

A Sustainable Ecology Movement: Catholicism and Indigenous Religion United against Mining in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

Wigke Capri Arti¹

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Abstract

This article examines and discusses a sustainable ecology movement that has protested the mangan mine in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, since 2000. This movement has united Catholicism and indigenous religion in an effort to promote sustainability, conservation, and environmentalism. Using the institutions of tradition and religion, this movement has negotiated with the State and the private sector and advocated for a moratorium in mining. This article is a qualitative one, employing interviews and focus group discussions as well as a review of documents and previous research into Manggarai and mining conducted by the Research Centre for Politics and Government (PolGov). This study seeks to understand how tradition and religion have been consolidated in their efforts to stop mining in Manggarai. It makes four important findings. First, although manganese does not have much economic value, it is important for poor provinces such as East Nusa Tenggara. Second, Catholicism and indigenous religion have united to advocate for ecological sustainability and oppose manganese mining. Third, traditional and Catholic institutions have strengthened the bonds between members. Fourth, in a literature dominated by studies of religious movements and extractivism, this article contributes a fresh perspective on extractivism and political ecology.

Keywords: *religious politics, environmental sustainability, political ecology, anti-mining advocacy*

Introduction

This article discusses an anti-mining movement in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. It elaborates upon the unique characteristics of this movement,

particularly those that support its efforts to promote ecological sustainability and oppose mining. This movement has been influenced by several factors. *First*, the materiality of manganese, which necessitates open-pit mining. *Second*, the

¹ Department of Politics and Government, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada

developmentalist ideology of a centralistic, authoritarian, and pro-economy government, which has exacerbated the environmental degradation in Manggarai. *Third*, the combination of Abrahamic and indigenous religions in an effort to promote ecological sustainability and conservation, being open to change rather than trapped by literal and dogmatic interpretations.

For more than a decade, a movement has fought against manganese mining in Manggarai, East Nusa Tenggara. This movement has involved broad elements of civil society, including churches, pastors, and traditional communities, all of which have perceived mining as harmful to the environment and to ancestral lands. Exploration of East Nusa Tenggara has occurred since the Dutch colonial era, when JP Freijs showed that Manggarai held such material resources as gold and tin; he highlighted Wae Pesi River as particularly rich in metal ore (Dietrich, 1983). A century later, manganese ore was discovered in East Nusa Tenggara, amidst limestone and volcanic rocks. This mineral became a prime target of exploration and exploitation. Western Timor and Flores have particularly high quality ore (48%), and as such have dominated the world market (Gulf Manganese, 2018). The ore in Manggarai is of slightly lower quality, with content ranging from 30–45% (Pemerintah Manggarai, 2011).

In Indonesia, manganese exploration and mining has been relatively uncommon, and there has thus been a significant gap between production and potential production. According to data from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (2017 (Dirjen Mineral dan Batubara, 2016; Beritagar.id, 2015), 15.5 million tonnes of manganese could be produced, with another 4.4 million tonnes of other metals

(and 5.78 million tonnes in reserve). Production, conversely, has been significantly lower—only 155,000 tonnes in 2019. For comparison, Australia—the world's third largest producer of manganese, after South Africa and China—produces three million tonnes of manganese per annum (National Minerals Information Centre, 2016).

Recognising the significant potential of East Nusa Tenggara, in 2018 PT Gulf Mangan Grup—based in Perth, Australia—signed an agreement with the East Nusa Tenggara government to construct a smelter in the Bolok Industrial Complex, Bolok Village, West Kupang District, Kubang Regency, East Nusa Tenggara (Kaha, 2018). This shows the local government's interest in using manganese mining to improve the local economy as well as its disagreement with protestors.

Churches, traditional institutions, and civil society organisations have opposed manganese mining for both ideological and ecological reasons. The deleterious effects of mining are not only limited to ecological issues, but also health and environmental ones. Open mining has significant consequences, causing air and water pollution. A 2015 WHO report shows that manganese mining can damage the nervous system, disrupt respiration, decrease fertility, and stifle child development. When inhaled, manganese particles directly affect the mind and the liver. Manganese-related ailments, known collectively as *manganism*, cause a variety of psychiatric and motor disturbances, including reduced response speed, irritability, mood changes, and compulsive behaviours. Sufferers' lungs are inflamed, and they experience bronchitis. Manganese poisoning also disrupts the reproductive system, affecting

men more than women. Sperm mobility and libido decline, resulting in impotence. Children, meanwhile, tend to be more aggressive and hyperactive, with their motor development and neurological development being stymied (ATSDR, 2015); (World Health Organization, 2015); (Williams, Todd, & Roney, 2012). Studies by WHO (2015), Williams (2012), and Huang et al. (2016) have likewise shown that manganese mining pollutes local ecosystems, ecologies, and water systems.

This issue has positioned the traditional communities of Manggarai in opposition to the local government. The people of Manggarai believe that humans should maintain harmony with their environment, with their peers, and with God. Conversely, the local government has been oriented towards economic growth and development. At the same time, liberation theology has brought reform to the Catholic Church, infusing religion with a spirit of human rights and environmentalism. This has brought Catholicism in line with indigenous movements that against mining.

