

# Indigenous Resistance to land grabbing in Mereauke, Indonesia: the importance and limits of identity politics and the global-local coalitions<sup>1</sup>

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*The exclusionary land grabbing promoted by the MIFEE project in Mereauke, Indonesia, generated since the beginning a strong broad resistance from the indigenous people whose territory is targeted for this project, and local, national and international NGOs that opposed it on the grounds of environmental conservation, food security, human rights and indigenous territorial rights, forming a resistance coalition guided by ethnic narratives and identity politics. While this resistance was able to stalk the project it was unable to stop it. This article aims to understand the potential and limits identity politics, local-national-global alliances, divergent indigenous agendas and the lack of long-term alternatives*

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*Social movements – land grabbing – indigenous peoples of Indonesia (9,349 words)*

## Introduction

Land grabbing is defined as “capturing control of relatively vast tracts of land and other natural resources through a variety of mechanisms that involve large-scale capital” (Borras et al., 2011, p. 851), whether for agriculture, extractive industries or environmental protection. It has elicited different responses from the local people affected by this process, reflecting differences within them, different contexts and interests at stake including the role played by the nation-state (Hall et al, 2015). According to Oxfam (2011), the land appropriated in developing countries since 2001 is about the size of Western Europe (227 million hectares) with most of the transactions taking place after 2008. Eastern Africa had the largest investments while Indonesia had the largest area acquired by investors with 9.5 million hectare (Provost, 2011).

“Large-scale land investment” has been promoted as an effective strategy for poverty reduction, economic growth and increased supply of food and biofuel, where local people affected by this land transfer would benefit through “employment generation, social benefits, access to markets and technology, or taxes” (Deininger et al., 2010, p. 91; Li, 2011). By contrast, most NGOs and civil society organizations, scholar-activists and some development organizations see land transfer as land grabbing that violates land rights of small farmers and indigenous peoples, generating more inequalities and problems without solving poverty and hunger (Borras and Franco, 2012). Furthermore, it jeopardizes biodiversity, watersheds and ecosystems, deteriorates livelihoods increasing unemployment conflict, political instability and food dependency and insecurity (Graham et al., 2010).

Due to its massive negative impact, social movements emerged to resist and challenge land grabbing at the local, national and international level and to rehabilitate its destructive impact (Provost, 2011 and 2012; Branigan, 2012; Via Campesina, 2013). The Tirana Declaration of 2011 Condemns the recent phenomenon of land grabbing and promotes the need to “secure and equitable access to and control over land for the poor to reduce poverty, promote sustainable development, and contribute to identity, dignity, and inclusion” (ILC, 2011, p. 10).

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript builds on analysis and evidence gathered by the first author through interviews and non-reactive observation (GINTING, W., 2015).

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Similar positions have been stated within the UN system (for a further analysis on land grabbing see Graham et al, 2010; Edelman, Oya and Borras, 2013; Shepard, 2011, Rahman and Yanuardi, 2014).

The exclusionary land-grabbing promoted by the MIFEE project in Indonesia faced immediately a strong broad resistance from the indigenous people whose territory is taken for this project and local, national and international NGOs that opposed it on the grounds of environmental conservation, food security, human and indigenous territorial rights. While this resistance was able to stalk the MIFEE, it was unable to stop it.

This article takes a closer look at the resistance movements against the MIFEE project in Indonesia and the factors that nurtured and limited this resistance aiming at contributing to understand other resistance movements against land grabbing and for the recognition of indigenous rights.

### **Land grabbing in Indonesia and the MIFEE Project**

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world with a population of 251 million; 16.2 percent of it living below USD 1.25 per day and about 52 percent of the working poor living below USD 2 a day. Considered as one of the next “economic powerhouses”, its rapid economic growth (6.5% in 2011 and 5.1 % in 2014) is followed by the growth of inequality by 30 percent between 2002 and 2012, suggesting that “Indonesia’s growth benefited the relatively rich households almost exclusively; the poor gained little from this growth and often lost from it” (De Silva & Sumarto, 2014, p. 239).

