰ Atkinson op. cit. note 8 and A. C. Kruyt, 1930, De To Wana op Oost Celebes, *Tijdschrift voor Indische taal-, land- en volkenkunde* 70:398-625, cited in same.