This article seeks to understand how indigenous religions and Catholicism have intersected to address the issue of mining in Manggarai. How do such movements oppose mining? To realise this goal, this article is divided into three sections. *First*, it provides a theoretical framework for ecological transformation in Manggarai. *Second*, it discusses the local government's use of manganese mining for regional development. *Third*, it discusses how ecological movements have opposed manganese mining. It closes by drawing several conclusions.

Religion as a Transformative Agent for Ecological Change: The Intersection of Catholicism and Indigenous Religion

Religion's involvement in socio-political change is not new. Both Abrahamic and indigenous religions—often identified as cultural systems that embody local philosophies—have often played a transformative role. This article borrows its conceptual framework from Johnston (2010; 2013), who describes the intersection of religion and sustainability. To become a transformative force, Abrahamic religions must be capable of redefining two important relationships: the relationship between religion and humanity and the relationship between religion and politics. In this, they can work with indigenous religions to promote ecological sustainability.

Capitalist Culture and Religion

Religions have long incorporated transformative agendas in their social values and their political activities. In critical situations, religion offers a spirit and agenda for mobilising ideas and agents to promote economic, social, political, and environmental change. Religion is not static, but dynamic. Sachs (2019) argues that religion's ability to promote critical reflection and initiate transformative change. Religion is capable of promoting change, reflective evaluation, systemic internal reform, and sustainable development.

Western capitalist systems, including their pro-growth, pro-development agendas, cannot be separated from the Protestant ethos that has permeated individuals and institutions (Blanchard, 2010; Beckford & Demerath III, 2007; Rashid, 1996; O'Brien, 1926). For Weber

(2001) and Rashid (1996, p. 15), capitalist culture, including its legal and ethical structures, is deeply rooted in this ethos. Collins (1986), conversely, argues that Western capitalist systems trace their roots to the Catholic Church and its institutions. According to this model, Catholicism provides liberty and security for everyone from farmers to merchants, under the guidance of their local monasteries. It may thus be surmised that religious institutions, be they Protestant or Catholic, have reinforced the European capitalist systems that promoted colonialism (Melvin & Sonnenburg, 2003).

Developments in Europe, particularly since the French Revolution, have resulted in secular approaches being used to separate religious institutions from state institutions. Religion has been perceived as a curse, as something that must be removed entirely from European culture (Beckford & Demerath III, 2007). Religious institutions have lost their ability to promote social change and to control society. Consequently, approaches to religious studies have become more traditionalist, literal, and dogmatic (Johnston, 2010). Religion is no longer an integral part of the social and political system; it is solely a means of regulating humans' relationship with God. Religion has thus experienced the dual processes of secularisation and sacralisation (Swatos & Christiano, 1999; Demerath III, 2007).

As an implication of this secularisation and sacralisation, there have been efforts to redefine humanity's relationship with nature. According to Baskin (2015), this concept—the Anthropocene—has provided a radical reconceptualisation. Simply put, the Anthropocene concept holds that all on earth and in nature is intended to fulfil

humans' needs and to advance their interests. The industrial revolution and expansion of capitalism have contributed to this concept (Crutzen, 2002). Humans, rather than protecting the biosphere, have caused severe pollution and environmental degradation.

One implication of capitalism and the Anthropocene concept has been the colonisation of countries in the Global South. Churches, as religious institutions, likewise advanced Western colonial interests. As Demaria and Latouche write: "Religion was used to promote economic growth, rather than oppose pollution and ecological degradation" (2019, p. 149).

Religion's ability to redefine itself is closely related to three important elements: the correlation between religion and humanity, the correlation between religion and politics, and the correlation between religion and politics. Repositioning religion vis-a-vis other social elements requires reflection, which has been made possible in Catholicism through liberation theology. This has promoted a new environmentalism, one in which the Catholic Church shares the same goals as indigenous religions.

As an agent of change, religion is political; likewise, religious activities are political activities. Johnston (2010), Benthall (2008), and Chidester (2013) agree that religion can advocate political agendas through its dogmas, and thus is inherently political. Such politics are not formal or procedural; rather, they occur when religions activities are used to create change (Johnston, 2010), cultivate discourse (Benthall, 2018), promote active political and community involvement (Benthall, 2008; Chidester 2005), legitimise claims (Benthall, 2018), and establish public spaces for negotiating and

advancing shared interests (Chidester, 2005). Chidester (2005) even goes so far as to identify religious political activities as part of religion's mission.

In Catholicism, religious institutions have been redefined and repositioned through liberation theology, which has redefined how religion is positioned vis a vis humanity and politics. The relationships between religion and humanity, as well as between religion and politics, have been reformed. No longer does the church advocate for the interests of the elites, as in the colonial era; it promotes human rights and welfare (Philpott, 2007, p. 511; Planas, 1986, pp. 6–7; Prokopy & Smith, 1999, p. 3; Betances, 2007, p. 53).

