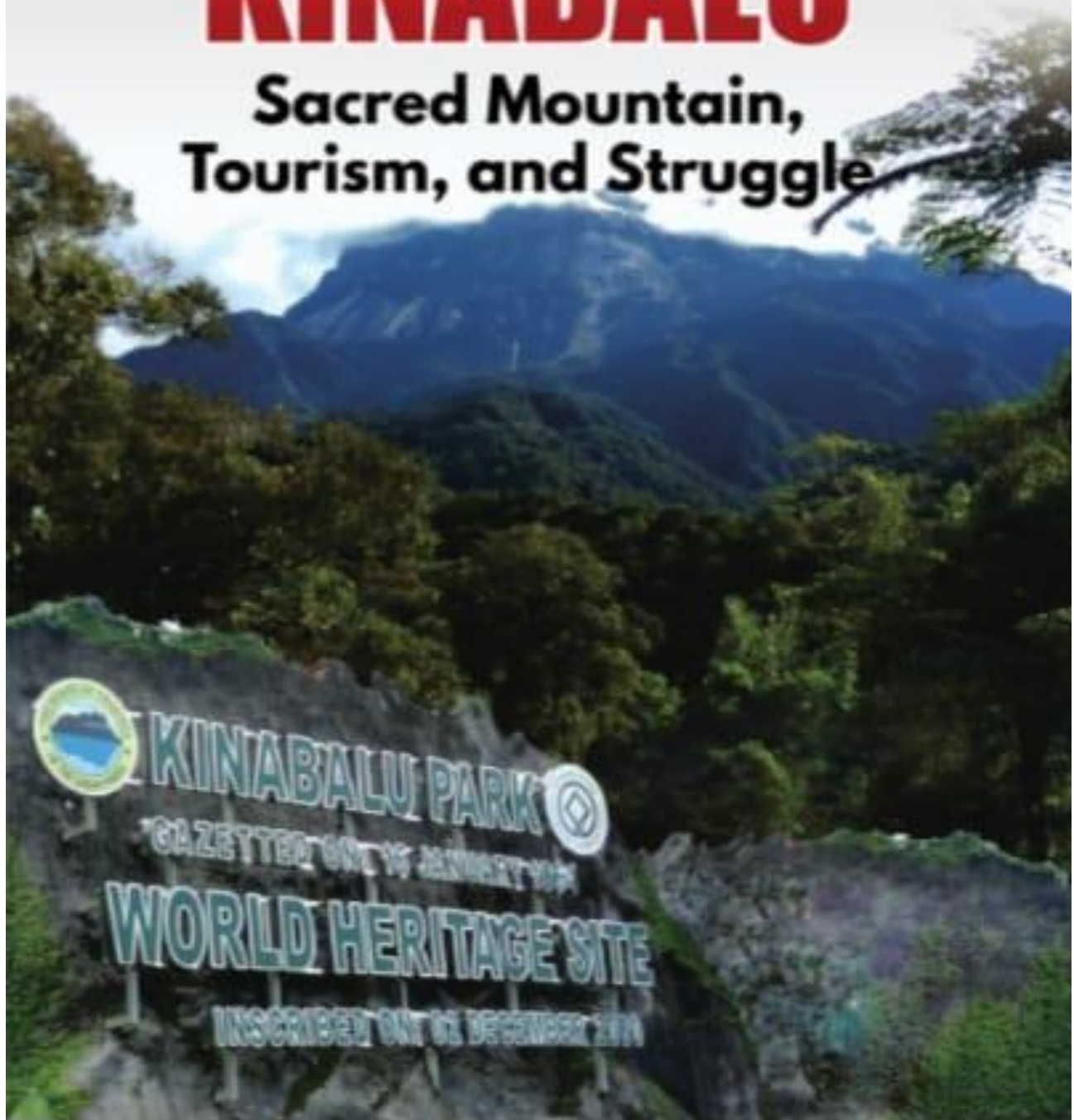


**Nur Widiyanto**

# **KINABALU**

**Sacred Mountain,  
Tourism, and Struggle**



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**Kinabalu:**  
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## FOREWORD

