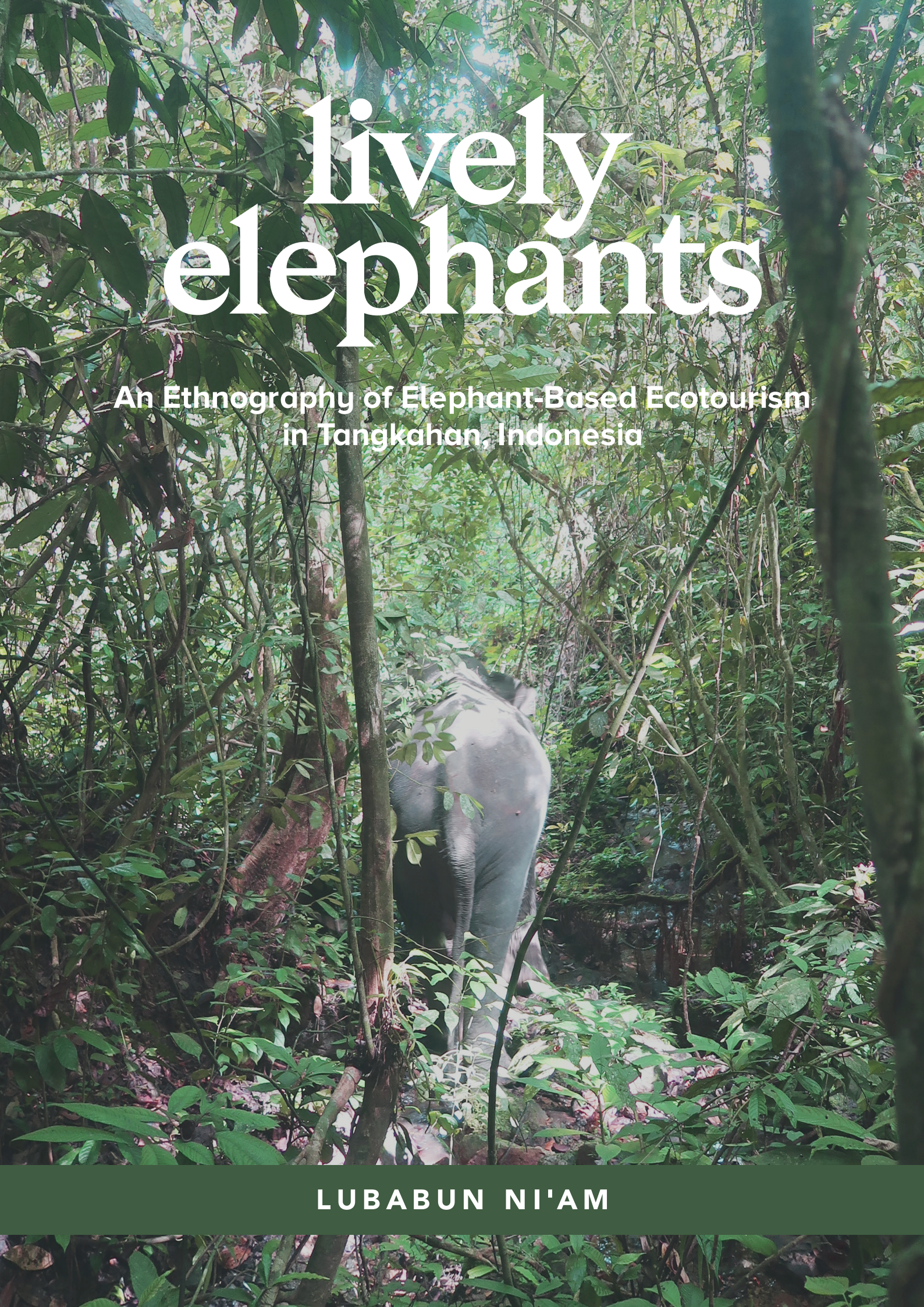

lively elephants

An Ethnography of Elephant-Based Ecotourism in Tangkahan, Indonesia

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Lively Elephants:
An Ethnography of Elephant-Based Ecotourism in Tangkahan, Indonesia

MSc Thesis Rural Sociology (RSO-80436)
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Contents

Figures and Table

Abbreviations

AsESG	Asian Elephant Specialist Group
CRU(s)	Conservation Response Unit(s)
CTO	Community Tour Operator
ECC	Elephant Conservation Centre
ETC(s)	Elephant Training Centre(s)
FFI	Fauna & Flora International
GLNP	Gunung Leuser National Park
INDECON	Indonesia Ecotourism Network
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
NGO(s)	non-governmental organization(s)
PLG	*Pusat Latihan Gajah* or Elephant Training Centre
SECP	Sumatran Elephant Conservation Programme
SSC	Species Survival Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US Congress	United States Congress
USFWS	United States Fish and Wildlife Services
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Abstract

Various programmes have come to orient and set up the foundation for rural livelihoods by reinforcing the idea of conservation and the commodification of nature at once. However, conservation actors have often attempted to impose an apolitical approach to development, not least in the case of Tangkahan, Indonesia, where elephant-based ecotourism has become the prominent attraction. This research is held to understand the commodification of captive elephants for ecotourism by taking an alternative path of investigation from the side of captive elephants. It does so by utilizing the theorization around the intersection between capitalism and conservation, as well as the conceptualisation of lively commodities. This thesis concludes that a particular set of conservation strategies has been deployed in Tangkahan in order to incorporate captive elephants and mahouts under the neoliberal conservation agenda. Moreover, elephant-based ecotourism has ultimately paved the way for the emergence of captive elephants as lively commodities in which encounter value is exploited through the moments of bodily interaction. The incorporation of captive elephants in ecotourism constitutes a transformative moment for captive elephants to be more productive entities by attributing monetary value to their liveliness as living beings. Through this research, I have attempted to contribute to the broader debate on the commodification of nature under the contemporary system of capitalism, with particular reference to elephant-based ecotourism.

Keywords: *elephant-based ecotourism, neoliberal conservation, commodification of nature*

1 Introduction

The day of my arrival in Tangkahan, my fieldwork site for this research, coincided with a training session on honeybee farming organized by the Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP) Office in Sumatra, Indonesia. The park invited a successful honeybee farmer to give lectures and workshops about honeybee farming over two consecutive days to the participants, which consisted of around twenty local men from Tangkahan. In the opening session, one of the park officials said that the purpose of the training was to open up a new livelihood opportunity outside of tourism-related activities, and one which did not involve destroying the forest through activities such as logging, hunting, or land encroachment. Another official said that the training aimed to change local perception regarding the forest; that the park as a conservation area has successfully provided real contributions for local well-being. Even though during my stay I could not see any continuation of honeybee farming activities, this does not mean that the participants got nothing. I witnessed that they engaged in the lectures and performed the techniques of honeybee farming excellently. After all, they got food and snacks as well as per diem for their participation. This workshop palpably exemplifies an endless effort to show that the conservation agenda is not a passive and non-productive pathway in terms of economic production. Through the case of the honeybee farming workshop, I would like to start the debate by highlighting the way in which local community of Tangkahan embraces the idea of conservation that has been continuously brought upon them through various programmes. The most prominent of these, which first came to orient and set up the foundation of their livelihood by reinforcing the idea of conservation and the commodification of nature at once, is elephant-based ecotourism. This is the problem we are going to discuss throughout this document.

1.1 Problem Statement

Ecotourism has been widely recognized, is infamous even, as "all manner of activities that generally endeavour to *sell* an encounter with 'nature'" (Fletcher 2018, 591—emphasis added). To illustrate, one of Sumatra's ecotourism portals promotes a list of "what to see & to do" in Tangkahan which can be categorised as selling encounters with nature: elephant riding, swimming and tubing, jungle trekking, and experiencing village life.[1] Here, elephant riding, or elephant-based activities in general, are promoted as the first and in fact the most prominent attraction. This research is devoted to further investigating the political ecology of elephant-based ecotourism in the area. Looking into the commodification of captive elephants in the broader context of ecotourism and forest conservation, this research accordingly follows a particular path of understanding political ecology as a perspective to examine how nature, particularly nonhuman animals, come to bear capitalist value (Collard and Dempsey 2017, 78). Robbins (2012) observed that scholars tend

[1] See http://www.sumatraecotourism.com/tangkahan/whattosee.html. Last accessed at September 30, 2018.

to represent political ecology as an alternative to apolitical ecology. The definition of political ecology above is, therefore, developed to contend with the apolitical approach to development that conservation actors have often attempted to impose, as seen in the historical trajectory of Tangkahan ecotourism.

As an ecotourism site, Tangkahan has been framed in grey literatures as a singular portrait (INDECON 2004; 2007). Readers are encouraged to be impressed by the background story of Tangkahan as an area that previously served as a transit point for logs traveling out of the forest. Residents of Tangkahan used to work as illegal loggers, and their activities are charged as the cause of forest destruction (INDECON 2003), although the problem of forest degradation across Sumatra and Indonesia in general is much more complex and not merely due to illegal logging by local people (Stoler 1995; Tacconi 2012). However, what makes the story quite dramatic is that the illegal loggers have found an alternative, non-destructive and less risky way of earning a living through ecotourism. The GLNP Office even granted the local community part of the national park areas for ecotourism and conservation purposes. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in the Netherlands claims that Tangkahan is an example of how community development and conservation can go hand in hand (Olsder and van der Donk 2006). In short, Tangkahan has gained an increasing reputation as one of the "best practices" of community-based conservation through ecotourism, and this success is expected to be replicated in other places across Indonesia (Wiratno 2013). Ecotourism has maintained its status as one of the buzzwords in development debate (Krüger 2005).

However, ecotourism—what Mowforth and Munt (2016, 2) refer as "a now not-so-new form of tourism"—also appears as a promising economic sector in Third World countries, including Indonesia. For this country, tourism has increasingly gained a significant position, now ranking as the second highest foreign exchange earner after palm oil, and the quest to hold first place seems to be boosted (*Indonesia Investments* 2018). As of September 2017, foreign exchange earnings from foreign tourist arrivals were recorded at roughly US$ 14.0 billion, while palm oil reached approximately US$ 17.7 billion (*Indonesia Investments* 2017). Nevertheless, amidst the increasing concern over the environmental impacts of palm oil consumption (see Barthel et al. 2018), ecotourism can thus be understood as what some scholars argue as "fixes" to the contradictions of capitalism (Fletcher and Neves 2012). Two fixes are relevant to be presented here. Firstly, the environmental fix. With its premise to support conservation agendas while improving local livelihoods, ecotourism offers an environmental fix for the barrier to accumulate capital as a result of ecological degradation. Secondly, the psychological fix. In this sense, ecotourism is a prominent example of environmental commodification (Castree 2003, 285) by selling encounters with nonhuman natures from which humans have been alienated. Elephant-based ecotourism is very much part of this, but the current critical question on the commodification of captive elephants for ecotourism is, echoing Castree (2003, 277), "what kind of characteristics do things take-on when they become commodities?"

Within critical social science, primarily by political ecology enthusiasts, elephants have stolen the show. Duffy (2014; 2015) and Duffy and Moore (2010), for instance, have explored elephant-based tourism in Thailand and Botswana. Others have investigated the rubric of human and Asian elephant relations—what Locke (2013) suggests as ethnoelephantology—across countries traditionally known as Asian elephant habitat, such as India (Barua 2016; 2017; Münster 2016), Nepal (Locke 2017), Sri Lanka (Lorimer 2010), and Cambodia (Erickson 2017). Drawing from forerunners, who look into dogs (Haraway 2008) and exotic pets (Collard and Dempsey 2013; Collard 2014), Barua (2016; 2017) has contributed by examining lions and elephants in India as lively commodities. Coupled with the theorization around the intersection between conservation and capitalism, the conceptualisation of lively commodities (Collard and Dempsey 2013; Collard 2014) is to be adopted for the under-analysed case of captive elephants (Csuti 2008; Riddle and Stremme 2011) of Leuser ecosystem, home of Sumatran elephants and other critically endangered animals (orangutans, rhinoceros, and tigers) (UNESCO Jakarta 2012). In short, despite the lack of attention within academia related to the political ecology of elephants in the context of ecotourism and conservation, the proposed study is needed to put on the table the more nuanced story of the lively commodification of the largest living land animal.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the problem statement and background elaborated above, the main question to be addressed in this research is:

How has the commodification of captive elephants for ecotourism as a neoliberal conservation practice been imposed and embraced in the case of Tangkahan?

To equip this research with an appropriate amount of data for the basis of analysis, the main question above is then divided into three sub-questions:

1. What is the main conservation agenda that has been introduced in Tangkahan? What are the conservation strategies deployed in realizing the intended agenda?
2. To what extend are captive elephants employed for ecotourism activities? How is the commodification of captive elephants managed in Tangkahan?
3. What kinds of mahoutship labour are required in taking care of captive elephants' needs?

1.3 Thesis Structure

This chapter has accomplished its task in presenting the problem statement and research questions of this research. The thesis will take the following structure. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 is devoted to describing the design, methods, and limits of this research. The findings of this research are stretched out into three parts: Chapter 4 elaborates on the conservation agenda and strategies deployed in Tangkahan

(sub-question #1), the pages between Chapter 4 and 5 tells the story of mahoutship custodial labour (sub-question #3), and Chapter 5 interrogates the employment of captive elephants in ecotourism activities and the commodification of captive elephants as it has been performed in Tangkahan (sub-question #2). The description of mahoutship custodial labour is inserted within the story, not in an individual chapter, because that particular information is considered important to know, but not necessarily relevant for the theoretical discussion of this thesis. The dialog between the findings chapters and the theoretical framework is held in Chapter 6. The discussion part is meant to respond to the problem statement I have presented above and technically serves as my elaboration in answering the main research question. I end this report by providing concluding passages in Chapter 7.

2 Theoretical Frameworks

2.1 Conservation and Capitalism

Critical endeavours in theorizing contemporary practice of conservation have put a high degree of attention on its intersection with capitalism. Here, capitalism is considered as the main driver of the deepening of environmental crisis throughout the world, including in the form of issues such as forest degradation and fragmentation or wildlife extinction. Büscher and Arsel (2012, 130) argue that environmental crisis as an inherent characteristic of capitalism could be traced back to the nature of capital itself as, citing Marx, fundamentally "value in process". For Marx, capital "comes out of circulation, enters into it again, preserves and multiplies itself within circulation, emerges from it with an increased size, and starts the same cycle again and again" (via Büscher and Arsel 2012, 130). Conservation is, hence, seen as an antithesis to the dominant ongoing system of capitalism. Moving against this normative view of what conservation is supposed to be, critical scholars have devoted their thoughts to unveil another thesis: conservation is often compatible with capitalism (Brockington 2017; Brockington and Duffy 2010; Büscher et al. 2012). The endless trend of the commodification of nature, articulated through numerous conservation projects, has starkly shown that conservation's compatibility with capitalism exists through a process of attributing monetary value in order to save nature (McAfee 1999).