Liberation theology has created a new mindset, one known as *insurgent consciousness*, which has produced collective action and values (Smith, 1991; Philpott 2007, p. 511). Religious institutions' criticism of capitalism and colonialism can be seen, for instance, in the *Quadra Gesimo Anno* (Pius XI, 1931), which identified the Church as doing more than mediating the relationships between humans and God; it also opposes any systems that injure the marginalised and downtrodden (Smith 1991, pp. 58–59). To borrow from Johnston (2010), Catholicism has positioned itself as more than a religion; it is also a political entity that can advocate for the marginalised and promote active political participation (Benthall, 2008).

Ecological Sustainability: Where Catholicism and Indigenous Religion Meet²

Sustainability is a key part of agrarian transformation. Interestingly, sustainability is not only foundational for Abrahamic religions, but also part of indigenous religions. According to Johnston (2013), sustainability is necessary for religion, as it highlights the affective and emotional dimensions of political issues such as extractivism. Religion offers a means for promoting sustainability in public spaces. As Johnston (2013) states, religions—both Abrahamic and indigenous—offer public spaces for important discourses.

Narratives of ecological sustainability have long borrowed from religious teachings and materials, even those voiced by secular groups. Such narratives have been used to underscore the importance of maintaining a close relationship with nature (Johnston, 2013, p. 55). According to Chidester (2013), ecological sustainability is an important part of religious activities and expressions. Being ecologically minded means showing one's dedication to one's faith and one's God.

The importance of sustainability has been underscored in multiple studies into the social, economic, and political injustices that have plagued marginalised communities and the Global South. Such studies have employed a range of theories, including post-developmentalism (Escobar, 1992; Sachs, 2019), postcolonialism (Mohanty, 1998; Escobar, 1992), political ecology (Verschuuren et al., 2010; Dudley et al., 2005; Guha & Martinez-

² Indigenous religion refers to the localised belief systems of indigenous people.

Allier, 1997), ecofeminism (Shiva, 2019; Sachs, 2019), and feminist ecology (Stevens, Peta, & Denise, 2018 Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). The link between political and economic issues has also drawn significant attention, particularly within the context of conservation and environmentalism (Verschuuren et al., 2010; Dudley et al., 2005).

Catholicism and indigenous religions have united not only in their support for ecological sustainability, but also for the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). Shortly before the conference was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Territory, Environment, and Development was held in Kari Oca. This conference provided alternative channels for understanding the environment and for expressing religious beliefs (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015). The Catholic Church subsequently transformed itself, adapting its social curriculum to promote environmental justice (Erb, 2003). This enabled the Church to establish close ties with indigenous religious communities, conducting joint religious activities to advocate for ecological change and shared interests. Religious institutions, both indigenous and Abrahamic, have been used for such activism.

Abrahamic and indigenous religions have collaborated around the world, not only in Manggarai (Cleary, 2004; van Cott, 1994; van Cott, 2000; Yashar 2005; Trejo 2009; Gill, 1998). In Latin America, for example, religious activities crossed the boundaries between religious and secular institutions (Gill 1998), with bishops, pastors, indigenous leaders, and secular leaders working in collaboration to promote change and oppose authoritarianism (Gill 1998; Smith 1996).

Manganese Mining and Regional Development

After East Nusa Tenggara became part of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia, *lingko*—the customary forests of the archipelago—were converted into state forests. This represented a shift in authority, from customary to formal. This was intended to promote conservation and protect forests from exploitation (Martinus, 2015 Suban, 2009).

For the people of Manggarai, the *lingko* has an economic, social, and conservation function, being used to fulfil their food needs, improve water absorption, and establish homes. Since the colonial era, the *lingko* has provided people with resources as well as space for cultivating coffee, cloves, and vanilla—all of which have traditionally been important parts of Manggarai life (Advocacy Team for the People of Manggarai, 2003).

The developmentalist New Order government transformed the *lingko* and its use, beginning to open this conservation area to mining exploration. The centralistic and authoritarian tendencies of the New Order (Mas'oed, 1989) influenced its management of the manganese mining industry, and companies operated under the coordination of the Central Government. Since the 1980s, dozens of companies have conducted exploratory and mining operations in Manggarai. These included PT Aneka Tambang, which conducted its first explorations in Customary Forest No. 103 and began operations in the 1980s; PT Nusa Lontar Mining; PT Flores Indah Mining (Biliton); and PT Istindo Mitra Perdana in Reo. In 1997, this company began mining in Torong Besi, Soga I Block, and Soga II Block in Wangkung, Jengkalang, and Gincu Village. Other companies included PT

Flores Barat Mining (Singapore & PT Aneka Tambang), operating in Manggarai Regency; PT Istindo Mitra Perdana, conducting explorations in Lambaleda District; PT Sumber Jaya Asia, operating in Reok District; and PT Sumber Jaya Asia (PT SJA), which took over the operations of PT Istindo Mitra Perdana (Regus M. , 2011, p. 10).

Mining concession areas (such as those shown in the map below) continue to be traded and sold in Manggarai.

Companies with registered concession areas include PT Sejahtera Prima Nusa (DPE.540/382/XII/2009), PT Grand Nusantara (DPE.540/381/XII/2009), PT Bangun Usaha Mineral Indonesia (DPE.540/196/VIII/2009), PT Prima Komotindo Utama (DPE.540/386/XII/2009), PT Indomineral Resources (HK/244/2009), PT Sumber Jaya Asia (HK/72/2009), PT Bajawa Resources (76/KEP/DESDM/2010), and PT Adhiyasa Utama Reka Ventura (44.H/KEP/HK/2010).