The Asian Crisis hit Indonesian economy, triggering price hikes that resulted in massive protests that marked the end of 30 years of the Soeharto regime and the beginning of the Reformation Era in 1998. Under IMF and World Bank advice Indonesia became a neoliberal state whose main role is to facilitate free markets and capital accumulation for domestic and foreign capital (Habibi, 2014; Rahman & Yanuardy, 2014). The Masterplan for Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia's Economic Development (known by its abbreviation in Bahasa Indonesia: MP3EI), is the national strategy for Indonesia to achieve a higher economic growth by opening its resources to foreign investment. (Rahman & Yanuardy, 2014).

The MIFEE project is one of MP3EI’s components. Under the narrative of green energy and food security, it facilitates domestic and foreign investments targeting 1.2 million hectares of Marind’s customary forest, ‘unproductive’ land that should be turned into ‘productive’ land (Ito, Rahman, Savitri, 2014). This megaproject is promoted to “feed Indonesia, feed the world” with an expected production of 1.95 million tons of rice, 937,000 tons of corn, 167,000 million tons of beans, 64,000 cows, 2.5 million tons of sugar and 937,000 tons of crude palm oil every year (Jiwan, 2011).

The MIFEE project was presented as having limited environmental impact due to its location in the savanna landscape of Southern Papua. However, since 75 percent of the land allocated to this project consist of natural forests with 350,000 hectares of peat land, the project was later assessed to cause massive environmental degradation (Awat Miffee, 2012). Furthermore, its high demand for skilled labor might result in more migrants to this area, further displacing the Marind people <sup>4</sup> (Obidzinski et al., 2013),

The MIFEE project is located in the Merauke Regency<sup>5</sup> in West Papua<sup>6</sup>, the most eastern region of Indonesia that is well known for its rich biodiversity and for its cultural richness and diversity. West Papua Forests are recognized as the last frontier of rain forests in the Asia Pacific region (Hidayat and Yamamoto, 2014) and as the third largest tropical forest in the world, after the Amazon and the Congo Basin (Telapak-EIA, 2009).

West Papua’s abundant natural resources have been extracted for more than four decades<sup>7</sup>, and still, this region has the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) and the highest poverty rate<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The long-standing transmigration project changed the demographics of this region where now the indigenous peoples in their own ancestral territory represent only 40% the population (Savitri, 2013; Muntaza, 2013; Budiarmo and Liem, 1988)

<sup>5</sup> Administratively, Indonesia is hierarchical divided into provinces, regencies, cities, districts, villages and wards.

<sup>6</sup> While West Papua is divided into two provinces (Papua and West Papua), in this paper we refer to the whole region.

<sup>7</sup> Papua has the largest gold reserve in the world and the third largest copper reserve, and is rich in nickel, cobalt, natural gas, timber and land. For studies on the negative environmental impact of transnational corporations, their

This situation of extreme poverty and marginality results from policies favoring extractivism without mechanisms for fair distribution of benefits among local people; it also results from the particular history of West Papua and its controversial annexation to Indonesia in 1968, challenged by the West Papua Freedom Movement. To fight the separatist movement and protect the private investors exploiting natural resources in this region, there has been a process of militarization that has resulted in violations of human, labor and land rights<sup>9</sup>. The militarization of this region since the 1960s has been well documented (Supriatma, 2013). In 2001, to ease the demand for independence, the national government of Indonesia issued the Papua Special Autonomy Law No.21/2001, which admits the human rights violations and injustice experienced by indigenous Papuans in West Papua and protects their right to development. It recognizes Papuans as indigenous peoples, their collective and individual rights, their customary land and forest rights and their customary law. It guarantees natural resources revenue sharing up to 80 percent. It also provides a legal framework for local governments to develop specific policies to address indigenous Papuans' needs. It ensures the rights of indigenous Papuans to participate in decision making through Papuans People's Assembly (GoI, 2001).