Recently, the term of neoliberal conservation has stolen spaces of academic papers. Igoe and Brockington (2007), unfortunately, loosely define neoliberal conservation as "viewing conservation through a neoliberal lens." Indeed, the conceptualization of neoliberal conservation is valuable in order to contextualize the discussion around conservation within neoliberal political economic governance that has infiltrated even the remotest regions of the world since the 1970s (Harvey 2005). However, what is neoliberalism? To understand what neoliberal conservation is, we must first comprehend neoliberalism. Büscher et al. (2012, 5) propose a useful way to see neoliberalism as "a *political ideology* that aims to subject political, social, and ecological affairs to capitalist market dynamics" (emphasis original). Defining neoliberalism in a Foucauldian fashion like that of Büscher et al. (2012)'s helps us to make sense of neoliberal or neoliberalism as a process rather than a fixed end-state; it is "a *process* of market-driven social and spatial transformation" (Brenner and Theodore 2007, 153). The neoliberalization of nature, hence, might be characterized as the process of, as Igoe and Brockington (2007) put it, "the reregulation of nature through forms of commodification." Here, commodification serves as the mechanism through which capitalism performs as a processual system of selling nature. Büscher et al. (2012)'s call for the tendency of capitalist expansion is then crucial to note. They remind us that "environmental (and other) crises increasingly are themselves opportunities for capitalist expansion," and the role of conservation at that moment when capitalist expansion is aggressively underway is "to entrain nature to capitalism" (Büscher et al. 2012, 7).

Thus far, there is no doubt to say that, under neoliberal conservation, nature serves as what Büscher and Fletcher (2015, 273) have termed as accumulation by conservation, defined as "a mode of accumulation that takes the negative environmental contradictions of contemporary capitalism as its departure for a newfound 'sustainable' model of accumulation for the future." Ecotourism might be put on the table as one of the manifold articulations of the accumulation strategy under neoliberal conservation. Igoe and Brockington (2007, 434) have stated that the promise derived from the development of ecotourism is "to promote environmental consciousness for Western consumers by encouraging them to fall in love with the environment through direct connections to it." Let alone, people of Southern countries today are grappling on the ground to transform their surrounding environments into commodities for the fulfilment of a couple of purposes (biodiversity, rural livelihood, consumers' pleasure, and so on) at once, so everybody can win (government, NGOs, consumers, villagers, and other actors involved across different layers). Sodikoff (2012, 7) then added an argument to take questions of labour into account, thereby revealing "the effects of hierarchy, differential compensation, resistance, and acquiescence" on the value production of nature. For her, the idea of conservation "has only shrouded the contributions of subaltern workers who have prepared the grounds for Westerners' romanticization, exploitation, discovery, and salvation of tropical wilderness" (Sodikoff 2012, 8). In this thesis, labour has commanded central attention, mainly because elephant-based ecotourism entails the companionship of humans and nonhuman elephants. Those labour forces have been incorporated in ecotourism ventures to enliven the productive role of conservation as a means for economic growth and enhancing rural livelihoods.

We now turn to the application of neoliberal conservation. It is echoed elsewhere that the process of neoliberalization is unevenly applied across different places (see, for instance, Brockington and Duffy 2010). Planetary in terms of scale, but that was exactly the point in explaining the variegated versions of neoliberal conservation in practice. As Roth and Dressler (2012, 364) have observed: "grounded empirical details often remain missing or disconnected from the discussion of how, when and why markets 'neoliberalize' nature, or empirical details are examined in an *a priori* fashion." They have pointed out that the practice of neoliberal conservation is not always easily identified from below as a neoliberal type of conservation. They have also shed light on an important point about the continuity of market-based governance in conservation practice across different periods of time, even before the triumphalism of neoliberal regime (Roth and Dressler 2012). Let alone, neoliberalism itself constitutes a particular political economic governance and thoughts, as Harvey (2005) has examined, and accordingly neoliberalization of nature entails a set of particular neoliberal features (deregulation, reregulation, privatization, marketization, etc.) as Castree (2008a; 2008b) has revealed. On the basis of all those, Roth and Dressler (2012, 364) further highlight the importance of critically engaging on "the ways in which markets 'neoliberalize' nature, humans, and nonhuman species in an effort to 'save' all three" through an analysis of empirical data.

Obviously, conservation projects in play recently largely appeared in the form of new hybrid governance arrangements (Brockington and Duffy 2010), even on territorialized protected areas such as national parks (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995). In many parts of the world, it is increasingly common to find alliances of seemingly ideologically different actors in sustaining conservation projects, encompassing the government, community institutions, corporations, or conservation NGOs. For the last mentioned actors, Brockington (2017, 8) has indicated, they are "the vanguard of neoliberal conservation" that might be playing the role as "entrepreneurs and restless innovators" and "behave very like the capitalists who are endlessly and energetically seeking new opportunities to create profit." Depicting the behaviour of conservation NGOs under the influence of capitalism is not necessarily a calling for the revitalisation of NGOs, as the emergence of developmentalist NGOs has been informed by the globalizing of the neoliberal regime (Holmes 2011). Being interlinked through cooperation with the state body and profit-making enterprises, NGOs build a network that is important to take on board. All the related actors are "rhetorically united by neoliberal ideologies" and "profoundly alter the lives of rural people" (Igoe and Brockington 2007, 432) in targeted areas such as Tangkahan, where the venture of lively commodification has been continuously reinforced.

2.2 Lively Commodities and Encounter Value

The concept of lively commodities, according to Collard and Dempsey (2013, 2684), is used to describe "live commodities whose capitalist value is derived from their *status as living beings*" (emphasis original). The definition implies that dead commodities do not fall into this category. Similarly, all kind of commodities derived from living beings that are no longer alive, such as milk or meats produced by cows and fruits or vegetables yielded by trees or plants, are not part of the subjects discussed. Nevertheless, living beings by themselves are not lively commodities. As Watts (2009, 99) argues, there are indeed several things that are traded as commodities but not intentionally produced to be so, such as labour. In our discussion here, a central character to be considered is their liveliness, meaning: "active demonstrations of being full of life" (Collard 2014, 153). Collard (2014, 156) illustrates from her study of exotic pets, they can be "a parrot perched on its owner's shoulder that can talk and ruffle its colourful feathers, or a nimble-fingered monkey in a diaper and dress that can steal a lick off its owner's ice cream cone." The list, of course, might include dogs (Haraway 2008), lions (Barua 2016; 2017), elephants (Barua 2016), whales (Neves 2010), and penguins and sea lions (Bulbeck 2005).

Collard and Dempsey (2017, 79) assert that the biological aspect of life is central to lively commodities. The "vital or generative" qualities of living beings, particularly nonhumans, are the ones that have to be taken on board, "qualities that can produce capitalist value as long as *they remain alive*" (Collard and Dempsey 2013, 2684—emphasis original). It means that no values are produced in case the commodities somehow cease to live, whatever the causes are (killed, diseases, outbreaks, etc.). Here, Wadiwel (2018, 531) sees that a biopolitical process of making life or keeping alive is the point of attention in value production of lively commodities. Therefore, there is a certain form of life that can

generate capitalist value. According to Collard and Dempsey (2013, 2689), an animate or encounterable life is a form of life that predominantly enables lively commodities to be incorporated in the generation of capitalist value. Encounterability determines the commodification processes of nonhumans, but it is also produced through commodification processes (Collard and Dempsey 2013, 2685). In the end, liveliness is implicitly coming back and indeed worthwhile at least for two reasons. First, it helps us to distinguish between the concept of lively commodities and the similar concept of sentient commodities, as I discuss below. Second, it brings us to elaborate the concept of encounter value, an "under-analysed axis of lively capital" first introduced by Haraway (2008, 65).

The concept of sentient commodities is used by Wilkie (2010) in her study about livestock or farm animals. For her, the term is productive to depict the legal status dynamics of livestock and the fine line workers should negotiate in facing livestock as a commodity and a sentient being. For animals, to be a sentient being means it is "capable of being aware of its surroundings, of sensations in its own body, including pain, hunger, heat or cold and of emotions related to its sensations" (Turner 2006, 6). Like lively commodities, Wilkie (2017) also argues that sentient commodities bear dual functions; they are functional objects and sentient beings at once. In this sense, I agree with Collard (2014, 153) that sentient commodities can be considered lively commodities. What makes these two lives distinguishable is that the former is *bred to die* while the latter must *remain alive*. As Wilkie (2017) herself points out, sentient commodities are "a source and embodiment of ambiguity: they are 'lively commodities' who are bred to die." Additionally, Collard (2014, 153) asserts that the sentience of lively commodities is acknowledged "only insofar as it animates them as companions and not so far it would admit them into a category of beings that are not permitted to be killed, captured, made captive, and bought and sold."

Back to the discussion of lively commodities, as alluded above, the "capacity to be encountered – to be stroked, gazed upon, draped around one's neck" (Collard 2013, 13) constitutes the source of capitalist value. Haraway (2008), drawing on the readings of Marx's labour theory of value, advances the concept of encounter value to denominate such a capacity. For her, it is a trans-species encounter value because the encounters take place among "*subjects* of different biological species" (Haraway 2008, 46—emphasis original). It is all "about relationships among a motley array of lively beings" (Haraway 2008, 46). Haraway (2008, 46) introduces the concept in order to make sense of a particular relationship she observed in "the historically specific context of lively capital." Unlike Marx (1990) who perceives human labour exclusively in the process of value formation, Haraway (2008) believes that human labour is not the whole story in the context of capitalist production of contemporary society. As I read Haraway's *When Species Meet* (2008), she indeed criticizes Marx's tendency of human exceptionalism (Clark 2014), even though it does not undermine Marx's arguments by any means. Less in rigorously conceptualizing encounter value, rather she is more, in her words, "making a little headway" (Haraway 2008, 46) of the third partite of value by standing on Marx's shoulders. It is apparent when she demands in another passage, "It is time to think harder about encounter value" (Haraway 2008, 62).

In response, Barua (2016, 728) develops a definition of encounter value as the "*process* of value generation where bodies, ethologies and liveliness of an animal *makes a difference to*, and *is constitutive* of, those very relations that render or mobilize it as a commodity" (emphasis original). But, to understand how encounter value operates requires adopting a new perspective on political economy. Barua (2016) suggests lively perspective based on the previous work of the distinction between dwelling and commodity perspectives done by Ingold (2000). Dwelling perspective is introduced by Ingold (2000) in the pursuit of a perspective in studying skills that enable us to situate "the practitioner, right from the start, in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of his or her surroundings" (Ingold 2000, 5). Skills here, for Ingold (2000, 5), are not of "the techniques of the body", but "the capabilities of action and perception of the whole organic being (indissolubly mind and body) situated in a richly structured environment." Meanwhile, the commodity perspective refers to Marx's contribution to the critique of political economy in which he dissects the role of commodity in a society where the capitalist mode of production prevails. Marx (1990, 125) formulates the labour theory of value from the elaboration of a commodity, the signifier of the wealth of capitalist society. In theorizing the lively perspective, Barua (2016) shares a similar critique to commodity perspective as Haraway (2008) does and adopts relevant ideas of a dwelling perspective. Both tendencies are made evident in the four characteristics of the lively perspective below.

Firstly, in the lively perspective, commodities are *eventful*. The eventfulness of commodities is one of the characteristics that makes it distinct from Marx's interpretation, who views commodities as uneventful things. For Marx, commodities are the "expression of the inner logics of capital" or even "the waste produced through capitalism's uneven development" (Braun and Whatmore 2010, xxxiv–xxxv). Secondly, Barua (2016, 729) argues that in the lively perspective, humans and animals are involved "*at their tasks*" in terms of labouring activities. Those tasks, he observes, are "performed through a range of carnal and ethological registers" and "enacted *in the presence of others* whose own performances necessarily have bearings on the skilled agent's activity, human or animal" (Barua 2016, 729—emphasis original). Ingold (2000, 195) himself defines tasks as "any practical operation, carried out by a skilled agent in an environment, as part of his or her normal business of life." Thirdly, while conducting those tasks, humans and animals are in the middle of the "temporalities of which are rhythmic, intrinsic to and emerging from movement itself" (Barua 2016, 729). Fourthly, the production process in the lively perspective is *intransitive* instead of *purposive* in terms of making products. This characteristic requires reinterpretation of productive activity as the "processes of *growth*" (Barua 2016, 729—emphasis original) in which animals play an integral role.

3 Methodology

This chapter is designed to explain the methodology or how I understand it as a working mechanism of this research. I present a simple overview of the research design and the relevant practical techniques for data collection derived from this. As this research took shape, some important issues were ultimately left untouched. These limitations will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

3.1 The Design

This research is primarily designed to understand the process of the commodification of captive elephants for ecotourism in Tangkahan, an ecotourism site situated in the buffer zone of the GLNP in Langkat district, North Sumatra province, Indonesia (see Figure 1). Tangkahan was established in the early 2000s and has been managed by a local community organization since the beginning. Brought in there from the neighbouring province of Aceh, Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus ssp. Sumatranus*) have currently become an inseparable part of Tangkahan ecotourism. There are nine elephants as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1 The data of captive elephants in Tangkahan, North Sumatra

Name*	Sex	Date of Birth	Place of Capture/Birth	Father/ Mother	Elephant Handler*
Siji	Male	1998**	Bohorok, North Sumatra	Unknown	Sa
Loro	Female	March 9, 2015	Tangkahan, North Sumatra	Siji/Songo	Duwa
Telu	Female	1990**	Bohorok, North Sumatra	Unknown	Lhee
Papat	Female	July 19, 2015	Tangkahan, North Sumatra	Telu/Songo	Peut
Limo	Female	1985**	Ujung Medang, Aceh	Unknown	Limong
Enem	Female	1979**	Ulee Glee, Aceh	Unknown	Nam
Pitu	Male	September 22, 2015	Tangkahan, North Sumatra	Wolu/Songo	Tujoh
Wolu	Female	1985**	Ulee Glee, Aceh	Unknown	Lapan
Songo	Male	1994**	Bohorok, North Sumatra	Unknown	Sikureung

* Pseudonym

** Estimated date of birth

A series of publications on elephant tourism by Duffy (2014; 2015) and Duffy and Moore (2010) have shed light on the use of captive elephants as tourism commodities under neoliberal governance. However, they offer no room for the dynamics of the elephant conservation and rural livelihood context. It is apparently because they opted to direct