**I**ndigenous people have become one of the most haunting figures to wildly imagine since a few decades ago, when I was still studying at junior high school in Magelang, Central Java. My mother was a teacher, and she often brought me some books about the life of Ainu in Japan, Massai warriors in Africa, Korowai in Papua and the most attractive ones; Native American heroes from the school library. It was the first time I heard the great names of Geronimo, Sitting Bull, Black Hawk and their struggle for the native people, and ancestral land. A few years later, one of my families brought me an Indonesian Magazine which introduced me to another native American hero, Rigobertha Menchu who was given Nobel Price in 1992 for her effort to protect indigenous communities and tropical rain forests in Guatemala. My first impression to the indigenous people was, on the one hand, they were people living on untouchable places, wearing traditional clothes with a romantic eco-friendly lifestyle as the fruit of long-time harmonious adaptation to their remote environment. However, on the other, discussing indigenous communities are also closely connected to the fact that they are one of the most neglected and marginalized groups across the globe, and



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## CHAPTER I.

### THE DECADES OF MISERY

A few past decades have been often stated as “the decades of sorrow” for many marginalised groups across the globe due to the impact of policies of developing countries in managing their natural and cultural resources (Rich,1999). This turning policy favouring economic development has directly triggered the exclusion of minority groups living in the rich lands and determined the emergence of movements to respond to various socio-cultural and ecological impacts. Throughout the idea of supporting economic growth, multiple policies have ruined millions of hectares of forest areas, particularly in developing countries. In these circumstances, socio-ecological crises have been triggered by the interest of a few elite economic groups; however, the impacts affect the most impoverished people, marginalised groups and the most pristine ecosystems in many regions. Ironically, the affected people include the indigenous communities who have been conducting a harmonious balance with the environment for decades (Clay in Gedicks,



## CHAPTER II.

# IDENTITY AND CULTURAL MOVEMENT

**T**he connection between the movement to strengthen cultural and religious identity by engaging with tourism is quite rare to study. Hefner (1985) provides the example of how the hilly society, the people of Tengger in East Java, Indonesia has produced a hybrid identity between the native Tenggerese tradition and Islamic tradition as their cultural adaptations toward the predominantly Muslim society. Thus, cultural practices and indigenous beliefs are inseparable. Many social science scholars have partially given attention to each area rather than connecting each other, including the study of the Dusun group in Sabah. It can be understood because tourism has become one of the popular phenomena and has also been incarnated into a discourse that has gotten all of the attention as it has become the trigger, and determining factor for social change during the last few decades. During the 1970s, the people of Ainu in Japan used tourism activities; including crafts for tourists and cultural tourism by promoting Ainu's mythology, rituals and history as the central process in reconstructing Ainu's identity (Friedman, 2000). It



## CHAPTER III.

### DUSUN: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

**S**outheast Asia is commonly considered a part of the greater Asian traditions and exists as a contentious historical and cultural space. Throughout history, we have witnessed the emergence of various cultures and subcultures, including hybrid forms after the encounter of the cultures of Indian, Chinese, Islam and Western. In the religious discourse, religious pluralism has often been located in the Asian tradition (Reid, 2014). Furthermore, Reid puts Asia as the great laboratory of religion where different ritual practices co-existed, and appear to have learned from each other and these religious communities have survived over a thousand years as minorities distinct from their neighbours. Moreover, there were various attempts to impose religious uniformity through military and political power, however, these were surprisingly considered unsuccessful and short-lived.

Part of these 'external powers' are several Semitic (world) religions that have made their way to Southeast Asia by bringing the idea of crusade, until they finally adjusted to Asian realities (2014: 50). The





## CHAPTER IV.

### RELIGIOUS DYNAMIC OF THE DUSUN

**A**s it has been previously discussed, indigenous religions are the majority of the world's religions. However, the growth of world religions has abandoned or destroyed these local-scale religions. Expansion or "*dakwah*" is not regarded as a trait of the Indigenous religion, making these beliefs limited in certain areas, rainforests or small villages. It also leads every Indigenous community practising the beliefs to develop a strong connection to the land as the main source of the worldview itself. In many cases, the connection with the land has been denied by government policies, such as by the enactment of the national park. It has been occurred to the belief of Momolianism in Bundu Tuhan, Sabah as these beliefs are also the fruit of various dynamics along their history as societies, including its encounter with external forces. Moreover, nowadays, these beliefs are tried to be revived as an alternative strategy to obtain recognition over cultural identity and ancestral land.