Bordering with Papua New Guinea, Merauke is one of the most eastern regencies in Indonesia, located in the south of West Papua region, and the largest regency in Papua and Indonesia, with 4.7 million hectare. About 95.39 percent of land were forests, 3.42 million of them virgin forests (BPS Merauke, 2014). The Marind-Anim are the largest indigenous peoples group in Merauke representing 38% of the total Merauke population (with the Yei, Kanum, Mandobo and Muyu, they represent 40 percent of it) (Statistic Indonesia, 2014). Merauke is their customary land, used for hunting, fishing and for practicing traditional agriculture in small rotational plots (AGRA and PAN-AP, 2012).

### **Factors influencing the development of the resistance movements**

Resistance movements against the MIFEE project emerged at the local and national levels after the national government launched the project in 2010. At the national level, about 30 organizations agreed to join forces forming the Civil Society Coalition Against MIFEE (henceforth the coalition) to organize the resistance against MIFEE. The rapid protest movements succeeded to slow down the project and forced the government to review it (Ito, Rahman & Savitri, 2014; Ginting and Pye, 2013; Santosa, 2014). The resistance peaked in 2012-2013 and declined afterwards.

The key elements that we explore as influencing the development of the resistance movements are: the militarization of West Papua; the diverse coalition organizing the resistance movement, the use of information and communication technologies, dependency from international support; and the use of identity politics and ethnic narratives, related to the issue of representation. These key elements are interrelated and contributed both to the success and decline of the resistance movements.

### ***Conflict and repression in West Papua***

The first element to consider is the hostile environment in which the work of raising awareness, organizing and mobilizing Marind communities had to be carried by local grassroots and NGOs, due to the climate of intimidation and repression sustained by the military forces.

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abuses on human and indigenous peoples' rights and on their links with the military, see Global Witness, 2005 and Telapak and EIA, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Papua Province's HDI is ranked 34<sup>th</sup> with index 66.25 and West Papua Province is ranked 31<sup>st</sup> with index 70.62; poverty rate in Papua and West Papua Province were 27.80% and 26.26% respectively, much higher than the average national score of 10.96% (Statistic Indonesia, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> In 1962 the Dutch passed control of this region the UN Temporary Executive Authority (UNTEA). Occupied by Indonesia since 1963, it officially became part of Indonesia in 1969 after the Act of Free Choice was voted as part of the New York Agreement (NYA). The fact that West Papuans were not represented at the NYA and that the elections for the Free Act were held during a military occupation, are presented to question its validity). Denounced crimes against indigenous peoples in West Papua include individual killings, death and illness resulting from violent relocations and military attacks and bombing entire villages, with a total estimated victims of 100,000 people since 1960 (AHRC, 2013; Komnas Perempuan, 2010; Abigail, 2001; The Guardian, 2014).

More than a decade after the Papua Special Autonomy Law was issued in 2001, little has changed in this region (Widjojo et al., 2008) where violence and repression from the military forces prevails (Pontoh, 2014; Mote, N.D.). Corruption and lack of capacity prevent local bureaucracies to provide better services, which aggravate the situation (Widjojo et al., 2008).

The presence of military forces in West Papua restricted the mobility, assembly and use of public spaces and capacity building for community organizations, therefore affecting the development of the movements at the grassroots level. The plantation companies used military forces to intimidate the indigenous Papuans to accept the MIFEE project and sign land leases. The coalition documented and denounced this intimidation.

### ***Preexisting networks opposing commoditization of natural resources in West Papua***

Before the MIFEE project was launched, NGOs at the local, national and international levels, were already critical of large-scale land investments facilitated by the GoI in West Papua for agriculture and/or natural resource extraction. These NGOs advocated for the indigenous West Papuans and reported how these investments have resulted in human rights violations, marginalization of indigenous Papuans, poverty and environmental degradation (Global Witness, 2005; DTE, 2011; Telapak & EIA, 2005 and 2009; Franciscans International, 2011; Obidzinski et al., 2013; FPP & Sawit Watch, 2006; Friends of the Earth, LifeMosaic and Sawit Watch, 2008). They formed a broad resistance network linking the local national and international levels, which facilitated the fast response against the MIFEE.