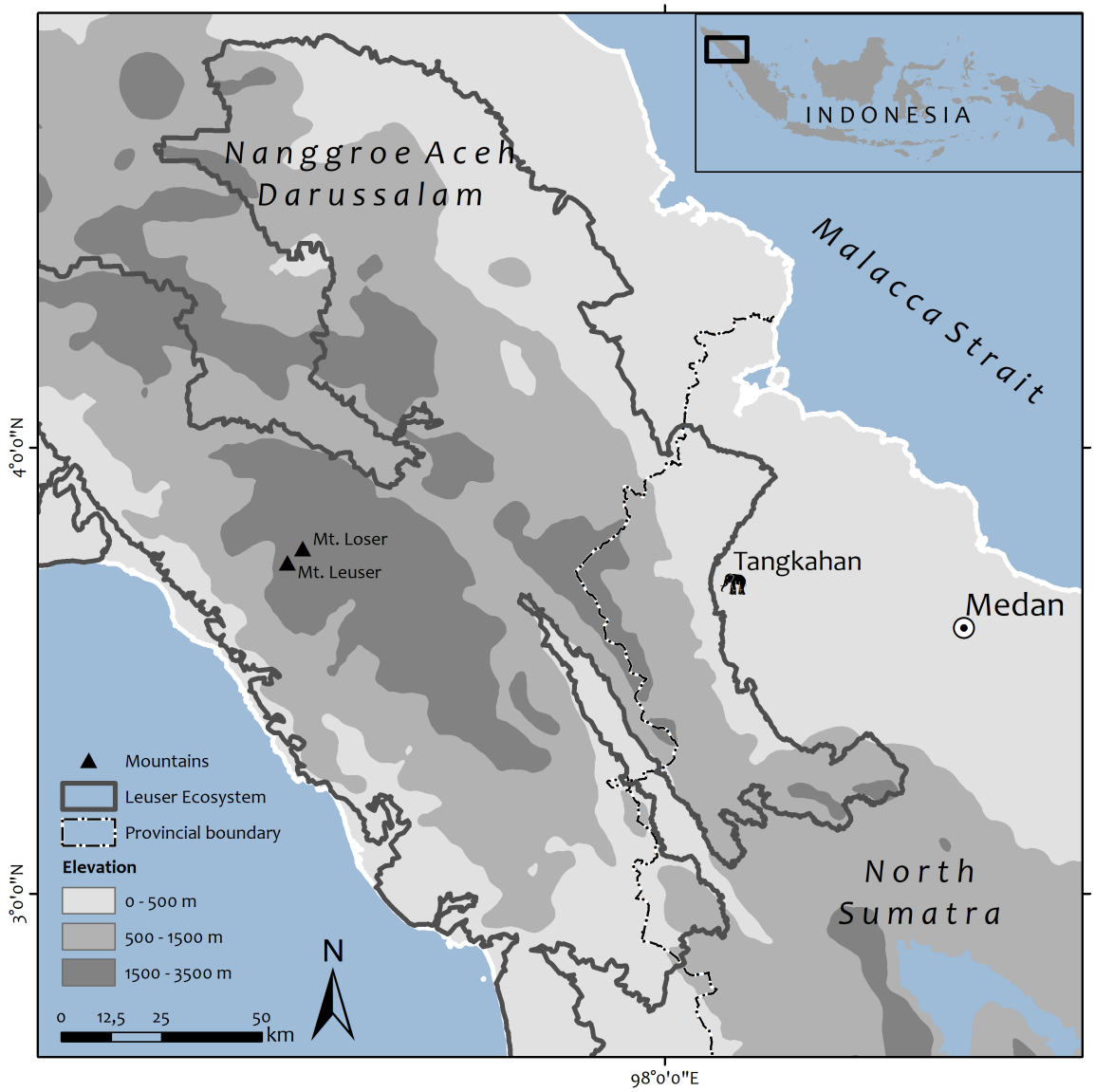


Figure 1 The map of North Sumatra and Leuser ecosystem

The map was created by Tombayu Amadeo Hidayat. Sources: (a) Elevation: ASTER Global Digital Elevation Model (GDEM) by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS); (b) Leuser Ecosystem: Global Forest Watch (GFW) by the World Resources Institute (WRI); (c) Provincial boundary: Geospatial Information Agency of the Republic of Indonesia.

their studies on the neoliberalization of nature (and not neoliberal conservation) from the side of neoliberalism rather than from that of nature. To take an alternative perspective, partly also as a response to the emerging criticisms on the pursuit of ecology in political ecology (Walker 2005) or of nature in an ethnography of conservation practice (Kiik 2018), this research has been set its departure from nonhuman nature, i.e. captive elephants. As such, this research requires an intimate observation of the ongoing process of elephant-based ecotourism and thus mahoutship labour. At this point, this research gains methodological inspiration from the recently promoted genre and writing of multispecies ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Locke 2018). However, rather than understanding multispecies ethnography as the cultivation of human and nonhuman

nature relations, it is enacted as a method of doing ethnography on the commodification of nature under neoliberal conservation regime. This conceptualization can be grasped with greater clarity by looking at the set of data collection techniques deployed during the fieldwork.

3.2 The Techniques

This research involved an application of various methods of data collection in order to compile data on the various topics represented in the proposed research sub-questions: (1) the main conservation agenda that has been introduced in Tangkahan and the strategies deployed in realizing the intended agenda, (2) the extent to which captive elephants are employed for ecotourism activities and the commodification of captive elephants as it has been performed in Tangkahan, and (3) mahoutship labour required in taking care of captive elephant's needs. Each of these subjects has been approached with different combinations of data collection tools. However, generally speaking, three main methods were deployed during the ten-week fieldwork period, which lasted from the end of November 2018 until the mid of January 2019.

Firstly, participant observation was utilised. I was initially involved as a bystander participant in elephant-based activities and remained so for the whole period of fieldwork in terms of handling elephants. Along with the increasingly better rapport I have developed with mahouts, I began to turn into an active participant in terms of assisting the work of mahouts and veterinarians. I did not perform tasks such as fishing out the dung from elephant's stomach rectally nor administering drug injections, but I did ride elephants, prepare fodder, and carry out other minor mahoutship tasks. In terms of riding an elephant, every single participation opportunity eventually turned out to be an affective apprenticeship (Locke 2017) in becoming a mahout for me. By exploring what Locke (2017) terms as "not-just-human figurations of personhood," the mahoutship apprentice has allowed me "to learn animal gestures and the collection of non-verbal data" (Alger and Alger, 1999 via Collard 2013, 72) and to "experience events in a multisensory fashion" (Collard 2013, 72). Following Suter (2019), I believe that riding an elephant is not harmful and can be beneficial to the elephant if it is done correctly. Besides engaging in elephant-based activities, I also joined the forest patrol on two occasions. The first was conducted to identify harmful holes for small wild elephants around an ex-plantation area. This patrol was held following the death of a wild female calf in a mud hole in the area. The second was a day patrol to identify flora and fauna as well as to monitor any illegal activities in the forest. Both were conducted without captive elephants. During my participation, I spoke in Bahasa Indonesia, even though people mainly speak Karo and Javanese. However, I made narrative descriptions of my fieldwork on a daily basis in English.

Secondly, interviews were conducted. During my fieldwork, I collected twenty-nine recording files, consisting of semi-structured interviews, a multi-stakeholder meeting, and focus group discussions. I had semi-structured interviews with mahouts, veterinarians, guides, and local leaders, some of them more than once. I also gathered interviews using

the same methods with the director of the organization who is responsible managing the daily needs of captive elephants, the Conservation Response Unit (CRU) Tangkahan. I attended a meeting hosted by the GLNP Office in Medan where related stakeholders on Tangkahan ecotourism were invited. Three focus group discussions were also conducted inside the forest, on the topics of animal welfare issues, a mahout's daily life in an elephant training centre, and elephant medical care. During elephant grazing, where elephants were foraging for food, I conducted discussions with mahouts and veterinarians. When I was not participating in elephant-based activities, I used the time to interact with the young people of Tangkahan. Mingling with villagers provided me the chance to get into the desires or the progress that the local community expected to gain from ecotourism.

Thirdly, document analysis was performed. I collected various types of documents from various institutions to support my argument. I obtained data on the number of tourists in elephant-based activities from the CRU Tangkahan. Meanwhile, the GLNP Office gave me permission to copy archives on the management of captive elephants in Tangkahan, such as minutes of meetings, a letter of understanding between the GLNP Office with the CRU Tangkahan and the Community Tour Operator (a company built and managed by the community to manage ecotourism in Tangkahan), and correspondences between the GLNP Office and all related parties regarding the management of captive elephants in Tangkahan. Although the documentation of the GLNP Office itself is not complete, it has played a significant role in data validation for this research. Other resources that I have found useful are publications on Sumatran elephant conservation since the 1980s, which I mainly collected from *Gajah*, the journal of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group (AsESG) and the Species Survival Commission (SSC) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The portal of Nexis Uni also served as a valuable resource in tracing the history of Sumatran elephant conservation at that time through news reports. Other relevant resources from the internet have also contributed to the content of this thesis.

3.3 The Limits

1. Even though nonhuman figures, i.e. elephants, are highlighted in this research, this does not mean that the information is gathered from talking to them. Instead, the data gathering process remains dependent on the human perspective. Indeed, this issue is not unique to this research, since social scientists have recently paid attention and experimented with this celebrated subject, such as Tsing (2014) who comes with the idea of direct attention to assemblages. This research did not make a step that far. The set of methods ranging from observations to interviews that have been applied, as I have described above, is highly informed by classic methods in ethnographic research.
2. In this research, readers will not find the tourist perspective in the sense of tourists as interviewees. Instead of tourists, I give room for mahouts, local community members, NGO activists, and government officials. One might argue that incorporating tourist's

perspectives would enrich my data, particularly that presented in Chapter 5 where the commodification of captive elephants is elaborated. I would say that the absence of the tourist perspective is not by accident. By giving a voice to the above-mentioned people, I would like to see what different actors who engage on a daily basis in the field think about the issue of elephant-based ecotourism. People who would like to see the commodification of nature-based tourism, but not necessarily of elephant-based ecotourism, with a strong emphasis of the tourist perspective are recommended to visit Reis (2012).

3. The tourist perspective is not the only one missing from this research; women's perspectives are too. This does not mean that I did not interact with women during my fieldwork. I believe that women have played a crucial role in the ecotourism economy and I am in favour of any attempts to strengthen gender equality in every layer of societal organization. In the case of Tangkahan, I found women serve as peasants, housewives, souvenir shop keepers, cooks and waitresses in food stalls (*warung*), English teachers for children, etc. Nevertheless, if I look at mahoutship, tourist guiding, and related jobs in forest conservation, the gender bias of conservation development is highly prominent, a tendency that has been found and criticized by Lounela (2019) in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, and Carruyo (2008) in La Ciénaga, the Dominican Republic. This leaves room for self-criticism of this research, but this is also the case for the development of Tangkahan in particular and conservation development in general.

4 Imposing Conservation Agenda

It was a sunny, hot day when we were sitting for an interview. Lapan, a senior mahout of Tangkahan, explained to me that the origin of captive elephants in Tangkahan started from the day they were first brought there by 2002. At that time, Tangkahan had just been set out as a project site for the establishment of a Conservation Response Unit (CRU), a concept of captive elephant management introduced in Sumatra by the Fauna & Flora International (FFI), an international conservation charity and nongovernmental organization based in Cambridge, the United Kingdom. Currently there are nine captive elephants in Tangkahan, consisting of six adults and three calves. "All of the adult elephants were conflict elephants," Lapan told me. Conflict elephants here refer to wild elephants that were involved in human-elephant conflicts and have been captured to be trained in an Elephant Training Centre (ETC). The CRU concept is arguably inseparable from the ETC as the CRU has been proposed and established as an alternative to the ETC. From this, the subsequent questions are: What is the main conservation agenda in establishing the CRU in Tangkahan? What are the conservation strategies deployed in realizing the intended agenda?

This chapter is mainly devoted to elaborating the conservation strategies employed by the FFI Indonesia (and its proponents) in bringing the CRU programme into being. My aim is not to show the project plan of the CRU or step-by-step activities in obtaining a set of the project goals. Rather, I shall reveal the underlying narratives behind that particular agenda without which there are no actual acts or the idea would lose its significance. To do this, one should consider what is new and what has been challenged. In this case, I attempt to make sense of the CRU (the new institution) in its relation to the ETC (the challenged institution) by looking at the broader socio-historical conjuncture of elephant conservation. By doing this, changes and/or continuities can be presented in a more detailed manner. This way of thinking has eventually brought me to arrive at—which then served in structuring this chapter—(1) the historical trajectory of elephant domestication in modern Indonesia and (2) the discursive strategies in realizing the main conservation agenda in Tangkahan. In each part of those sub-chapters, I would begin by mentioning the focus of attention as well as its related subjects that are beneficial to take on board. The task of wrapping up the presented substantial points is then accomplished in the conclusion.

4.1 The Birth of Captive Elephants

In this part, I trace the historical trajectory of elephant domestication in modern Indonesia, encompassing the period from the 1980s until the 2000s. The focus of attention here is the programme of capturing wild elephants as the starting point for elephant domestication and the establishment of the ETCs across Sumatra as the institutional foundation for captive elephant management in Indonesia. I explain the broader issue of human-elephant conflicts that should be dealt with by the Indonesian government and how

they ended up with the elephant capture programme. I also highlight the changing behaviour of wildlife conservationists in relation to the programme of capturing wild elephants.

The decline, fragmentation, and degradation of elephants' habitat has been identified as the most serious threat to wild elephants that subsequently contributed to the increasing number of human-elephant conflicts across Sumatra (Departemen Kehutanan 2007, 13). Trampling people to death, gobbling up crops, destroying croplands, or crushing houses and other properties are deemed as a set of common damaging actions caused by stampeding herds of wild elephants. Academic and grey literature refer to the phenomena in technical terms as human-elephant conflicts, a recurring issue when it comes to talk about the encounter between humans and elephants in Sumatra (Hedges et al. 2005; Nyhus, Tilson, and Sumianto 2000), and other elephant inhabited regions in Asia and Africa (Desai and Riddle 2015; Shaffer et al. 2019). Nevertheless, within two decades of the 1980s and 1990s, another important source of human-elephant conflicts in Sumatra should be taken into account, namely the rising human population facilitated by the human transmigration programme (Santiapillai and Ramono 1993a; 1993b). Through this programme, thousands of people were moved out of the overcrowded islands of Java and Bali to find themselves working for large-scale plantations or clearing trees of forested lands for agriculture. The competition for land had become a primary source of conflict between humans and elephants (Fisher 2016; Santiapillai 1987).

Various types of measures have been tried by the Indonesian authorities to reduce the scale of human-elephant conflicts, mainly by targeting the elephants. Since 1980s, the Directorate General of Ecosystem and Natural Resources Conservation of the Ministry of Environment of Forestry, the linchpin of elephant conservation in Indonesia, has attempted several mitigation strategies, either by translocating herds of wild elephants into protected areas such as national parks or game reserves, building fences as a barrier for the elephants to move into cultivated areas, or capturing them to be trained for human purposes (Santiapillai and Ramono 1993a; 1993b; Sukumar and Santiapillai 1993). Recently, another approach has also been identified with more emphasis on villagers' participation to help protect their lands by using chilli-based deterrents (Gunaryadi, Sugiyo, and Hedges 2017; Hedges and Gunaryadi 2010). Moreover, it has become an old issue that villagers' attempts to drive wild elephants away by using traditional methods at many times have just ended up with failure and induced animosity, either by use of flaming torches, firecrackers, and bonfires or banging tin cans, drums, or other noisemakers (*United Press International* 1985a).