## CHAPTER V.

### DRAMATURGY OF RESISTANCE

According to Quijano (2000), globalization is connected to the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and colonial/modern Euro-centered capitalism as a new global power. One fruit of this model of power is the social classification of the world's population through the idea of race as a mental construction of colonial domination. Therefore, this globally hegemonic power supports an element of colonization. When Quijano's argument is brought to the Southeast's Asia context it is connected to the fact that Euro-centrism is one of the root of discrimination toward indigenous communities. It can be traced from the Dutch colonization especially in Indonesian archipelago, when racially people were divided into several different categories; Europeans, foreign oriental (Arabic, Chinese) and *bumiputera*. This structure was an articulation of two different perspectives; *firstly*, to maintain certain social and economic superiority over the local people, and *secondly*, on the contrary were more closely to respecting and recognizing indigenous law (Moniaga,



## CHAPTER V.

### DENIED FROM THE ANCESTRAL LAND

“We do not want the mountain back. It is a heritage for the world, and for that, we are proud and happy to share this mountain to everyone. We just would like to have one day to return to the mountain, each year, we want to have one day just for our communities to make a pilgrimage. A day when no one else will be allowed to climb the mountain, a day just for our people.”<sup>42</sup>

The statement was declared by an elder Dusun people from Bundu Tuhan in the middle of 2010, during the process of officially demanding back the local Dusun access to the sacred mountain, Kinabalu. A group of people living in the area nearby the mountain, especially from Bundu Tuhan and Kiau villages led by Joseph Sariman and Tambunan Asang from Kiau submitted a letter for the Kinabalu Park authority, in order to get at least one day of access for freely climbing to

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42 [www.global-diversity.org/news/southeast-asia/dusun-communities-kinabalu-plan-return-sacred-site](http://www.global-diversity.org/news/southeast-asia/dusun-communities-kinabalu-plan-return-sacred-site), accessed on January 28, 2016.



## CHAPTER VII.

# TOURISM; NEW ARENA OF STRUGGLE

### Tourism and Globalization

**T**his chapter focuses on connecting tourism development, including what has been initiated by the Dusun community in Bundu Tuhan to strengthen cultural identity and access to Mount Kinabalu as the central of their cultural practices. The development of global tourism is strongly connected to globalization which brought the elimination of barriers; economic, cultural and political, and the free flow of people, goods, capital, information, communication and lifestyle on a worldwide scale (Cohen, 2013). When tourism is defined as an activity consisting of three elements; (a) the movement of travellers to a particular place, (b) temporary nature in the area visited for pleasure and (c) not connected to permanent activities (Page, 2003), therefore, tourism is considered as the macro global forces and one effective vehicle for the flows as previously described (Bhaba, 1994; Appadurai, 1996). Longchar (2014) emphasizes that commercial-oriented tourism as the instrument of globalization



## CHAPTER VIII.

### HETEROTOPIC TOURISM: A NEW PATH OF RESISTANCE

Referring to Foucault, *heterotopias* is the notion of a spatial and diffused spirit which exist in many forms and places, representing the idealization of certain real places. Moreover, *heterotopias* represent the society itself in a perfected form, with areal places as the mirror of the utopias which are unreal. Therefore, *heterotopias* facilitate the creation of a space of illusion dreamed by every society into another real place. Thus, according to Foucault, it is located on “other place”. Different from Foucault, Lefebvre prefers to locate *heterotopias* as the product, developed and located within the society. It could be triggered by the process of undermining the existence of certain cultural identities by the domination of particular hegemonic powers. Therefore, according to Lefebvre, the creation and development of *heterotopia* is strongly connected to the social actions taken by certain communities to maintain cultural existence. Thus, a *heterotopia* is made up of social actions, and the product of these actions (Potter, 2017: 116).



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE NEWLY CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY

**I**n the middle of 2016 I had an opportunity to directly visit Sabah for the first time. My Kadazan's friend, Tanya Tangit offered to take me to Ranau District, nearby Mount Kinabalu. Tanya is an activist of Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA) which was obligated to handle a local KDCA meeting to prepare the state-level Kaamatan, at the Nunuk Ragang monument. She offered me to join the meeting before visiting Bundu Tuhan and then would drop me to one lodge at Kampung Cinta Mata, Kundasang. Realizing that it would be relevant to my study, I straightforwardly agreed. Having no experience in visiting the hinterland area of Sabah before, I had the expectation of meeting an exotic group and the 'traditional' people; those who are living in the rural areas and still preserving the use of their local language, wearing traditional clothes, going to the meeting venue on foot and so forth, as I had the portrayal of the people of Kasepuhan Ciptagelar in West Java in my mind.