Figure 1. Map of Mining Concession Areas in Manggarai



Source: www.indominatingmap.com (2019)

Developmentalist ideologies, as well as authoritarian tendencies, have continued in the Reform era. Studies by Erb (2010), Erb & Widyawati (2018), Regus (2017) , and the Advocacy Team for the People of Manggarai (2003), the state has continued to use repressive approaches in its "greenification" programmes. In 2002, the regency government began its Green Forests Programme to promote conservation and reduce conflict between farmers and governments. Other greenification programmes have been implemented by the national government to prohibit people from occupying forested areas, including removing the coffee plants that they deemed to reduce the fertility of the land (Advocacy Team for the People of Manggarai, 2003, p. 10; Erb & Widyawati, 2018).

This greenification program first targeted Western Ruteng. The local government, military, police, and hundreds

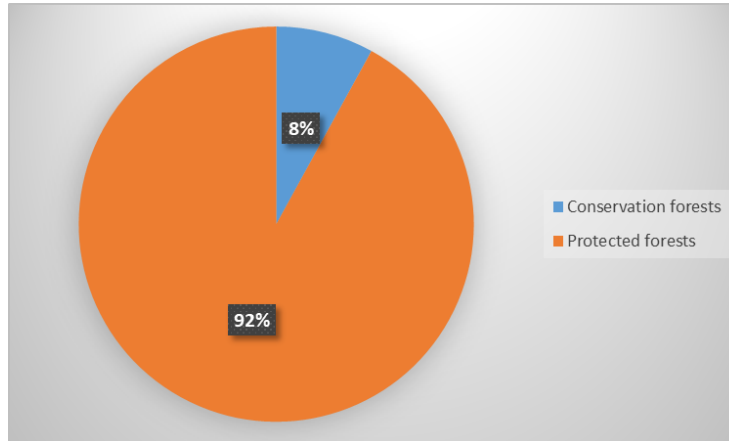
of students travelled to forested areas, felling coffee, clove, and vanilla plants and burning homes. More than 2,000 hectares of land was cleared. Together with affected citizens, NGOs protested the government's action. However, activists were subsequently arrested and imprisoned (Erb & Widyawati, 2018).

The Government Greenification Programme had two implications. *First*, it showed that mining had penetrated even further into protected forests. One year after this programme was initiated, WALHI (2003) found that 39.8% of mining activities in Manggarai occurred in forests, with 30.2% occurring in protected forests, 1% in nature reserves, and 23.7% in national parks. Eleven years later, the Directorate General of Forest Planology at the Ministry of Forestry found that mining permits covered 71,483.13 ha of forest, including 5,620.26 ha of conservation forests and 65,862.87 ha of protected forests (Koalisi

Anti-Mafia Tambang, 2014). However, mining in conservation forests violates Law No. 41 of 1991 regarding Forestry and Law

No. 5 of 1990 regarding the Conservation of Natural Resources.

Figure 2. Area Covered by Mining Permits in East Nusa Tenggara, 2014

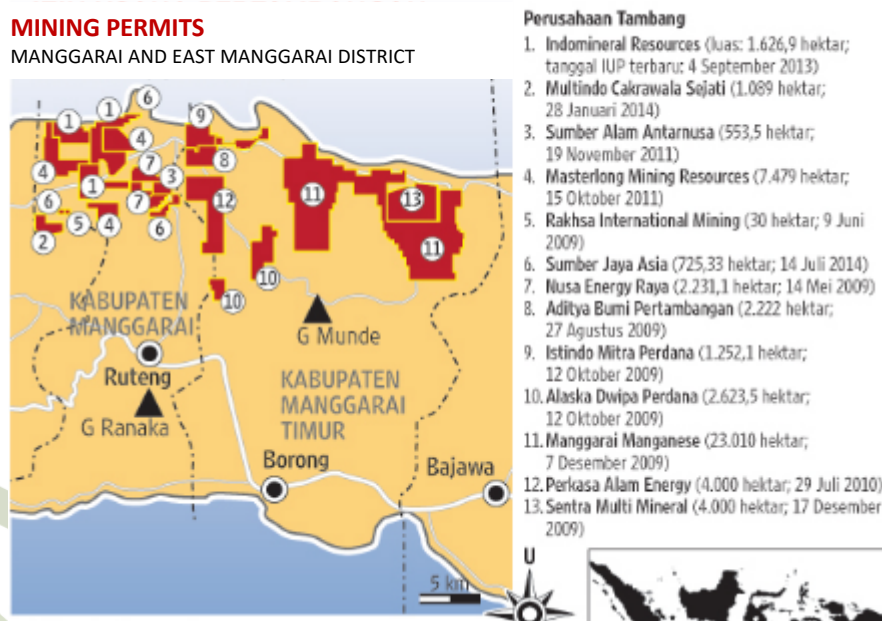


Source: Modified from *Koalisi Anti-Mafia Tambang (2014)*

In 2012, the Indonesian Way found that the Manggarai Regency Government had issued mining permits to eleven companies—PT Usaha Energi Raya, PT Indomineral Resources, PT Tamarindo Karya Resources, PT Multi Cakrawala Sejati, PT Sumber Alam Nusantara, PT Tribina Sempurna, PT Masterlog Mining Resources, PT Sumber Jaya Asia, PT

Rakhsa International, PT Menara Armada Pratama, and PT Wijaya Graha Prima—through 2029 (Indonesian Way, 2012). In 2013, the Regent issued another 22 mining permits (Hasiman, 2013, p. 87). As such, more mining permits have been issued since the fall of the New Order than during the regime.