When the MIFEE project was introduced at the 108th anniversary of the Merauke Regency on February 12, 2010 it became a common enemy that further united the organizations advocating for human rights, indigenous rights, environmental justice, agrarian justice, food sovereignty, social justice and community empowerment. Applying their own particular perspectives, they developed thorough criticisms of the MIFEE project, activating their networks and mobilizing their resources to counter the national government narrative about the advantages of the MIFEE project. They formed the Civil Society Coalition Against MIFEE (henceforth the coalition), comprised of 30 local and national organizations (Ginting and Pye, 2011). Some key members of this coalition are Forum Kerjasama Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat Papua (The Papua NGOs Cooperation Forum/FOKER LSM Papua), an umbrella organization for 118 local NGOs in West Papua; Sekretariat Kemanusiaan dan Perdamaian Keuskupan Agung Merauke (The Justice and Peace Secretariat of Merauke's Catholic Diocese/SKP-KAM), a Catholic Church organization concerned with human rights, peace and humanitarian issues; Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (the Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago/AMAN), an umbrella organization of indigenous peoples in Indonesia; Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI/Friend of Earth Indonesia) and Greenpeace Indonesia, organizations focused on environmental issues; Jaringan Advokasi Tambang (JATAM), an environmental organization that focuses on mining issues; PUSAKA, an organization concerned with indigenous peoples issues; SAWIT WATCH, an environmental organization addressing oil palm plantation issues and SAJOGYO Institute, an organization that focuses on agrarian issues. In West Papua, local NGOs formed Papuan People Solidarity Against MIFEE (Solidaritas Rakyat Papua Tolak MIFEE/SORPATOM) and Forum SSUMAWOMA (Forum Masyarakat dan Intelektual Sub Suku Marind Woyu Maklew Anim/Forum of People and Intellectuals of The Marind Woyu Maklew).

The rapid reaction of the resistance coalition managed to slow down the project and reduce the number of investors (Ito, Rahman & Savitri, 2014; Ginting and Pye, 2013; Santosa, 2014). However, these movements could not totally stop the project or provide alternative development ideas for the Marind people in particular and West Papua in general. Recently, media reports show the government reactivating the implementation of MIFEE without any willingness to recognize, compensate or correct the damages caused to the Marind people and to the environment in Merauke (Cahyafitri, 2015; JPNN, 2015).

Another critical element of the resistance is the West Papua Freedom Movements who fight for independence. These movements share the coalition criticism of MIFEE but have a different agenda. They frame Indonesia's policies as an act of "[Indonesian] imperialism" (Ginting & Pye, 2013, p. 175). While these movements have contributed to the international visibility of the resistance against MIFEE and other land grabbing in West Papua, their active presence is used to justify the militarization and violence in this region, under the logic of "defending the nation-state". Repression in West Papua is indiscriminate and it is a serious obstacle for the development of grassroots organizations and agency.

***Strength and vulnerability of the resistance coalition against the MIFEE Project******A. The role of ICT, activist research and synergistic division of roles and tasks***

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) played a crucial role in the development of the resistance movements. In addition, the coalition allowed different actors with different capacities at the local, national and international level to collaborate, building on their strengths and compensating for their weakness. For instance local grassroots and NGOs in West Papua had limited capacities to openly do advocacy, while organizations at the national and international level, had more freedom and resources to campaign the resistance. Since the Marind people are vulnerable to represent themselves publicly, the NGOs took the role as the Marind's representative and advocates. Another limitation for local organizations in Merauke is the distance from Jakarta where most of national NGOs are based. They relied on ICT to communicate and collaborate, overcoming these constraints. Using cellular phone and other ICT, they established a permanent communication network between the people in the villages and the NGOs to update information from the field to the NGOs networks and vice versa and to plan visits, events and mobilizations (Barber and Moiwend, 2011).