Believed as a first in the global history of elephant conservation, an elephant translocation project called Ganesha Operation, named after the secret elephant of Hindu mythology, was conducted in 1982 (*United Press International* 1982a; 1982b). The operation successfully moved around 200 elephants 50 kilometres away, from Air Sugihan to Lebong Hitam in South Sumatra province (Caufield 1983). The operation involved at least 1,000 people, among of them 440 members of armed forces, as well as two helicopters (*The*

Associated Press 1983). Being driven by beating drums and exploding firecrackers, the elephants were forced to pass through human-made jungle corridors and crossed over shallow swampy canals. After one and half months, the elephant translocation project had finally been accomplished, with two individual elephants reported dead during the travel due to exhaustion (*United Press International* 1982c). This tremendous story certainly inspired the government to adopt the same strategy when the need to relocate the herd of wild elephants arose (*United Press International* 1984). Another similar attempt in Aceh province, however, faced more difficulties (*United Press International* 1985b; 1985c; 1985d). The elephants, in this case, went on a rampage across nine villages (*United Press International* 1985c).

The Indonesian government had ultimately started an elephant capture programme by 1986. The Director General of Ecosystem and Natural Resources Conservation, Rubini Atmawidjaya, proclaimed to the press: "A war has erupted between elephants and settlers. Buffaloes live peacefully with people, so why not elephants?" (*The Globe and Mail* 1985). The idea of capturing wild elephants with the purpose to transform them as working animals had long been proposed a decade before (Poniran 1974). However, as mentioned elsewhere (e.g., Azmi and Gunaryadi 2011; Departemen Kehutanan 2007; Lair 1997; Santiapillai and Jackson 1990), the programme had just been realized in 1986 when the first capture operation was executed in Lampung province, which led to the establishment of a *Pusat Latihan Gajah* (PLG) or Elephant Training Centre (ETC) in the same province and its gradual proliferation in six different provinces throughout Sumatra. The first capture operation was a response to the killing of a six-year-old boy by an elephant in the village of Sukadana Ham (Santiapillai 1987). The incident made villagers so angry and frustrated, directing their feelings towards the government. As a result, three wild elephants, consisting of a sub-adult bull and two cows, were caught and taken to the ETC.

The objective of the ETC, according to Santiapillai and Ramono (1992, 20), besides reducing human-elephant conflicts and providing trained elephants for human purposes, was to "re-establish the elephant as a part of Sumatra's myths, history and cultural heritage." Indeed, the art of domesticating elephants had disappeared from existence in Indonesia (Santiapillai and Jackson 1990, 37). It is, therefore, inevitable for the country to first import *khoonkies* elephants. After months of negotiations, Jakarta made it real when Bangkok had agreed to sell two *khoonkies* from Chaiyaphum province, Thailand (Lair 1997; Reilly and Sukatmoko 2002; Santiapillai and Ramono 1992). The Hindi word *khoonkie* refers to a well-trained elephant used for catching wild elephants (Kahl and Santiapillai 2004, 16) as well as driving them onto trucks and assisting the taming and training processes afterward (Lair 1997, 80). The selection and transportation of *khoonkie* elephants, along with four mahouts, to the centre in Lampung was made possible thanks to the support of Taman Safari Indonesia (Reilly and Sukatmoko 2002), a private safari park network which had participated in supporting Ganesha Operation (Taman Safari 2019) and then bought some of the trained elephants. Along with the establishment of another ETC in Lhok Asan of Aceh province in 1989, other two *khoonkies* and two

mahouts were imported. Senior mahouts of Tangkahan gained mahoutship skills and knowledge from them.

The capture program initially gained support from conservationists, including by Charles Santiapillai, a world-renowned elephant researcher who then served as the Senior Scientific Officer of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Asia based in Bogor, West Java province, Indonesia. On the one hand, capturing elephants with a subsequent program of taming and training them for human purposes is considered to be "more humane and meaningful than shooting them as pests" (Santiapillai and Ramono 1993a, 17). On the other hand, by performing a policy in which culling the animals is avoided, it was expected that "a good public opinion" would be created of the Directorate General of Ecosystem and Natural Resources Conservation as a state institution (Santiapillai 1987, 20). In Santiapillai's monograph *The Asian Elephant: An Action Plan for its Conservation* (1990), a seminal text for anyone working in Asian elephant conservation compiled together with conservation biologist Peter Jackson, it is argued that capturing wild elephants is the best answer to reduce human-elephant conflicts across Sumatra. They argue:

> Pocketed elephants have no long-term viability. They can be maintained by constructing barriers to keep them out of cultivated areas, but such measures are invariably expensive and in the long-term, unsatisfactory. The animals should be removed. However, there is limited scope for translocating them to forests elsewhere. The best answer is to capture such doomed animals for domestication and training. Trained elephants can be used in patrolling the reserves, in transporting visitors within the reserves, and in logging. (Santiapillai and Jackson 1990, 47)

Nevertheless, in the early 1990s after leaving his job in Indonesia, Santiapillai had begun to write critical remarks on the capture programme. Santiapillai argues that the programme can barely be justified if no significant actions have been made to improve crucial aspects of the ETCs, particularly the veterinary care of captive elephants, financial support, and trained people to handle captive elephants (Sukumar and Santiapillai 1993, 59–60). In his article co-authored with Widodo Sukohadi Ramono, an official of the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry with whom Santiapillai often published reports on Sumatran elephants, Santiapillai says:

> It would be naïve to believe that capturing chronic crop raiders and training them in itself would solve the elephant-human conflicts in Sumatra. It is at best only a temporary measure and should not become institutionalized practice accepted as routine. (Santiapillai and Ramono 1993b, 57)

For about one and a half decades (1986–2000), instead of being a solution for extreme cases of human-elephant conflicts, the capture programme had become a routine activity initiated by the Indonesian authorities (Hedges 2006, 478). Nevertheless, for recent generations of elephant conservation communities, the capture programme is seen as a problematic one as it had just created the camps as a pooling station of tamed elephants that was financially expensive (Departemen Kehutanan 2007, 7). The ETCs have become too

costly in terms of the financial support required for taking care of tamed elephants as well as mahouts and their families. This is a highly critical case due to the Asian financial crisis in which Indonesia was swept up in 1997–1998, but it did so since its proliferation throughout Sumatra around two decades earlier. The tamed elephants had continuously been enlisted to be offered to private sector actors such as forestry companies and zoos, but the interest was far from expected, let alone helping the ETCs to be financially self-sufficient. By 2000, finally, the capture programme had officially been closed, although some provinces still implemented the programme until 2009 (Azmi and Gunaryadi 2011, 59) and accordingly the ETCs have been transformed into the Elephant Conservation Centre (ECC) (Suprayogi, Sugardjito, and Lilley 2002). Including those in zoos, safari parks, and other conservation facilities, by 2017 Indonesia is reported as the home of 467 captive elephants (Ministry of Environment and Forestry 2017, 17).

4.2 A Couple of Conservation Strategies

In this part, I identify two conservation strategies articulated in the form of CRU. The first one is dismantling the ETCs and the severe condition of captive elephants. The second one is undermining the role of mahouts in looking after captive elephants in the ETCs. Those strategies have encompassed two companion species at once: captive elephants and their mahouts. Combined, those strategies have enabled both subjects to be incorporated into a greater agenda of forest conservation through the CRU, one of which has been built in Tangkahan.

In Tangkahan, captive elephants are officially managed by the CRU Tangkahan based on a joint understanding with the GLNP Office. Even though the CRU Tangkahan is currently an independent NGO, it used to be a side project of the FFI in Indonesia. The concept of CRU itself is now being implemented in several locations across Sumatra, largely in Aceh province, but is also adopted in India (Azmi et al. 2006, 37) and Myanmar. In its formative years, the CRU Tangkahan had been supported by various international donors, but the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) of the Ministry of Interior has played an especially significant role for the introduction of the CRU in Tangkahan by 2002. The CRU Tangkahan has eventually been transformed in quite a distinct way compared to other CRUs in Indonesia, as they all are organized under each provincial conservation agency. The CRU Tangkahan, as written in their information flyer prepared for tourists, proclaims itself as the longest established CRU that has successfully achieved self-sufficiency through ecotourism; it thereby confirms their strategy as based on market-based mechanisms.

Strategy #1: Dismantling Institution, Saving Captured Elephants

The importance of CRU can only be comprehended by placing them in juxtaposition with the ETC. Not only because the ETC has become a modern institutional base for the management of captive elephants in Indonesia, but primarily because the CRU as an alternative approach is developed to fill up a space resulting from many critical

investigations into the ETC. Such investigations form a new sentiment of how elephant conservation is supposed to be, particularly after the US Congress passed the Asian Elephant Conservation Act of 1997, an influential law that has subsequently appropriated funds for, amongst other things, the establishment of the CRUs throughout Sumatra (Nagendran, Clyne, and Riddle 2013; Nagendran and Riddle 2008; Stromayer 2002). The investigators mainly shed light on the severe conditions of captive elephants in the ETCs, but their view encompasses the whole management aspect of the ETCs. Suprayogi, Sugardjito, and Lilley (2002, 183), for instance, observe that captive elephants in the ETCs were "under-utilized," while the centres were "under-resourced" and held "few clear functions." To reach the full extent of the problems: "the ETCs include inadequate land area and facilities, poor health and husbandry of elephants, poor management and coordination, and welfare problems of elephants, mahouts and veterinarians" (Suprayogi, Sugardjito, and Lilley 2002, 183). The ETCs were summarized as in need of assistance (Mikota 2000), regardless of any evaluations that have been conducted since the very beginning (Krishnamurthy 1992; Reilly and Sukatmoko 2002).

Those criticisms, in short, have provided the basis for some to argue that the ETCs were "unable to demonstrate their role in the global effort to conserve elephants in their natural habitat" (Azmi et al. 2006, 36; Nagendran, Clyne, and Riddle 2013). These commentators assume that the ETCs were established with the aim of contributing to a presumably more essential conservation agenda, i.e., the conservation of elephants' natural habitat. The Sumatran Elephant Conservation Programme (SECP) of the FFI Indonesia, a project under which the CRU concept was designed to anchor, stated that the main goal of the programme was "to conserve Sumatran elephants in their habitats," "understood as largely synonymous with lowland forest" (Azmi et al. n.d., 1). The Asian Elephant Conservation Act similarly defines conservation as "the use of methods and procedures necessary to bring Asian elephants to the point at which there are sufficient populations *in the wild* to ensure that the species does not become extinct" (Section 4, emphasis added). Therefore, the Act categorizes the capturing of elephants for domestication as part of the threats to wild elephants (Section 2) instead of an acceptable response to human-elephant conflicts.

It is no surprise, accordingly, that the CRU Tangkahan principally do not support the capture programme. Instead, the CRUs are created as an instrument to prevent new capture. For the CRU Tangkahan, there are many options of mitigation approaches to human-elephant conflicts, not exclusively capturing wild elephants, and those strategies should be taken into consideration before the decision is made. This contention brings about the CRU Tangkahan's argument that capturing wild elephants is not the best answer, as opposed to the view of previous conservationists (Santiapillai and Jackson 1990). It is also important to note that the employment of captive elephants as one of the main components of the CRUs, according to the CRU Tangkahan, should not be used to justify the need of capturing wild elephants. Wahdi Azmi, the director of the CRU Tangkahan, who was formerly the program manager of the FFI Indonesia which oversees the CRU project, elaborates:

> **Azmi:** We cannot resolve human-elephant conflicts by ignoring conservation. The conflicts are being resolved, but it should be done with the purpose of conservation. When the CRU is making use of captive elephants, it does not mean that we promote the solution for elephant conservation as looking after captive elephants in the CRU camp. No. It should be otherwise. It is the CRU that should promote or cast as the solution that the conflicts can be overcame by not only capturing the elephants.

Strategy #2: Dividing Landscape, Undermining Mahouts

The CRUs have demonstrated a dominant discourse of the global conservation institution, which essentially promotes the prominence of natural habitat preservation (Garland 2008) and its wildlife inside it. Removing wild elephants from their habitat is a threat to the elephants and thus no longer justified by any reasons. The new norm of elephant conservation has been imposed and this forced conservationists to engage with it. Yet, Azmi states that captive elephants have been deeply affected by this burgeoning discourse:

> **Azmi:** Not many donors are interested in giving their support for captive elephants, although they have confronted complicated problems in the ETCs. International conservation organizations are thinking that they should not invest their time and energy in taking care of captive elephants. Why? It is perceived as not the best conservation strategy. In effect, no one is willing to think of captive elephants.

As such, the CRU came up with the concept of combining *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation (Azmi et al. 2006, 36; n.d.; Nagendran, Clyne, and Riddle 2013). Taken from Latin, *in situ* conservation is defined as on-site conservation, while *ex situ* conservation as off-site, unnatural, or captive conservation (Braverman 2014, 48). The creators of the CRU believe that both parts "can complement each other and provide insurance against the shortcomings of any one method" (Azmi et al. 2006, 36). Indeed, among conservationists, there has been a long debate involving both sides, with those who believe in an *in-situ* approach often claiming that *ex situ* conservation is not part of what conservation is supposed to be. Yet, as Braverman (2014, 48) has explained, both competing sides somehow remain locating "the pristine nature that exists outside of society" as "the central object of conservation." Considering this argument helps to understand why the vision about the linkage between *in situ* and *ex situ* elephant conservations is translated by, to borrow Azmi words, "bringing in *ex situ* components into *in situ* conservation." In practice, it involves activities such as using captive elephants for forest patrol or for driving away wild elephants. Here, captive elephants are seen as *ex situ* components, while wild elephants are *in situ* components that inhabit their natural habitat as if humans are strictly outside of the habitat.