Figure 3. Mining Permits in Manggarai and East Manggarai



Source: *"Tambang di Manggarai" (2015)*

Economic Value of Manganese Mining in Manggarai

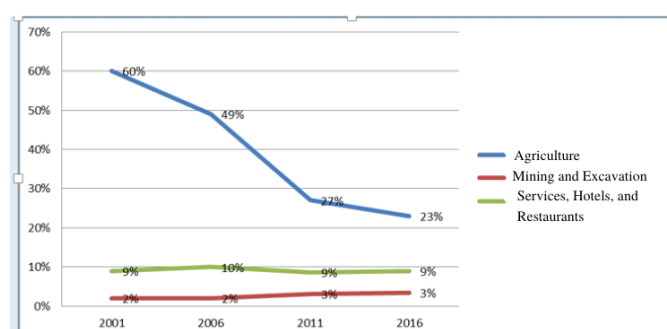
As manganese is of higher economic value than iron sand, it has become much in demand in Manggarai. It has become a major commodity, with potential production of 545,000 tonnes, with an average price of US\$32.98/tonne; conversely, iron sand has a potential production of 671,000 tonnes, with an average price of US\$28.59/tonne (East Manggarai Regency Government, 2016; Pablo, 2018). Manganese, therefore, is worth 125% as much as the next most valuable commodity in Manggarai.

Problematically, however, manganese mining in Manggarai has been small-scale. Between 2001 and 2016, the mining sector represented only 1% of the Manggarai economy. In 2008, the mining

sector contributed Rp 144 million to locally-generated revenue; in 2010, it contributed Rp 12 million; and in 2012, it contributed Rp 132 million (0.3% of Manggarai's locally-generated revenue) (Centre for Education and Training of East Timor, 2013). Owing to a lack of investment, manganese has yet to contribute significantly to the Manggarai economy.

According to the Data and Information Technology Centre at the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources (2017), manganese production and exports have dropped by 30% between 2010 and 2012. As mining is done at the small scale, it has not contributed much to the regional economy. In East Manggarai, agriculture contributes more to the local economy than mining (see Figure 4). Nonetheless, mining has continued, as has its negative effects.

Figure 4. Sectoral Contributions to the East Nusa Tenggara Economy (2001–2016)



Source: Compiled from Statistics Indonesia

The data above shows that the agrarian sector has continued to dominate Manggarai. Furthermore, it has continued to grow, albeit insignificantly (averaging 2%– 3% between 2006 and 2011). The services, hotel, and restaurant sector represents 9% of the local economy. Likewise, the agrarian sector employed 64% of the Manggarai workforce in 2013, while the mining sector only had a labour absorption rate of 1%.

A Sustainable Ecology Movement in Manggarai: Uniting Indigenous Religion and Catholicism

The indigenous religion of Manggarai is known as *gendang onè*, *lingko pe'an* (commonly abbreviated GOLP), which means “the village inside, the forest outside”. As an indigenous religion, GOLP employs a holistic perspective for understanding human–nature relations, including traditional homes (*mbaru tembong*), yards (*natas*), altar stones

(*compang*), water (*wae tek*), gardens (*lingko*), graves (*boa*), and villages (*beo*). These elements are integrated, being mutually supportive and complementary. GOLP seeks to promote ecological sustainability, as this is necessary to ensure the future of their communities and their children.

In their everyday religious activities, GOLP practitioners rely on an institution known as *Mbaru Gendang*. Several scholars have understood *Mbaru Gendang* simply as traditional homes (Lawang, 1999, pp. 53–54) (Latif, Hemo, & Darnys, 1990, p. 75) (Erb, 2010). However, *Mbaru Gendang* is more than a mere symbol of indigenous faith; it is a system of governance that is used to administer indigenous communities. In this, it utilises a legal system known *Mbaru Gendang/Bèò*, with *Golo* being the smallest administrative unit. Every *Golo* has the right to administer itself in accordance with customary law, which is formulated by a legislative body known as *Tu'a Panga/Uku* (Erb, 2010; Wardhani & Nudya, 2017).

Where administration is handled at the individual level, rather than the community level, it is difficult to maintain harmony in human–nature relations. *Lingko* is perceived symbolically as a spider web (*lingko/lodok*), a symbol of the earth and the sky. Where the *lingko* is violated, it symbolises disharmony in the social and spiritual lives of the Manggarai people (Dahus, 2017) (Marselus, 2013) (Bagul A. , 2008)). As part of the holistic whole, the degradation of *lingko* is detrimental to their religious practices and harmful to their spirit of sustainability. Mining has resulted in competing claims between land owners and communities (Regus, 2011, p. 18); as such, efforts to protect the *lingko* from

mining are also efforts to prevent its commodification.