The Marind people, who directly suffer its impact, are the most important actors in the resistance against the MIFEE project. Therefore, organizing and building their capacity is strategic even though this work has to face military intimidation and repression. Despite these difficulties, local networks played a key role in the resistance movement, raising awareness at the grassroots level while documenting and researching the problem, generating evidence that was used in the national and international campaigns. Local NGOs playing this role include FOKER LSM Papua, YASANTO and SKP-KAM<sup>10</sup>. These reports about the impact of MIFEE project helped to counter the national government narrative.

The process of collecting data and sharing information also raised the awareness of the Marind people on the impact of MIFEE, helping to mobilize the resistance at the community level. The Marind people also learned about the MIFEE the hard way: when they could not access their forests after they released their land to the companies, which forced them to shift their traditional livelihoods. Documenting the impact of MIFEE in villages that suffered the most and sharing that evidence with other villages was very effective for raising awareness at the local level (AwamIFEE, 2013).

The local networks conducted training on human rights, indigenous rights and Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and facilitated new local alliances such as SORPATOM, FORMASI SUMAWOMA and KOMALI/ the Community for Indigenous People and the Environment (Ginting & Pye, 2013; Ito, Rahman, Savitri, 2014). Local networks also mobilized support from the Communion of Churches in Indonesia—PGI and from the Papuan Customary Council --Dewan Adat Papua (Awam MIFEE, 2014). Local networks as YASANTO, served as focal point for NGOs and concerned groups interested in MIFEE, and for communications between Merauke, Jakarta and beyond (Ginting & Pye, 2013).

The national networks mostly act as a think tank for the movements, organizing campaigns at the national level and mobilizing support to local networks and to the Marind people. PUSAKA, SAJOGYO Institute, AMAN, Walhi/Friend of Earth Indonesia, JATAM, Greenpeace Indonesia, Sawit Watch, KPA, ELSAM, among others organizations were involved in advocacy at the national level. The different expertise and focus of the members of the coalition brought different lenses and perspectives to review the MIFEE project, which resulted in a critical campaign that was well articulated and well documented.

The national networks also fostered public dialogue between the local and national governments, indigenous Papuans, academics, and the NGOs. For instance on June 1, 2011, in collaboration with the Indonesia Institute of Science (LIPI), they organized a roundtable discussion on MIFEE (Suara Pusaka, 2011). They also actively offered press conferences to update the public on the MIFEE project.

With a more democratic situation at the national level, the national NGOs have more freedom to campaign the resistance nationally and to expand it internationally. Due to the global attention to West Papua, the international community has become more attentive about any issue regarding West Papua.

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<sup>10</sup> Research on MIFEE and its impact was conducted by YASANTO and SKP-KAM supported by PUSAKA, KARSA and Forest People Program (See: Zakaria, Kleden, Franky, 2011) and by SKP-KAM, Sajogyo Institute, INSIST and Kop (See: Savitri, 2013). Video was used to record testimonies and life situations on the affected villages, in their own language, which helped people from other villages to understand the situation.

In this regard, the campaign at the national and international levels has been strategic to strengthen the resistance movements. The international networks played their role by mobilizing their support to the local and national networks, helped local and national organizations to campaign MIFEE resistance at international forums and submitted letters and reports to UNCERD, UNCESR and UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food (FPP), an international NGO based in UK was actively involved in advocacy at the national and local level, facilitating human rights training for the Marind leaders and assisting in the writing of the Request letters to UN (FPP, 2011). A key task was translating information into English. TAPOL, a UK based NGO, is one of the organizations that took that role (Barber & Moiwend, 2011). Together with Survival International and Down To Earth, both UK-based NGOs, they published much information on their websites about MIFEE and its resistance.

### **B. The strengths and limits of international alliances, funding dependence and ICT**

The decision to put more effort on the international campaign was strategic since the MIFEE coincided with the re-emergence of transnational movements against land grabbing, and Indonesia got international attention for allowing the largest area of land to be acquired by investors. The resistance against MIFEE was not isolated but part of many movements across the globe that challenged land grabbing.

Land grabbing revived and strengthened the social movements on a global scale and advocacy networks on land and food sovereignty and indigenous rights developed at the regional and international level. The Tirana Declaration condemning land-grabbing practices resulted from international conferences (ILC, 2011). Other international fora for voicing concerns about land grabbing are The International Civil Society Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty (IPC), the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples and UN's Food and Agriculture Organization.