In this sense, captive elephants are not the only entity. Within the perception that they are part of *ex situ* components, their captivity comes with a particular ability to handle

an elephant or mahoutship skills carried out by humans, called *mahout* in Hindustani or *pawang* (Kahl and Santiapillai 2004, 18) or *serati* in Bahasa. Since mahouts are encouraged to take part in forest conservation, they should be equipped with a set of basic technical skills such as operating a hand-held navigation receiver, taking pictures, and filling data sheets. By incorporating mahouts (and captive elephants) into a broader agenda of forest conservation, it is expected that they would obtain more positive outcomes (Azmi et al. 2006, 36), primarily in the form of stable income. However, the ideal narrative of CRU regarding the role of mahouts relies on the undermining view upon the menial tasks of looking after captive elephants. Besides being perceived as "unexplored" human resource, mahouts are still regarded as socially minor workers given the fact that their "empowerment" through the incorporation into field-based conservation is also intended to raise "a sense of dignity" from being a mahout (Azmi et al. 2006, 37). Moreover, since they were part of the bigger problem of the ETCs, they were assumed as less "knowledgeable" and not "capable" (Nagendran, Clyne, and Riddle 2013) and, therefore, they were entitled to "improvement in basic training methods" (Mikota 2000). It should not surprise me when Azmi expresses his argument in which mahoutship custodial labour was undermined:

> **Azmi:** Their function was no more than feeding the elephants. Could you imagine that so many of their tasks were bearing no meaning for conservation? It was so minimum since the elephants had not been used for anything indeed. In the camps, there are too many mahouts and elephants who did nothing. How could mahouts, who are only feeding the elephants till they are retired, also take part in *in situ* conservation? The idea of how to exercise *in situ* conservation, but that of *empowering ex situ* conservation, was emerged from here. [Emphasis added, as he increased the tone at the word "empowering."]

4.3 Conclusions

From the above passages, I have shown that the elephant capture programme had been put into action as part of a set of policy measures taken by the Indonesian government to deal with human-elephant conflicts across Sumatra. The implementation of the elephant capture programme had thus led to the establishment of the ETC as an institutional foundation for captive elephant management in Indonesia. The idea of capturing wild elephants to be trained as working animals initially gained support from wildlife conservationists. Critical views, however, had been expressed along the implementation of the programme before it ended because the ETCs were not self-sufficient and were financially expensive. The behaviour of wildlife conservationists has been important to look at due to their role in providing justification for policy measures taken by the government, not exclusively in relation to the elephant capture programme. It seems that conservationists have been working hand in hand with the government, either by providing their expert support or critical remarks on the elephant capture programme. Making sense of this socio-historical conjuncture of Sumatran elephants would be worthwhile in order to

comprehend another institutional form for captive elephant management, namely the CRU, which came into being to challenge the practice of the ETC.

Through the concept of CRU, the FFI Indonesia as its implementer came up with the agenda of wildlife and natural habitat preservation. This resonates with the conservation ideals that have been stipulated in the Asian Elephant Conservation Act of 1997 passed by the US Congress. Through the USFWS, the Act has appropriated funds for the implementation of the CRUs across Sumatra, including the one in Tangkahan. The proponents of the CRU have developed at least two discursive strategies in sustaining the concept of CRU and thus promoting the significance of realizing the CRU programme. The first strategy is dismantling the ETCs and the severe conditions of captive elephants. As part of this strategy is the standing position that, in contrast with previous conservationists, they do not support the elephant capture programme and the CRU itself is promoted as an alternative elephant conservation model by not capturing wild elephants. The second strategy is undermining the role of mahouts in taking care of elephants in the ETCs. (I present the stories of my participation in mahoutship custodial labour in the next part.) Those strategies have provided the basis for incorporating captive elephants and their mahouts under the CRU programme. The two companion species have served as the backbone in imposing the agenda of forest conservation, which has found fertile ground in Tangkahan since its commencement in 2002.

The first mission of the FFI Indonesia with its CRU in Tangkahan was, therefore, law enforcement against illegal loggers, not only around Tangkahan but also in and around the GLNP (Azmi et al. n.d.). In Tangkahan particularly, another additional mission was establishing ecotourism by making use of the labour of captive elephants. Training related to ecotourism development and its promotion was indeed organized, in which the local people of Tangkahan participated (Azmi et al. n.d., 28–35). However, before it all started, captive elephants and mahouts from an Aceh's ETC were deployed to Tangkahan. Their first activities included forest patrol and monitoring as well as developing elephant-based ecotourism activities such as elephant trekking, bathing, and feeding (Azmi et al. n.d., 18–27). Most importantly, the development of ecotourism is seen as compatible with the agenda of protecting the national park, primarily in term of its effectiveness to provide an alternative livelihood for the local people of Tangkahan who used to gain a living largely from illegal logging. The FFI Indonesia currently no longer provides funds for the CRU Tangkahan, which has been transformed into an independent NGO. The same concept, hence, remained in place in managing Tangkahan ecotourism, which has become increasingly reliant on elephant-based activities. The commodification of captive elephants for ecotourism forms the subject of discussion for Chapter 5.

Mahoutship Custodial Labour

In this part, I present the story of my experiences in accompanying mahouts during their workday. Mahoutship labour is organized as regular working hours, though weekends and holidays are barely recognized since the looking after of living creatures allows no interlude. Six days of time off per month are available for each person. However, one should consider one another when it comes to claiming the chances. In taking care of elephants, the principle that there should be one mahout in charge of one adult elephant applies. The number of mahouts, therefore, should be higher than the number of adult elephants. In Tangkahan, as I have mentioned in the methodology, there are nine elephants (six of them are adults) and eleven mahouts, two of them are Lapan and Duwa, the people I have highlighted in this story. They have contributed to shaping my understanding of mahoutship custodial labour and the practice of embodied care performed by mahouts.

Caring for Elephants

As I expressed my intention to follow mahout activities in taking care of the elephants, I had been directed to Lapan, a funny, humble guy who has been working as a mahout since 1991 when he was 19. At that time, precisely one year after he finished junior high school, he decided to work and postponed his further study. Supported by his father's connections and enchanted by the image of riding an elephant he saw every time he went to school, he then started to work in an ETC at Lhok Asan, Aceh province. "I was a teenager, so I was still enjoying riding an elephant. It seems a lot of fun," he told me. He recalled his first tasks were clearing the forest and cleaning up an elephant enclosure before eventually, one year later, he was assigned to take care of a newly captured bull. What he meant by taking care of the elephant involved feeding the elephant, cleaning up the enclosure and camp garden, and training the elephant. He experienced a formative period when Thai mahouts were still working there to educate local people how to catch, tame, and train wild elephants, in spite of their infamous reputation as elephant trainers (Lair 1997). He elaborated on his first affective encounter with his first elephant and the apprenticeship under Thai mahouts as follows:

> ***Lapan:** He was as big as Songo, a bit smaller. I trained him together with other mahouts. I stepped back when he first frightened me. Similarly, when I first trained him, I was trying to climb on his back, but he threw me off, it was normal. Since I did it in front of other mahouts, they laughed at me and they also helped me, so no problem.*
>
> *Thai people trained us. When I got my elephant, I asked them, and they replied, "You just need to follow the process. But you have to memorize everything you will have learnt. So, one day you will not be in trouble when you have problems." So, we had never asked again. We observed and fully paid attention. When they told us to do something, we did it. We would automatically understand along the way.*

Currently, under the management of the CRU Tangkahan, besides being responsible for elephant training issues, Lapan has gained respect from other mahouts thanks to the combination of his kind-heartedness and countless experience in handling elephants. To illustrate, one of his tasks is to find out an effective reinforcement technique before asking his fellow mahouts to do the same to their elephants. It is to him that mahouts need to go when they face any particular problems with their elephants. Sometimes I heard he reminded other mahouts to not punish the elephant if no fault is done. Indeed, he has to do it. He holds a key role for assigning a rotating schedule of elephant handlers that applies differently for each single day. He has to make sure that every mahout has been registered evenly to handle all elephants, even though he also has to keep a large proportion of assignments to an elephant to whom a given mahout is in charge of. It is a crucial position that considerably affects the docility of captive elephants. On the one hand, ideally every mahout should be capable of handling any given type of elephants, regardless how variable the behaviour of the individual elephant (Barash 1997). On the other hand, every mahout is principally in charge of one single elephant and he has to observe his elephant for any behavioural changes or related issues. In the recent years, Lapan has been in charge of an estimated 34-year-old cow, Wolu, who is perceived as the most sluggish of all elephants in Tangkahan, and her 4-year-old bull, Pitu. He shared his intimate relation to his elephants:

> ***Lapan:*** *Today I am not handling Wolu. Nevertheless, every morning I come over and look at her, I observe whether there is something missing from her and Pitu. If, for instance, there are indications that she is going rebel, or feeling unwell, or something else, I know it. I can feel it. In case she is not good when we are walking, due to a stomach-ache or a limp, it is obvious.*

From that excerpt, it is clear that to take care of the elephant means "to be emotionally at stake" (van Dooren 2014, 291) in the elephant. Moreover, another message is also emerging; that performing mahoutship custodial labour entails "an obligation to look after" (van Dooren 2014, 291) the elephant. From here, in case any particular problem with the elephant, such as health problems, is found, "some concrete way" (van Dooren 2014, 291) could be provided immediately. Lapan recalled one day Pitu collapsed in the forest with the symptoms of diarrhoea:

> ***Lapan:*** *In the morning, he was fine. As usual, he still chased people. Once we got in the forest, he was just lying down on the ground. I did not take it seriously. An hour later, he still there in the same position. But the dung was loose and watery. Then, a veterinarian was called. Once the veterinarian arrived in the afternoon, an injection was given because it was already critical. Walking five meters, gedebuk, he fell dawn. His stomach was ill, so he threw off his own body. I did not know what he ate in the forest. But, in the morning, he just ate pumpkins. After we looked at the dung, we found two worms. Finally, worm drugs were administered.*

Similar to Lapan, I witnessed that all mahouts in Tangkahan cultivate an intimate relation with their elephants. Some mahouts even stated that their emotional proximity could manifest in the form of longing for the elephant when they have not handled them for one or

more days, a consequential outcome of the labour rotation system. Indeed, previous studies on mahout-elephant interactions have revealed the existence of a unique bonding relationship between human mahout and elephant (Hart 1994; Lainé 2016; Münster 2016).

However, far from a solid positive account of intimacy that the description above has tried to show, Lapan taught me in a bodily interface manner precisely the type of relationship he has developed with his companion elephant (Lorimer 2010). When I was first participated with him for angon *(grazing, but it should be distinguished with elephant grazing, as I shall describe below), I rode on top of Wolu. I was on her neck, while Lapan was behind me on her back. Lapan changed it into a mahoutship training by, amongst other things, showing me how to stomp around the legs to drive the elephant, either to keep her walking, turn left, turn right, or remain stationary. Even though I did everything well, he said that along the way Wolu was hit by a hook. He told me that Wolu could recognize that an unskilled person was handling her, so she attempted to slow the movement down. Later in another occasion in the middle period of my fieldwork, on the way back from* angon*, he decided to cut me a stick. It was as thin as my little finger. "You have been here for quite some time. Do not be afraid of using this to hit Pitu! Look, he is moving closer to you to steal your stick!" said Lapan while giving it to me. I received the stick, but I had no chance to make use of it. To comprehend all these lessons, it is worth turning to another mahout saying which states that "the basic principle of handling an elephant is we must be tough with the elephant. If not, they will do it to us." As if wrapping up what mahoutship custodial labour means, Lapan said: "Working in taking care of the elephant should use the heart (*pakai hati*), but sometimes we must be daring (*sampai hati*)." In the case of human-elephant companionship, custodial labour is about performing care, but tough care.*

Angon *and Embodied Care*

Beside touristic activities such as bathing and riding, the main activity of captive elephants under the companionship of mahouts is angon *(grazing).*[2] Angon *occupies the largest portion of working hours of both elephants and mahouts in Tangkahan, sandwiched between bathing sessions in the morning and afternoon. Here,* angon *is seen as a distinctive activity and suggested to be categorized differently to elephant grazing, a tourism package in Tangkahan that offers a shorter version of* angon. Angon *actually would take roughly five hours in total, consisting of one and half hours of entering the forest, two hours for the elephants to forage for food, and another one and half hours of moving back to the shore for bathing. Mahouts ride on top of the elephants before the elephants are released. Mahouts have determined a camping site from which the elephants' food journey starts. The big elephants are fettered with a hobble or chains to slow them down while exploring the forest. In dry forest areas such as Tangkahan during dry season, a large amount of the elephants' diet is forage taken from more than 100 plant species (Sukumar 2006). As the*

[2] *I use the term* angon *rather than* grazing*. Literally, elephants do both grazing and browsing during foraging in the forest. Sitompul, Griffin, and Fuller (2013, 20) explain that "grazing occurred when elephants consumed grass and small herbaceous plants on the ground," while "browsing occurred when elephants consumed foliage from shrubs, young trees, tree bark, and bamboo."*

elephants go wild, mahouts start to hang their hammocks, killing time with random conversations, gossiping, playing games on a smartphone, napping, having lunch, or overseeing the elephant's feeding activities. Those who undertake angon *earn an additional incentive in the form of cigarettes and lunch compensation Rp30,000 (around €2) per day.*

Angon *represents the basic idea of mahoutship custodial labour as an embodied encounter with nature and epitomizes the bodily interaction with other beings along the forest paths. I spent several nights staying up late to listen to the rich stories of their encounter with various wild animals in the forest. Even their houses are the subject of visitations by lizards, snakes, and others. I also often heard the story of mahouts being stung by scorpions or bees, bitten by snakes, bees, and certainly sucked by leeches during their working days. I remember on the first day of my stay, Lapan's action of removing leeches from his legs stole my attention. "Are there many leeches in the forest?" I asked him spontaneously. "Why? Are you scared?" he replied me. Lapan then unzipped his pants to grab another leech. He got it, then threw it away. "They crept on my thigh because I wore short pants." This moment has stuck in my mind. It was momentous because it made me realize that I had landed in Tangkahan. I had heard before that it was a leech attaching itself to the body that marks someone's arrival in a tropical forest area. Later I found out that due to their abundance, it is impossible to get free of leeches when it comes to working under the dense forest canopy, including for* angon.