Springs, which occupy a central role in *Mbaru Gendang*, have also dwindled significantly as a result of mining. For example, the Torong Besi Forest—a water catchment area in Manggarai that holds several sacred springs—has been used by PT Sumber Jaya Asia (PT SJA) for mining activities (Regus, 2011, p. 14). These activities have left large holes, filled with black mud. Activities by PT ABM in Satar Punda Village, Lambaleda District, has polluted farmland in Luwuk and Lengko Lolok (Regus, 2011; Suban, 2009).

The erosion of local belief systems has resulted in the polarisation of indigenous communities. Differences of opinion are no longer resolved through *Mbaru Gendang*; rather, mining has resulted in strict divisions between pro and anti-mining blocs. Embu and Mirsel (2004, p. 25) refer to this as the loss of Manggarai identity, (Amman, 2015) Conflict with the government and the mining companies has further eroded the State's legitimacy in Manggarai.

The Centrality of Catholicism in Manggarai

The rise of Catholicism in Manggarai may be attributed to three factors. *First*, Catholicism shares many beliefs with indigenous religion. Indigenous Manggarai religion, for instance, holds that there is a Father in the Sky; similarly, Catholicism believes in Our Father in Heaven (with heaven being identified with the sky). It was thus easy for the people of Manggarai to accept Catholicism and its teachings.

Second, the colonial government provided support for Catholic institutions, which enabled the Catholic Church to spread its teachings. This was facilitated

by the Treaty of Lisbon, signed by the Dutch and Portuguese in 1859, which allowed Catholic missions in Flores to continue (Prior, 1988). The Church also lobbied the colonial government to recognise the power of customary Manggarai institutions and the authority of the Manggarai Kings. Finally, in 1930, the Dutch inaugurated the King of Manggarai and granted him the authority to educate the common people (Lawang, 1989). This strengthened the relationship between the people of Manggarai and the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the Church advocated for financial institutions to be controlled by local people, an authority that was granted in 1924.

Third, the Catholic Church has been a major driver of change in the education, agrarian, socio-cultural, and infrastructure sectors of Manggarai. As such, the Church has continued to maintain a central role in local society. Formal education was introduced to Flores by Fr. Antonio da Cruz, who was instructed to establish a school in Larantuka in 1571 (França, 2000). Education efforts were supported by the Dutch colonial government through the Flores–Sumba Regeling Accord, which also provided the Church with a new mandate to promote change. Jesuits, having established seminaries, gained the authority to administer education in Flores and Sumba (Erb & Widayawati, 2018, p. 88). The Church also contributed to development efforts throughout East Nusa Tenggara, including in Flores. The Church has thus transformed various aspects of life in Flores (Prior, 1988, p. 19).

When the Dutch colonial government introduced its Ethical Policy in the early 20th century, it positioned the Catholic Church as a major agent of development in Flores. It constructed schools and

administered education throughout the island, introduced irrigation to rice farmers, campaigned against communal living, and constructed roads. The Church helped the colonial government to administer the region, and in return it was given the freedom to spread Catholicism throughout Flores (Erb & Widayawati, 2018).

The centrality of Catholicism in Manggarai can further be explained by its support for marginal communities. Liberation theology has focused the Church on helping the victims of injustice, promoting human rights, and defending the weak. As a result, the Church has received significant support from local communities and customary institutions. At the same time, the Church has adapted to local contexts. Since the 1960s, young pastors have promoted sustainable ecological change and argued for cultural sensitivity. This has only become more prominent since the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Erb & Widayawati, 2018).

Mining: Environmental and Spiritual Degradation

The developmentalist ideology embraced by the Indonesian government differs significantly from the sustainability paradigm of the Manggarai people and the Catholic Church. The State has long promoted mining as a means of promoting the public welfare, and held that mining—though a minor part of the local economy—has made meaningful contributions. For the indigenous peoples of Manggarai, conversely, mining has been viewed as causing significant pollution and therefore not reflecting the local philosophy. The State holds that it is necessary to improve locally-generated revenue, while local communities and the Catholic Church have

underscored the importance of maintaining harmony with nature.

Manganese mining has been detrimental to protected forests, polluted water resources, and obscured the signs of seasonal change (KSI, 2015). The people of Manggarai have long looked to three mountains—Torong Besi,³ Torong Luwuk, and Golo Kantul⁴—to predict the weather. Torong Besi is located in Mount Robek, Reok District; Torong Luwuk is located in Satar Punda Village, Lambaleda District, East Manggarai Regency; and Golo Kantul is located in Toe Village, Reok District, Manggarai Regency. The coming of the rainy season is marked by thick fog and clouds around Torong Besi; once thick fog and clouds reach the other two peaks, the rainy season has arrived and the fishermen must ready to sail (Wardhani & Nudya, 2017). Such signs have become obscured since manganese mining began in 2005.