## EPILOG

**B**orrowing James Scott (2010), the basic idea of this study is the effort of people from the ‘world of peripheries’ represented by Bundu Tuhan Dusun’s community in preserving their cultural identity. In the last few decades, this groups have been denied from the right to practice their local beliefs and neglected from their ancestral land by the enactment of national park to serve both the environmental campaign and tourism development. Interestingly, nowadays these groups arrive at the point to engage with tourism itself to obtain the bigger recognition over their cultural practices rooted in Momolianism. Taking tourism as its avenue, both groups resist to the colonial power, the modern state and the dominant role of the world religions. The long story of resistances represents the idea that the oppressed groups are not powerless in dealing with external forces; conversely they have produced hidden productivity in several ways, including by engaging with tourism.

Dusun community in Bundu Tuhan, Sabah, Malaysia share a similar story as they should struggle to maintain their cultural connection to the sacred Mount Kinabalu after the government established the area to be a state’s park in 1964. The role of Mount Kinabalu is as central sources for the Dusun’s identity and its cultural practices rooted in the



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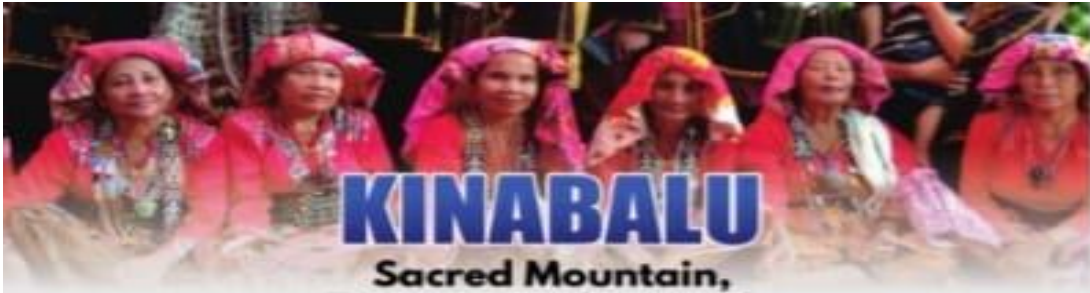


## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Nur Widiyanto** is a traveller, football addict, seafood lover and lecturer at Ambarrukmo Tourism Institute of Yogyakarta. He graduated from the Department of Cultural Anthropology, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta for his master's and PhD in Inter-Religious & Cultural Studies also from Gadjah Mada University. In the past years, he has conducted a series of research on the local

community and tourism development in Indonesia (West Java), Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak) and Thailand (Phuket) supported by the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS), The Institute of Thai Studies and The Indonesian Ministry of Higher Education (2017-2020). Parts of his research have been presented in Yogyakarta, Leiden, Bangkok, Seoul, Manila and Kuala Lumpur. Recently he also conducted a year of research projects entitled; *Tourism and The Better Cultural Understanding between the Japanese and Southeast Asian* conducted in Penang, Bali and Hokkaido, Japan funded by The Sumitomo Foundation (2021-2022) and a short fieldwork on Venice Lagoon and Over Tourism in Venice



# KINABALU

## Sacred Mountain, Tourism, and Struggle

**T**his book focuses on the struggle of a Dusun group in Bundu Tuhan, Sabah, Malaysia to strengthen their cultural identity and access to the customary land; Mount Kinabalu. This group is a part of the 'hilly people' having cultural distinctiveness from the dominant groups living in the lowland and urban areas. Although already converted to world religions such as Christianity and Islam, they preserve cultural practices rooted in an indigenous belief inherited from their ancestors. Interestingly, the sacred mountain as the primary source of their cultural pattern is also considered a valuable tourism resource in the form of Kinabalu Park.

This book tries to reveal the dynamic in the relationship between cultural practices rooted in *Momolianism*, state park policies and tourism development in the area of Mount Kinabalu within people's daily lives. Though the mainstream discourse tends to locate tourism as a destructive force, however, this book views that engaging with tourism is also a part of daily tactics to respond to external forces through *heterotopic* tourism, borrowing Foucault and Lefebvre. In this case, Dusun group in Bundu Tuhan is not merely passive; conversely, they productively create their responses in their daily life. Therefore, this book is useful for those who are interested in indigenous community's issues in Borneo and Southeast Asia, tourism and national park management, and the existence of customary beliefs in the contemporary world.



**SMATA KATA**  
INSPIRASI  
KEMERDEKAAN  
KEMAJUAN

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