Angon *is mostly conducted in a group, but it might be done on a solitary journey. One day, I joined a solitary* angon *with Songo, the biggest and only adult bull in Tangkahan, with his mahout at that day, Duwa. As I have learnt before, I prepared an appropriate outfit when I followed mahouts to the forest. Long pants and rubber boots to prevent leeches attaching to the skin, a dry bag to store and protect belongings from the rain, and lunch that we shared like a potluck on the forest floor. Mahouts arm themselves with a machete, too. This time, Duwa brought me not as deep as several experiences before when I joined collective* angons*. I was afraid that he brought us there because I did not ride atop of Songo when we entered the forest. Along the way, three of us—Songo, Duwa, and me—were walking individually. He introduced me to various kinds of forest plants with their physical characteristics and advantages. He showed me the first-grade commercial woods, various kinds of leaves and their benefits, the vine for making handcrafts, ex-illegal logging trees on the forest floor and river, and his experiences of being a mahout. Duwa is the one who explicitly acknowledged that working as a mahout has taught him to survive in the forest, even though these very skills are evident in the characteristics of all mahouts.*

Around 2 PM, we pulled off the hammock and started to move to find out where Songo was. Even though the elephant' front legs were already fettered, the elephant could still move far. Songo was found by Duwa after more than an hour of trekking. Trekking the secondary forest was exhausting because in certain parts we had to pass through rainforest shrubs that could be passed easily by the elephant. In addition, the search involves tracing his giant footmarks and newly warm dung, sometimes along the cliff or other precarious paths. Once we found Songo, I walked back by foot to the place where we left our belongings

behind. At first, I was in front of Duwa, who walked side by side with Songo. Somehow, however, I lost them. I was not able to follow Songo's footmarks and dung as my guidance. Duwa and Songo arrived earlier than me. He was worried and shouted my name. My position was not that far from them apparently, so I could hear his commands to Songo. From Duwa's voice, then I could see Songo's huge body, that subsequently served as my guidance to find him. Trekking the forest paths following an elephant's footmarks and dung had made me sweaty and dirty with the debris of forest substances (moss, leaves, etc.). As a care practice, it shows that angon *is physically demanding labour that requires not only embodied interaction with the elephant through their footmarks and dung, but also combatting the precarious condition of the forest.*

5 Lively Commodification of Captive Elephants

In Chapter 4, I have demonstrated the historical trajectory of elephant domestication in modern Indonesia, from the establishment of the ETCs through to the subsequent alternative institution of the CRUs. In Tangkahan, the establishment of the CRU has been built on its reliance on the labour of captive elephants that sustains numerous ecotourism activities. In this chapter, I would like to explore in more detail the extent to which captive elephants are employed for ecotourism as well as the associated consequences and dilemmas. I begin with elaborating more explicitly a set of necessary conditions required in incorporating and maintaining captive elephants for ecotourism, through which the commodification of captive elephants is enabled to flourish. Looking at the commodification of captive elephants allows me to investigate the specific type of commodities that captive elephants hold by being incorporated in ecotourism and the value production generated from elephant-based ecotourism activities.

5.1 The Trained Elephants

Even though there is no detailed resource regarding the historical record of each individual captive elephant in Indonesia, I am confident in saying that all existing adult captive elephants in Indonesia nowadays are the product of the capture programme described in Chapter 4. This is also true for those in Tangkahan. There, some of the elephants were even part of the first generation of captured elephants in the modern history of Indonesian domestication of Sumatran elephants. They had been tamed and trained not only as a crucial means for government authorities in dealing with human-elephant conflicts, but also as circus elephants before any types of street performances involving captive elephants were banned in the early 2000s. They also experienced a highly uncertain period in the midst of Aceh military conflicts in the 1990s and 2000s (see Hedman 2005), during which captive elephants along with their mahouts from the ETC of Lhok Asan had to move out of the camp and repeatedly search refuge outside Aceh province. The movement of captive elephants has remained highly dependent on changing political dynamics and agendas performed by manifold institutions.

In the case of Tangkahan, captive elephants were deployed to realize the greater agenda of forest conservation through ecotourism. Ndoro, one of first deployed mahouts, told me that for the sake of ecotourism, the elephants have been trained to perform a set of simple skills. Here, I would like to mention an example of elephant bathing sessions where some of the skills are performed. It is commonly known among mahouts that one of their jobs is bringing elephants for bathing by asking the elephants to enter the river and letting them bathe by themselves. However, in Tangkahan, the elephants are bathed with a brush. To enable tourists to participate in that session, the elephants have been trained to be able to lie down at the riverbed. This position enables tourists to brush the elephant's body comfortably. Another example is spraying some amount of water through the trunk. This skill has been developed as one of basic skills for a captive

elephant. They are familiar with spraying water over their own back to remove sand, mud, and other substances from it. However, for the sake of ecotourism, the elephants change the direction towards tourist's face. At the end of bathing session, tourists then take pictures together with the elephants and mahouts who sit on top of the elephants. For this, the elephants have also been trained to show the trunk to the front, facing the camera. Any forms of interaction to provide bodily encounters between tourists and captive elephants have been deliberately prepared prior to the actual performances.

Nevertheless, creating skilful captive elephants is not enough. In order to ensure the involvement of captive elephants in ecotourism is not interrupted, it is compulsory to keep captive elephants in captivity. Captivity of elephants, therefore, is not an undisturbed state or a fix condition. Mahouts of Tangkahan recognize the coming of a specific situation in which a captive elephant is going rebel. They call such an elephant a broken elephant (*gajah rusak*), which could be translated as animal resistance for its refusal to work (Wadiwel 2018). An issue is considered possible even with an already tamed elephant. When the problem is emerging, the elephant can feel ticklish again, a feeling that is forcibly made to disappear when the elephant is tamed for the first time. In many cases, rebel behaviours of captive elephants can be harmful and possibly end up with the death of mahouts, ironically at the hands of their own elephants (*The Guardian* 2015; *The Hindu* 2018). A deadly case of humans killed by captive elephants has never occurred in Tangkahan. However, Ndoro shared his experience with Wolu, an adult cow he used to handle, when she was broken and what he did to solve the problem:

> **Ndoro:** Before the enclosure was built, we tethered the elephant at an oil palm tree. I had been negligent to my duties. I did not bring Wolu for washing routinely. Since she had not been touched for quite some time, her ticklishness was coming back. She tried to throw people off from her back. She screamed when I touched her. To address this issue, we had to make her not ticklish again. We tied her modestly at the tree, and then we tickled her. We did it by touching the groin part of her forelegs and the bottom part of her belly. An elephant can feel tickling when someone touches those parts of the body.

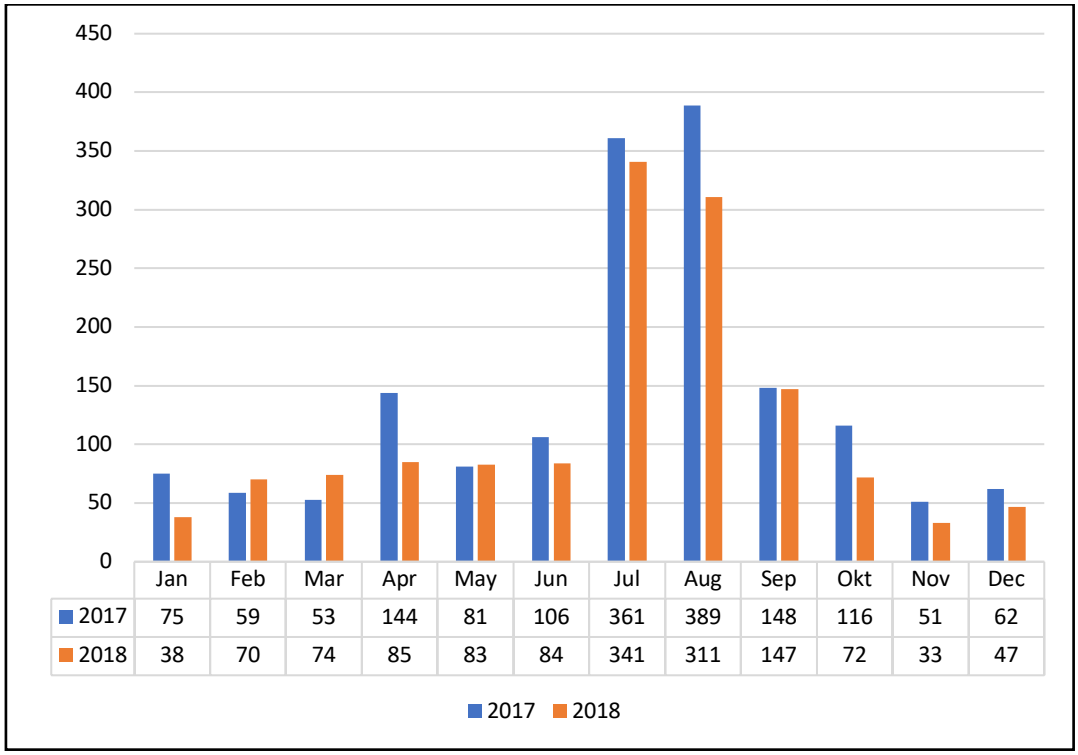
Thus far, it is evident that elephants in Tangkahan are those who have been trained and kept in captivity. After engaging with ecotourism as a new routine, at least since 2006 when Tangkahan was officially launched as an ecotourism site, those elephants have also been considered incompatible for any human-elephant conflict operations. Songo, the only adult bull in Tangkahan, had been involved in one operation, but he was afraid even to approach a sedated wild female elephant. He also tends to abruptly react by looking for an alternative path or simply turning back when he finds wild elephant's dung on the forest floor. Captured by 2000, Songo was tamed, yet he was not trained for a confrontation with wild elephants. Mahouts told me that elephant training is designed for an exact purpose with regard to the physical and intelligence capacities of each individual elephant, whether for performances, human-elephant conflict mitigation, or others. Yet, adult bull is usually projected for mitigation missions. Songo, unfortunately, had not been

prepared for such a mission. It is not only the case for Songo. All captive elephants in Tangkahan have been regarded as not suitable to confront wild elephants. The depiction of the particularities of captive elephants above shows the extreme amount of human interventions in captive elephants' behaviours, which is required as a necessary condition for the commodification of captive elephants to flourish.

5.2 Selling Bodily Interactions with Elephants

In Tangkahan, captive elephants have been managed by the CRU Tangkahan under a joint understanding with the GLNP Office. Based on the agreement, the mandate of the CRU Tangkahan revolves around the management of captive elephants in Tangkahan to support the protection of the national park and human-elephant conflict mitigation. There is nothing to do with ecotourism. It is the role of the Community Tour Operator (CTO), a company built and managed by a local community organization, to organize local guides and sell tourism packages, in which elephant-based activities—comprised of elephant washing, elephant trekking, and elephant grazing—have become the main attractions. In the low season (September–June), elephant washing is held twice in the morning and afternoon, but it can be held four times in a day in the high season (July–August) (see Figure 2). During elephant washing, as I have mentioned above, tourists are involved in brushing the elephants along with mahouts, feeding the elephants, and taking pictures together with the elephants and mahouts. Siwah, a local guide leader, told me that elephant packages are offered for its authenticity (West and Carrier 2004) and bodily interactions between tourists and elephants:

Figure 2 The number of tourists in elephant-based ecotourism by months, 2017–2018



	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Okt	Nov	Dec
2017	75	59	53	144	81	106	361	389	148	116	51	62
2018	38	70	74	85	83	84	341	311	147	72	33	47

Source: CRU Tangkahan

> **Siwah:** We provide an intimate interaction with the elephants, how the elephants interact with humans in the water. It is enticing for tourists, as if watching the National Geographic Channel, but this is the authentic one. Forest, elephants, and quietness. Perhaps people do not have an experience with elephants that is interesting to share because they have never had any intimate interactions with elephants. But, by joining elephant activities here, they get the experience and they can share it: "I know what an elephant's hair looks like! I know that their skin is grainy!"

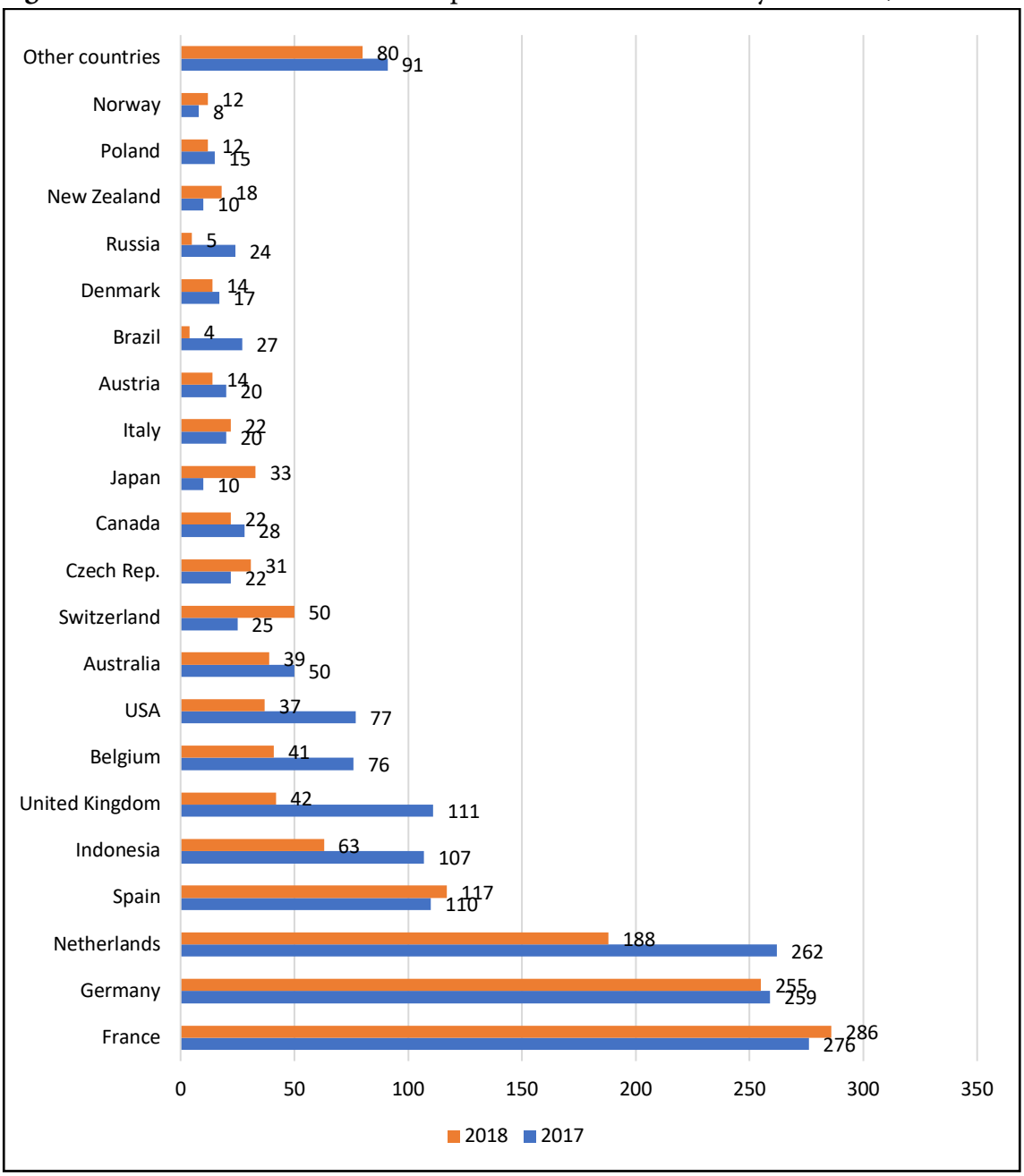
To provide wildness scenery, elephant washing takes place at the riverbank in the forest fringe. As long as I observed, the stream of the river flowed slowly but turns a bit stronger and brownish after a heavy rain during the night. At the shore, tourists could find tree trunks scattered around, the load that the river carried out down from the forest. From the gathering point where they were waiting for the elephants to come out of the forest, the density of the rainforest stood nakedly to provide an awe-inspiring sight. Trees were towering high to the sky. The ears could recognize the blaring voices of monkeys, birds, and other animals. Tourists could easily catch a sight of those creatures running, jumping, and flying wildly. And once the elephants come out crossing over the river, tourists usually start to take their first camera shot. Early on, they get a photographic view: elephants walking across the riverbed with the forest in the background. Tourists make the day perfect after gaining bodily interfaces with the elephants, along with all of their lively skills and performances.