Likewise, residents have had difficulty accessing the water needed for irrigation and for everyday needs. Approximately 75% of Manggarai residents earn a living as farmers and as fishermen; as such, when the Manggarai Regency Government issued 19 mining permits (covering 18,800 hectares of land) in 2014, it limited their ability to earn a living (Manggarai, 2014). This has provided a significant impetus for anti-mining protests and demonstrations in Manggarai, which have been coordinated by customary and church institutions.

GOLP and Catholicism share the same ecological goal: to promote conservation and ecological sustainability.

³ *Torong* means 'hill'.

⁴ *Golo* means 'mountain'.

These institutions, including *Mbaru Gendang* and the Church, have contributed significantly to environmental management, social, and political activities in Manggarai. State efforts to promote welfare through manganese mining, conversely, have failed to involve these institutions. Consequently, these institutions have become agents of change and opposed mining in favour of a more ecologically sustainable approach.

Ecological Sustainability and the Anti-Mining Movement in Manggarai

Collaborative efforts to promote environmentalism in Manggarai have occurred in three periods: *first*, 2000–2004; *second*, 2007–2010, and *third*, 2010–2018. During the first period, practitioners of Catholicism and indigenous religion focused themselves on helping farmers and activists who were imprisoned and charged with using forests illegally. During the second period, activism focused on anti-mining efforts, a shift that may be attributed both to the loss of protected forests between 2005 and 2007 and to politicians' use of mining to gather voter support. In the third period, the movement expanded its reach, establishing networks with national and international efforts.

The environmentalist movement in Manggarai traces its roots to joint efforts by the practitioners of Catholicism and indigenous religion to oppose government greenification programmes. The leaders of one such organisation, the Manggarai Farmers' Association (Serikat Petani Manggarai),⁵ were arrested and accused of

⁵ A member of the National Farmers' Association (Serikat Tani Nasional).

provoking unrest (Warren, 2003). In the forced eviction of farmers from state-owned forests, six farmers died and twenty-eight were injured. Civil society and Catholic pastors worked collaboratively to establish the Advocacy Team for the People of Manggarai (Tim Advokasi untuk Rakyat Manggarai, TARM). This team subsequently established networks with The Indonesian Forum for Environment (WALHI), the Indonesian NGOs Network for Forest Conservation (SKEPHI), and the Legal Aid Institute (LBH).

On 10 March 2004, indigenous activists held a protest outside the Ruteng Police Office, demanding the release of elderly women and men who were accused of planting corn on land that they had cultivated for years (Advocacy Team for the People of Manggarai, 2003; Erb & Widyawati, 2018). The prosecution of these farmers provided activists the momentum necessary to unit traditional communities, NGO activists, and Church activists (Erb & Widyawati, 2018). Farmers were accused of violating the law against illegal mining, and the government held that prosecuting these farmers was necessary to protect the forest, promote water absorption, and ensure access to clean water (Erb, 2010).

Activists regretted the response of the Bishop of Ruteng, the highest Catholic authority in Manggarai, who was perceived as supporting the government's environmental policy. At the same time, however, they agreed with his condemnation of the violence perpetrated by state actors. Ultimately, many Catholic pastors—including members of the Jakarta-based Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation network—chose to voice their individual support for farmers and indigenous communities (Erb & Widyawati, 2018; Suban, 2009).

The arrest of these anti-mining activists was used by politicians, both at the municipal and provincial level, to gather voter support. In 2005, one candidate for regent promised to put a hold on mining; after his election, however, this regent provided a concession to a Chinese mining consortium and allowed them to begin exploiting a protected forest. Consequently, the Bishop of Ruteng changed his position and provided full support to anti-mining activists and indigenous communities (Erb & Widyawati, 2018, p. 98).

Between 2007 and 2010, the ecological sustainability movement focused on three aspects. First, activists collected information on the effects of mining; second, activists held demonstrations in open spaces; third, activists used print media, seminars, and informal discussions to educate indigenous communities regarding the effects of mining. The main actors were pastors, indigenous leaders, JPIC, and *Societas Verbi Divini* (SVD) (Erb & Widyawati, 2018; Regus, 2011). They not only referred to examples from Lembata, but from elsewhere. Pastors similarly collected information regarding pollution and labour issues in Central Manggarai and East Manggarai.

Monks, nuns, and indigenous leaders, meanwhile, opposed mining through demonstrations, informal discussions, and the media. In this period, SVD members and pastors (Fr. Henri Daros, Fr. John Dami Mukese, Fr. Frans Ndoi) and non-church actors (Thomas Wignyanta and Valens G. Doi) established a daily, the *Flores Pos*, to convey information regarding mining and mining permits. Through the mass media, seminars, and informal spaces, pastors and indigenous leaders taught the people

of Manggarai about mining and exploitation (Erb & Widyawati, 2018; Hasiman, 2013; Kaha, 2018; NTT, Personal communication, 2019)

Between 2010 and 2018, activists focused predominantly on such issues as mining permits, environmental impact analyses, transparency, and mining moratoria. The coalition established in 2002 to address the criminalisation of indigenous communities expanded to the national and international level, including not only SVD and JPIC, but also indigenous organisations and anti-mining movements such as AMAN, JATAM, and PADMA Indonesia, as well as human rights bodies such as KOMNAS HAM, KOMNAS NGADA Jakarta, and VIVAT Indonesia and student organisations such as PMKRI, JPIC OFM, FKM Flobamora, and Formadda NTT. By including issues such as transparency, activists were able to expand their reach.

At the same time, the Catholic Church brought the environmental sustainability movement to the transnational level. Working with national and international environmentalist movements, the Church conducted anti-mining advocacy and reached out to the United Nations (Erb & Widyawati, 2018). In promoting transparency, the movement received support from PWYP (Publish What You Pay) Indonesia, Article 33, and the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, KPK). It thus built upon the work done by Catholic Pastors between 2007 and 2010, conducting advocacy at the local, national, and international level. According to a working paper produced by Koalisi Anti-Mafia Tambang (2014), the Directorate General of Minerals and Coal found that more than half of mining companies in East Nusa Tenggara had yet to be certified clear

and clean. At the same time, 172 permit holders had yet to fulfil administrative requirements.

Negotiating a mining moratorium was important during this period, as social conflict between pro- and anti-mining groups was escalating. In 2010, for example, public attention was drawn to conflict in Tumbak Hamlet, Satar Punda Village, Lamba Leda District (Regus, 2011). The arrival of PT Aditya Bumi Pertambangan (PT ABP), as well as its purchase of *lingko*, resulted in the local community becoming fragmented. After a series of discussions, community members chose to lease a strip of land 5 km long and 16 metres to PT ABP for a period of thirty years. Pursuant to the initial terms of this agreement, every family would receive Rp 3 million. However, owing to opposition against Tua Teno Abdul Karim's decision to allow mining in the *lingko*, it was ultimately decided to provide Rp 25 million to every pro-mining family ("Konflik tambang di Manggarai", 2015).

The unilateral decision to allow the exploitation of the *lingko* violated customary law. Rikardus Hama, an indigenous leader, reached out to Tua Teno Abdul Karim and asked him to explain his decision; however, he received no reply ("Konflik tambang di Manggarai", 2015). Suspicion became widespread in Tumbak, and this ultimately resulted in physical violence and spatial segregation. Tumbak became fragmented, with proponents living in Waso—near the mine—and opponents living approximately two kilometres away ("Konflik tambang di Manggarai", 2015).

This case was reported to the National Commission on Human Rights, which recommended that PT ABP leave the area ("Konflik Tambang", 2015). Problematically, however, mining activities

also involved local strongmen and police officials (“Konflik Tambang”, 2015). Strongmen occupied managerial positions in the company (Regus, 2011, p. 11), while police had provided security and curtailed lobbying activities.

Rather than introducing a moratorium, the government instead issued more mining permits. Consequently, residents were disappointed and angered, and lost their faith in the State. On 13 September 2014, dozens of local residents and JPIC members demonstrated against PT ABP, blocking the company's heavy equipment and preventing miners from entering the forest. Demonstrators were met with violence, and one coordinator—Fr. Simon Suban Tukan—was reportedly choked by police. Nonetheless, the demonstration was successful. On 23 September 2014, Regent Yosep Tote issued a moratorium on mining and requested that PT ABP leave the area (“PT Aditya”, 2014).

Another large demonstration occurred in October 2014, when the Catholic Church of Manggarai mobilised activists in Manggarai, East Manggarai, and West. School children, pastors, nuns, and monks—together with hundreds of indigenous peoples—united to demand the end of manganese mining in Manggarai. The union of the Catholic and indigenous community was clearly evident in this demonstration; Church leaders wore their formal clothing, while indigenous activists work traditional clothing. Indigenous rituals were also conducted as part of demonstrations.

Finally, several years after the moratorium was promised, a path forward appeared. In the 2018 election, the people of East Nusa Tenggara elected a candidate who promised to use tourism as a means

of stopping mining. Upon election, on 14 November 2018, he issued Gubernurial Decree No. 359/KEP/HK/2018 regarding the Temporary Cessation of Mineral and Coal Mining Permit Issuance in East Nusa Tenggara. According to WALHI (2018), however, this decree simply regulates companies' administration and financial obligations (NTT, 2019). Nonetheless, the efforts of the Catholic Church and the indigenous community have borne fruit.

Conclusion

In Manggarai, the Catholic and indigenous communities have united in their anti-manganese mining activities. Activism has provided peoples of different religious backgrounds with a medium for promoting environmental conservation. In the context of extractivism, this movement is an interesting one. Unlike most Indonesian movements, which have been driven by resource or nationalist perspectives, the ecological movement in Manggarai has been driven by religious forces. Second, indigenous institutions (as manifestations of indigenous religion) and Church institutions have united in their anti-mining activities. Third, unlike coal (which requires significant swathes of land for extraction), manganese mining only requires minimal amounts of land.

Three material aspects of the anti-mining movement are worth particular mention. First, indigenous and religious institutions in Manggarai have been shaped by centuries of interactions. Second, despite the small scale of manganese mining, such mines still require government support and permission; at the same time, there are many problems with transparency and accountability. Third, owing to high levels of poverty in East Nusa

Tenggara, manganese is still important despite its limited economic value.

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