Meanwhile, in elephant trekking, tourists ride on top of the elephant with companionship of mahouts. Sitting on top of the pedal on the elephant's back, tourists take trips of around 2 kilometres along the forest fringe. It is stated on a leaflet that the point of interest of this service involves "medical plants, the amazing ficus trees, butterfly beach," and "if you are lucky you will see gibbons, macaques, orang-utan, bears, Thomas leaf monkeys, etc." During my fieldwork, there were no tourists who bought the voucher for elephant grazing. Additionally, beside those packages, for which tourists have to book vouchers at a visitor centre, generally during national holidays domestic tourists can take a short version of elephant riding, which can be paid on location with a much lower price. It seems that, even though there is no detailed data on the number of domestic tourists for that particular service, it plays a significant role in providing additional income for mahouts and local guides.

Indeed, if we look at the graph below (Figure 3), the target market of elephant ecotourism in Tangkahan is foreign tourists, especially from European countries (excluded Indonesia, the big five countries are French, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, and United Kingdom). Since the number of visitors in the low season is far lower than in peak periods, it is important for the CRU Tangkahan to save money for spending during the low season because they must feed the elephants, regardless of if visitors are coming or not. Exactly for the same reason, the CRU Tangkahan then get a slightly bigger proportion of share than the local community organization. From each package of elephant-based activities,

there is an income share between the CRU Tangkahan (55%), the CTO (45%), and other expenditures (permit to the GLNP Office, fruits for elephant feeding, and rent cost of land for elephant bathing and trekking). Elephant ecotourism has, indeed, sustained the local economy of Tangkahan, both from elephant packages or other tourist consumption spending such as accommodation, food stalls, tires (for tubing), and gratuity from tourists. The latter apparently contributes a significant additional income for local guides and mahouts. Among staff of the CRU Tangkahan themselves, gratuity sometimes becomes a source of social jealousy. It is then part of the responsibility of a tourism manager to distribute the tasks of providing services for foreign tourists evenly to all mahouts.

Figure 3 The number of tourists in elephant-based ecotourism by countries, 2017–2018



Source: CRU Tangkahan

5.3 More Than Just Commercial Activities?

In managing elephant-based activities, one mahout holds a key role as a tourism manager (*mandor*), who oversees the entire elephant-based activity programme on a daily basis. Ndoro, a friendly guy who has been working as a mahout since 1993 when he was 20, takes the responsibility. Ndoro records the number of visitors manually in a book based on vouchers he receives on daily basis. Since holding the role as a tourism manager in 2016, he has no longer been working directly handling elephants, though he helps a lot during elephant bathing session such as by feeding small elephants. After purchasing the voucher in a visitor centre, tourists move to an elephant camp of the CRU Tangkahan and give the voucher to Ndoro before starting to participate in particular elephant-based activities. On the voucher, it states the purchased elephant packages: elephant bathing, elephant grazing, and/or elephant trekking. A local guide of Tangkahan, instead of non-local guide or even travel agency guide, accompanies tourists. Besides providing gracious services, one of the guide's main responsibilities is telling the historical story of captive elephants in Tangkahan prior to starting an elephant session. The introductory talk is particularly crucial because, as Siwah told me:

> **Siwah:** The guide has to explain why the elephants landed in Tangkahan, so that tourists do not get us wrong. Since we need to develop ecotourism, meaning that we need a point of interest, then they assume that we take the elephants out of the forest. In fact, it is not so. The elephants were conflict elephants. If the guide does not tell that fact, how do they know the truth?

Once elephant session is begun, mahouts take over the role of tourist guiding. Here, there are two discrete divisions of guiding systems in elephant-based ecotourism of Tangkahan. Firstly, elephant-based activities that tourists experience are performed as part of daily activities of the management of captive elephants. It aims to provide tourists with the sense of contributing to elephant conservation efforts, and there are no performances of sophisticated skills such as those conducted by circus elephants. Even elephant trekking is designed to show a short version of elephant grazing, so not solely riding an elephant. Secondly, by dividing the guiding responsibilities between local guides and mahouts, the sense of conservation is being reiterated. When tourists arrive at the elephant camp, they are directed to fill in a guest book and told with another message that their visit is valuable for the effort to save the lives of Sumatran elephants. The welcoming talk is done in front of a souvenir shop where local community products such as bracelets, necklaces, lucky rocks, and other items are sold. Directly and indirectly, tourists are being convinced about the non-exploitative activities of managing captive elephants and that their money is allocated for more-than-just commercial activities.

5.4 Rolling System of Handling Elephants

Although captive elephants have not been taken out of the forest specifically for Tangkahan ecotourism, they were initially deployed deliberately for establishing ecotourism over

there. During the formative period of Tangkahan ecotourism, the tasks of the elephants were not only accompanying mahouts and villagers for forest patrol. For at least two years (2004–2006), the labour of captive elephants played a crucial role in exploring potential ecotourism spots. The clearing of sand to transform a cave into a tourist attraction was done with the help of captive elephants. Several elephant trekking routes that used to be offered in Tangkahan required month-long explorations with and without the elephants, too. There used to be an elephant trekking tour from Tangkahan to Bukit Lawang, which took up four days and three nights. During the tour, the elephants passed through precarious forest areas instead of human-made asphalt road. For this adventure tour, it took months to prepare the route and other things such as shelters. Such a particular trip had been ended because it took too long outside of Tangkahan. Tourists who were visiting Tangkahan for only elephant washing (which is only an hour) or elephant trekking (one or two hours) often decided to cancel their bookings because less elephants were available or even not around. Coupled with other mismanagement problems, the long trip of Tangkahan-Bukit Lawang was finally dropped from the package list.

Now, to accommodate the existing activities of elephant-based ecotourism, a rolling system of handling elephants has been applied. In this system, unlike other systems of elephant handling in which a mahout builds a lifelong relationship with an elephant as found in India (Hart and Sundar 2000) and Burma (Lainé 2019), mahouts may handle different elephants each day. Even though each mahout is in charge of one elephant, they have to be able to handle all elephants. By doing so, when one or more mahouts are off duty, other mahouts are still available to handle the elephants. This means that the absence of mahouts does not necessarily mean the absence of elephants. The application of this system, however, is not without risks. I heard mahouts at times complaining their elephants that are becoming naughtier, a problem that leads to the use of more violence to control the elephants. Another impact of the rolling system lies in the form of handling an adult bull, Songo. Handling Songo is considered the most difficult task for some mahouts, that ideally should be done by an experienced mahout. Yet, when the task to handle Songo is assigned, it somehow requires the deployment of extra awareness and circumspection. Elephant-based ecotourism entails risky tasks that both mahouts and captive elephants have to bear under the regime of lively commodification (Collard 2013; 2014; Collard and Dempsey 2013).

For mahouts, the management of captive elephants in Tangkahan is still considered the best management model for taking care of captive elephants, at least compared to training centres or sanctuaries. By incorporating captive elephants in ecotourism, the budget for taking care of the elephants has been supported by ecotourism revenues. The government no longer needs to allocate funding for the elephants, as is the case with the training centre. The integration of captive elephants into the unstable business of ecotourism is considered as advantageous for the elephants in the sense that it provides a huge opportunity for grazing in the forest during the low season. The low season is longer than the high season, ten as opposed to two months. Meanwhile, the concept of sanctuary is considered risky for humans because captive elephants are barely touched as they are released in a

particular restricted area. However, the basic idea of rewilding captive elephants implemented in such a model is not necessarily without human interventions. A number of measures, such as medical care and providing food supplements, should still be performed by humans. Above all, releasing tamed elephants under human care environment is harmful for mahouts, as Ndoro told me with reference to a wildlife sanctuary recently developed in other part of Sumatra:

> **Ndoro:** In the sanctuary, elephants are herded and controlled verbally. The elephants are not tethered nor rode. The wild instinct of the elephants eventually emerges. One day, an elephant was in pregnancy. One of the workers approached the elephant. He thought it was a day just like many days before: he just approached the elephant, and then gave her food. Instead of taking the food, the elephant slapped the worker with her trunk. Three or four of his ribs were fractured. Although highly elastic, the trunk of the elephant can be harder than wood when it is used for a strike.

However, even without comparing a variety of captive elephant management models, the story of captive elephants' incorporation into ecotourism in Tangkahan has become a complex one. As the elephants are completely managed based on ecotourism generated income since 2012, the elephants have actually no longer been involved in field-based activities of forest conservation such as elephant jungle patrol. All of the elephants have been transformed into, to refer to the words of Ndoro, tourism elephants (*gajah wisata*), marked by the incompatibility for a direct confrontation with wild elephants. Exploring the debates among actors documented in minutes of meetings, I have also found the impression that taking out the elephants is currently akin with bringing an end to Tangkahan ecotourism: "do not take the elephants out of Tangkahan. (…) If we make a wrong decision, it might turn out as the downfall of Tangkahan ecotourism" (Minutes of meeting, February 1, 2018). In other words, keeping captive elephants in use for ecotourism, in the case of Tangkahan with its massive history of illegal logging and followed by the introduction of elephant-based ecotourism, is also necessary, to rephrase the words of one of state officials: "to minimalize the risk of social impact" (Minutes of meeting, April 27, 2017). The reliance of local livelihoods on elephant-based activities to sustain and elevate ecotourism has been strongly intertwined, leading to a particular dilemma in dealing with the growing campaign of animal welfare concerns.

5.5 Animal Welfare Dilemma

Tangkahan has become one of the main destinations for foreign tourists to visit in North Sumatra province. Of several community-based ecotourism sites managed in cooperation with the GLNP Office, the two biggest contributors of permit revenue are Bukit Lawang with its orang-utans and Tangkahan with its captive elephants (Balai Besar Taman Nasional Gunung Leuser 2016). However, people of Tangkahan are starting to recognize the declining number of visitors. Even during holidays, they told me that less people are visiting Tangkahan than before. Such a discourse is not a unique case of

Tangkahan and it should be interpreted as part of their survival strategy in terms of their interest in getting a decent income (Carruyo 2008). Sada, a local leader, provided me information to possibly make sense of people's complaints over the economic development of ecotourism in Tangkahan. He argued that people largely have different perceptions of what ecotourism is. He said that people perceive Tangkahan as a-not-yet-final product as an ecotourism site because they expect to see thousands of guests every day. For Sada, who had been involved in establishing ecotourism, Tangkahan has already run too far because the primary target is foreigners, but there have been already too many of them in the high season. If there is an issue around the number of visitors, it might be due to an increasing campaign of animal welfare issues, particularly of elephant riding as the main subject of criticism (Schmidt-Burbach n.d.). Sada is clearly not in favour of the argument of prohibiting elephant riding. He argued:

> **Sada:** They do not know what we really do in Tangkahan. We offer elephant riding, but for what? They do not want to know about it. For them, it is not allowed to ride an elephant, and that is all. If elephant riding is stopped, Tangkahan would be closed. I am pretty sure, once the elephants are taken out of here, ecotourism will be closed, the forest would be gone. Like it or not, elephants have been the icon of Tangkahan.

As workers at the frontline, it seems that mahouts perforce to bear the biggest responsibility in dealing with complaints regarding the welfare issues of elephants. They have received numerous. The ways in which they handle captive elephants, such as snapping, slapping, and even fishing out dung rectally, constitute the subject of complaints. I had also heard a complaint on why the small elephants were tied during bathing sessions. Dealing with such an issue on location among the crowd could be highly frustrating. Let alone, there is a language barrier they have to deal with. Even though most of them are familiar with English as a communication tool to talk to tourists, they remain in the belief that they need of more fluent English to explain their arguments clearly. It then makes sense when mahouts ultimately come to believe that those who inculpate their mahoutship activities hold an over simplistic view on the problem of sustaining the life of elephants in highly fragmented areas such as Sumatra. A couple of excerpts below points out how mahouts respond to those criticisms:

> **Duwa:** Sometimes I just said, "We have the boss. If you want to complain, go to them. We are just carrying out our duties. I'm just a worker here."

> **Lapan:** Once we knew that they were animal rights advocates, we told them before they asked, "We cannot speak in English." If not, they would continuously drop us questions.

After all, the strategy of harnessing captive elephants for ecotourism has turned out to be a dilemma for local communities, the GLNP Office, and the CRU Tangkahan. In a meeting in which the plan of the GLNP Office to end any endeavour of selling encounters with elephants was announced, the GLNP Office emphasized that captive elephants had

nothing to do with ecotourism. The representative of local community affirmed that in the last three years the number of elephant trekking vouchers has steadily dwindled. He argued that the time to evaluate that particular package had just been coming. Yet, the representative of the CRU Tangkahan insisted that a detailed investigation was needed to deeper analyse the visitor trend in Tangkahan. He said that it was too early to say stop for elephant trekking or any elephant-based activities by only looking at the trends of visitors. Animal welfare as a discipline of study, he added, is itself a complex subject and even the management of captive elephants must comply with animal welfare principles. He argued that it was too early to say that by riding an elephant, a captive elephant's welfare was not satisfied. Those arguments denote the dilemma of the commodification of captive elephants that inevitably have to deal with by all actors involved along with "the globalizing governance of animal welfare in elephant tourism" (Duffy and Moore 2011) and "the perpetual folklore that all captive calves are whipped, beaten and 'broken in' by mahouts" (Suter 2019).

5.6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have shown that captive elephants are trained to perform a set of simple skills during elephant-based ecotourism activities. Taking the example of an elephant washing session, one of the packages sold in Tangkahan besides elephant trekking and elephant grazing, skills such as lying down on the riverbank, spraying water into tourist's faces with their trunks, and presenting their trunks towards the camera have been deliberately prepared to create skilful captive elephants and, by keeping them in bodily encounter with humans, it has also contributed to make the elephants stay in captivity. Incorporating captive elephants for ecotourism purpose represents the lively commodification of captive elephants, in which wilderness and bodily interaction are sold to foreign tourists as the target market of Tangkahan ecotourism. Selling an encounter with the elephants is designed as a contribution to elephant conservation, and thus forest conservation in general, and to more-than-just commercial activities. This is evident in the division of tourist guiding tasks between mahouts and local guides before and during elephant sessions. Along with the reliance of Tangkahan ecotourism on the labour of captive elephants, a rolling system of handling elephants has been introduced. Although the impacts of this system on elephant behaviours have been starting to emerge, generally the incorporation of captive elephants is considered the best management model of captive elephants, at least compared to training centres or sanctuaries. Exactly because Tangkahan ecotourism has been sustained by the commodification of captive elephants, currently all actors involved are inevitably facing a dilemma in dealing with the growing campaign on animal welfare issues concerned with working elephants, which is unlikely to be resolved at this point in time.

6 Discussion

The preceding findings chapters (Chapter 4 and 5) have laid out the empirical data collected in a descriptive manner. This chapter focuses on bringing back the main research question by connecting the data with the theoretical framework in a more analytical manner. As stated in Chapter 1, the main research question is: *How has the commodification of captive elephants for ecotourism as a neoliberal conservation practice been imposed and embraced in the case of Tangkahan?* With a view to clarity of argumentation, I have divided the analytical discussion into two different but interrelated sections. Firstly, I analyse the conservation strategies introduced in Tangkahan as articulated in the form of CRU. Secondly, I analyse the commodification of captive elephants as it has been performed in Tangkahan. I present the propositions of each section in the outset, which accordingly intend to serve as the key arguments I shall propose in this research.

Proposition #1: The conservation strategies articulated in the form of CRU have been deployed in order to incorporate both captive elephants and their mahouts under the neoliberal conservation agenda.

In this thesis, I proposed a way of looking at Tangkahan as an ecotourism site from the side of captive elephants, because elephant-based activities have become the main attraction. This point of view has enabled me to see that the current form of the commodification of captive elephants cannot be detached from the state of environmental crisis within the sphere of the tightly intertwined issues of elephant and forest conservation. The emergence of human-elephant conflicts across Sumatra has signified the broadening scale of the fragmentation and degradation of forest across the island, due primarily to massive appropriation of forest land for plantations and the human transmigration policy from the overcrowded islands of Java and Bali to Sumatra. The programme of capturing wild elephants—followed by the establishment of the ETCs in which wild elephants were tamed and trained to be transformed into working animals for human purposes (tourism, industrial forestry, etc.)—had been introduced in order to reduce the number of human-elephant conflicts. However, the ETCs have subsequently turned out to be another serious problem, as opposed to the solution, amidst the growing urge to save elephants. By understanding environmental crisis as an inherent character of capitalism, we can see that a series of different crises in the world of elephant conservation have been emerging over time, be it human-elephant conflicts, the severe conditions of captive elephants under the management of ETCs, and recently the animal welfare dilemma. In short, identifying these crises as integral parts of the nature of capital as Marx has put it (via Büscher and Arsel 2012) allows me to trace the historical trajectory of the domestication of Sumatran elephants in Indonesia and to locate that particular subject as a foundational part of inquiry. It also allows me to comprehend the alternative scheme in the form of CRU proposed by the FFI Indonesia within the same continuum of events. Without mobilizing a general analytical tool around the intersection between conservation and capitalism,

the continuation of different modes of conservation across different eras may not reveal itself for examination.

The CRU concept itself was proposed by the FFI Indonesia by transforming the elephant conservation crisis into the pretext for a further process of commodification, the subject that will be discussed below. Again, using the side of captive elephants as the point of departure for this investigation has yielded another benefit in terms of contributing to the debate around the neoliberal conservation of the wildlife conservation NGO FFI Indonesia. This is not to conceal the role of other types of ecotourism NGOs and even the government authorities themselves, who have placed their concerns on liberating community entrepreneurial potential (see INDECON 2004; 2007). Rather, the chosen perspective helps to broaden the analytical scope by taking wildlife conservation NGOs into account. Here, I found that a couple of conservation strategies have been employed to extract the invisible productive role of captive elephants and mahouts. The proponents of the CRU concept have discursively contributed to dismantling all sorts of problems associated with the ETCs, in order to show that the life of captive elephants was at stake. Similarly, mahouts have been perceived as valueless in the face of the greater agenda of forest conservation. This eroding narrative is what I refer to as a reductionistic approach. This approach is seen as reductionistic because it promotes a new morality of conservation by undermining the previous conservation practice and breaking it down into separated different subjects. To activate this approach, the imagery divides the living-scape in the form of forest or *in situ* conservation from the out-of-the-forest or *ex situ* conservation, which serves as the main vehicle as it informs the way we conserve elephants in relation to their natural habitat. In order to achieve the agenda of forest conservation, hence, the reductionistic approach is applied in reinforcing the significance of implementing the CRU. However, the approach is heavily problematic, mainly because instead of undermining capitalism, it relies on its embodiment to capitalism through neoliberal conservation.

Here, the reregulation of captive elephant conservation is important to consider as it constitutes one of the typical characteristics of neoliberal conservation (Castree 2008a; 2008b; Igoe and Brockington 2007). The stipulation of the Asian Elephants Conservation Act of 1997 has played a significant role because the Act has appropriated funds to support the establishment of the CRUs across Sumatra. The Act has introduced the new norm of elephant conservation by not allowing wild elephants to be taken out of the forest and shifted the concern of elephant conservation to the management of captive elephants in relation to forest conservation attempts. This norm has served as the basis for conservationists to urge the government to end the elephant capture programme. At this point, the CRU was proposed as an example of captive elephant management where captive elephants (and their mahouts) are incorporated in the conservation agenda through the preservation of their habitat. However, as an alternative concept in dealing with the numerous problems in elephant conservation, the case of the CRU Tangkahan shows that it has currently moved completely away from the intended agenda, particularly after the CRU Tangkahan was transformed into an independent NGO. Since then, captive

elephants have been heavily integrated in ecotourism and no longer utilized for forest patrol. Indeed, given the high degree of dependence on elephant-based activities, any attempts to take the elephants out of Tangkahan is akin to mortal danger for ecotourism in Tangkahan. In effect, in order to save the source of livelihoods for the local community of Tangkahan, captive elephants must not be removed from the equation. Yet, this has clearly made the issue of elephant conservation through ecotourism a complicated affair for everyone, let alone for mahouts as workers at the frontline who have to deal with complaints over the way they treat their elephants. Indeed, this case study has eventually revealed the importance of seeing neoliberal conservation from below (Roth and Dressler 2012) and, most importantly, the strategic role of conservation "to entrain nature to capitalism" (Büscher et al. 2012).

Proposition #2: Elephant-based ecotourism has paved the way for the emergence of captive elephants as lively commodities in which encounter value is exploited through the moments of bodily interactions.

The incorporation of captive elephants in ecotourism activities as exemplified in the case of Tangkahan signifies the transformation of captive elephants as, following Collard and Dempsey (2013), lively commodities. This specific type of commodity status distinguishes them from another form of commodification of elephants: the illegal wildlife market in which the tusk is violently taken from elephant's body before being made available for trade (cf. Moore 2011). In the ivory market, the life of the elephants themselves has no monetary value, so that they have to be killed to allow poachers to remove the tusks from the body. On the contrary in Tangkahan, a site of elephant conservation, elephants must remain alive. Collard and Dempsey (2013, 2684) have stated that the capitalist value of lively commodities is derived from "their status as living beings." With these types of commodities, once elephants are dead, they no longer bear capitalist value. However, the commodification of captive elephants for ecotourism can thus be seen as another mode of production in selling the liveliness of elephants. As marginalized creatures in the broader process of the extractive forest regime, the life of elephants initially has no monetary value because they have been treated as mere conflict elephants. Even once they have been captured, tamed, and trained in the camps, their potential as the bearer of capitalist value remains idle in the ETCs before they are taken out of there and join the circuit of capital as working animals. Therefore, the incorporation of captive elephants to the CRU project is a crucial moment in transforming them as a meaningful sentient being in wildlife conservation. This path turns out to be the process of the attribution of monetary value once captive elephants get involved in ecotourism activities. This major transformation event is important because it marks the appearance of captive elephants, from being unproductive to being productive entities. In the end, this is beneficial to note in order to investigate the specific emergence of lively commodities in the particular case of living beings.

The notion of encounter value advanced by Haraway (2008) also helps to understand the way captive elephants are being involved in ecotourism. Here, the conceptualisation of

the lively perspective by Barua (2016) is useful in identifying the mode of production in which encounterability is the value exploited through the moments of bodily interactions between captive elephants and tourists. Firstly, in the process of lively commodification of captive elephants, captive elephants are eventful commodities, although they initially have no value in the previous mode of capitalist production. However, capitalism has finally found a way to entrain captive elephants to capitalism and not necessarily throw them out as marginalized creatures. Here, understanding the eventfulness of commodities requires a completely different understanding of capitalist production; not merely the production of commodities through the exploitation of nature and labour power. The nature of capitalism as an expansionary system has enabled it to create another type of production mode, that is lively commodification in the case of ecotourism. Secondly, as I have described from the example of the elephant washing session, the labouring activities of captive elephants take place within specific tasks, such as lying down on the river, spraying out water on the face of tourists, and directing their trunk to the camera. Those "practical operations" (Ingold 2000, 195) are performed not only by trained elephants, but also by their mahouts who are skilfully able to handle the elephants in performing these skills in front of tourists. Thirdly, the performance of those tasks is carried out through the combination of commands spoken by mahouts and carnal movements of the elephants. This is what Barua (2016) refers to as the rhythm of temporalities. Fourthly, all elephant packages offered in Tangkahan do not produce a new product because the production process in lively commodification is intransitive. As part of commercial conservation activities, the performance of captive elephants brings the idea of their survival. The survival of elephants means the growth and multiplicity of that particular species of beings. Lively commodification, hence, is about selling "the process of growth" (Barua 2016) rather than producing uneventful things as it is in a more conventional capitalist production, as Marx (1990) has elaborated.

Finally, it is now important to review the position of the CRU Tangkahan in relation to the value production of lively commodities. The reductionistic conservation strategies as embodied in the form of the CRU concept are not only crucial in incorporating both captive elephants and mahouts into the forest conservation agenda, but also for emphasizing the CRU itself as an institution in which the biopolitical process (Wadiwel 2018) of making life or the keeping alive of elephants is maintained. By standing against the elephant capture programme, the CRU Tangkahan holds the principle that wild elephants constitute "a category of beings that are not permitted to be killed, captured, made captive, and bought and sold" (Collard 2014, 153). As part of the CRU mission, chasing away wild elephants back to the forest is put forward as the way out in dealing with human-elephant conflicts rather than capturing or even killing the conflict elephants. However, in the case of already tamed elephants, their integration into ecotourism means perpetuating the presence of human interventions in order to keep the elephants in captivity. This is the case not only for tourism elephants, but also for any kind of working elephants, including those under the management of the sanctuary model. In the case of Tangkahan, captive elephants have become an inseparable part of ecotourism on which local communities rely on as a livelihood source. As such, captive elephants as lively commodities

cannot be treated equally with other types of lively commodities in other modes of capitalist production. This research is not intended to formulate a specific conceptual category derived from the examination of the commodification of captive elephants. However, it is clear that a new additional category to complement the previously devised concepts of sentient (Wilkie 2010) and lively commodities (Collard and Dempsey 2013) is required. The endeavour of such formulation may be better directed towards the institutions that traditionally promote the mission of biodiversity conservation.

7 Conclusion

In this thesis, I have sought to understand the commodification of captive elephants for ecotourism as a neoliberal conservation practice with the case of Tangkahan, an ecotourism site in the buffer zone of the GLNP in Sumatra, Indonesia. To do so, I took an alternative path by departing the investigation from the side of captive elephants rather than that of neoliberalism. This point of view has enabled me to pay a greater attention to the dynamics of elephant conservation and rural livelihoods as crucial elements within my endeavour to examine the contemporary forms of the commodification of nature.

The deployment of captive elephants in Tangkahan is performed under the CRU programme introduced by the FFI Indonesia. The CRU essentially promotes the prominence of natural habitat preservation. The CRU is, therefore, proposed as an alternative institution through which human-elephant conflicts is handled by not capturing wild elephants from their natural habitat. Rather, already captured elephants and their mahouts are incorporated for the purpose of forest conservation in such activities as elephant jungle patrol. To achieve that goal, two types of conservation strategy are deployed. Firstly, dismantling the ETCs as the foundational institution for the domestication of Sumatran elephants. These camps were established across Sumatra as taming and training institutions for captured elephants in order to transform them into working animals. The proponents of the CRU have discursively revealed all sorts of problems within the ETCs in order to show the severe conditions of captive elephants under the management of the ETCs. Secondly, undermining the role of mahouts in taking care of captive elephants in the ETCs. As I have closely witnessed in Tangkahan, mahoutship custodial labour involves an intimate relation between humans and captive elephants as well as an embodied care involving humans, captive elephants, and the forest where they go for elephant grazing. However, mahoutship menial tasks are considered as having no conservation value within the dominant discourse of forest conservation. Taking these together, those strategies have provided the basis for incorporating them as the main components of the CRU in establishing and maintaining ecotourism in Tangkahan, providing an alternative livelihood for villagers in that particular area who used to work largely as illegal loggers.

Currently, captive elephants of Tangkahan are involved in three packages: elephant bathing, elephant trekking, and elephant grazing. Taking an example from the elephant bathing session, it is clear that those elephants are trained to perform a set of simple skills, such as lying down on the riverbank, spraying water into tourists' faces with their trunk, and directing their trunk towards the camera. To add wilderness scenery, those skills are performed outdoors in the forest fringe of the GLNP. Selling encounters with captive elephants helps to keep them in captivity, which is necessary along with the implementation of the rolling system of handling elephants that has been introduced in order to meet the demand of elephant-based activities. Those services are deliberately designed to provide the moments of bodily interactions with skilful elephants that serve as the primary selling points of the commodification of captive elephants, in which foreign visitors are

targeted as the primary market. The revenue generated from elephant-based activities is then divided to be shared between the CRU Tangkahan, which holds the responsibility in taking care of the elephants, and a local community organization which organizes tourism packages and tourist guiding. Yet, the reliance of Tangkahan ecotourism on the labour of captive elephants is now facing a dilemma resulting from the growing concern over animal welfare issues for working elephants. All actors involved in sustaining Tangkahan ecotourism (the GLNP Office, the CRU Tangkahan, and the local community organization) have to deal with the dilemma of removing captive elephants from ecotourism, which would put the livelihood of the people of Tangkahan at stake.

Based on the data collected, this research comes out with two propositions. Firstly, a couple of conservation strategies articulated in the form of CRU have been deployed in order to incorporate both captive elephants and their mahouts under the neoliberal conservation agenda. The companionship of these species has become the main component of the CRU in imposing its agenda of natural habitat or forest preservation and establishing ecotourism in Tangkahan that ultimately heavily relies on the labour of captive elephants. Secondly, elephant-based ecotourism has paved the way for the emergence of captive elephants as lively commodities in which encounter value is exploited through the moments of bodily interactions. In other words, the incorporation of captive elephants in ecotourism constitutes a transformative moment for captive elephants to be more productive entities by attributing monetary value on their liveliness as living beings. They have become lively elephants. As such, in the case of Tangkahan, the CRU has played an effective role as an institution in which nature conservation and rural livelihood is deeply integrated with capitalism through the practice of neoliberal conservation. Finally, through this research, I have attempted to contribute to the broader debate on the commodification of nature under the contemporary system of capitalism, with particular reference to elephant-based ecotourism. Along with the increasingly common trend of selling encounters with animals under the banner of conservation, more rigorous research is needed to understand the more variegated mode of the commodification of nature under the contemporary system of capitalism.

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