Land grabbing also activated the alliance between social movements, NGOs and the academics, manifested in an academic conference on land grabbing hosted by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) in 2011 and another hosted by Cornell University in 2012. At the IDS conference at least seven papers discussed land grabbing in Indonesia, two of them specifically on MIFEE. Research and academic debates on this issue have been published on journals like *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, *Development and Change* and *Globalizations* (Edelman, Oya, Borras, 2013). All this attention to land grabbing from the NGOs, academics and the media put the issue in the international spotlight. The MIFEE project and its resistance movements became a case study discussed in many academic and non-academic publications, NGOs' reports and news.

The resistance against MIFEE started as part of this rising global resistance and it escalated building on this momentum. The first international forum used by the movements to campaign against MIFEE was the 9th Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, two months after the soft launching of MIFEE project. Several more letters, request and early warnings were sent to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's Urgent Action, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD) (henceforth the Request letter to UNCERD), the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), the UN Special Rapporteur, Right to Food (DTE, 2011), the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) (HuMa et al., 2011; FPP, 2011, 2012, 2013a and b).

The resistance against MIFEE was getting support from the international community. In response to the first submission to CERD, its Chairperson in 2011 requested the GoI information about the negative implications of MIFEE for indigenous Papuans and for the environment. The Chairperson of CERD in 2013 also reacted to the second submission with a similar request. The UN Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food and on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples warned the national government that the MIFEE project "could affect the food security of 50,000 people" (De Schutter & Anaya, 2012).

However, the global attention to land grabbing and related issues such as food security and green energy is decreasing, as shown by the lesser amount of information available on these issues. Between 2007 and 2012 the media, NGOs, policy analysts and academics produced abundant information and analysis in order to understand the phenomena of land grabbing (Edelman, Oya and Borras, 2013), which later decreased<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> The Guardian for example, under its International Land Deals rubric (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/international-land-deals>), has the highest number of reports in 2012 with 38 reports, 27 in 2013 and 12 in 2014. A similar trend is observed at the national level (Santosa, 2014). The

This change reveals the fragility of the international alliances and of international campaigns that rely on global trends and discourses that influence the dynamic of the resistance movements. When the trend is growing, the issue gets the most attention from the international community and the movements get stronger. However, when another issue replaces the previous one, the links between local, national and international networks become weaker or vanish and the resistance movements suffer and weaken, while the problem affecting local people remains unsolved.

Collins (2007) study on NGOs in developing countries shows how local NGOs face limited funding, which makes their work dependent on external funding. NGOs belonging to the resistance coalition face that problem, which limits their advocacy. Even though they support each other by sharing the cost of campaign activities, their operation is not financially sustainable. Local and national NGOs were mostly active between 2010 and 2013, when NGOs were researching the impact of MIFEE project on the Marind People, with external funding. During this peak period abundant publications on MIFEE flooded the Internet, which showed to be a cost-effective way to counter the government narrative at the national and international level. However, at the community level the Internet is almost non-existent. Decreasing publications and weaker campaigns reflect shortcomings in their funding, which came from international sources. This is an important weakness and a fragility faced by the coalition and by the local/national-international alliances.

### ***C. Identity politics, the use of ethnic narrative and the issue of representation***

Another key feature of the resistance movements against the MIFEE project is the use of ethnic narratives as a unifying framework to articulate specific demands from different types of organizations focused on human rights, the environment, food security, land rights and indigenous peoples. Most publications and documents produced by the coalition, used indigenous rights as the dominant framework.

The ethnic narrative set the national government and its MIFEE project vis-a-vis with the Marind people, the indigenous peoples who own the land and forests in Merauke. Using this narrative, the movements indicted the government for the MIFEE project has violated the rights of the Marind People as indigenous peoples of Indonesia, rights recognized and protected by international and national law: the United Nation Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Papuan Special Autonomy Status Law. By using this narrative, the resistance movement was able to connect the historic marginalization of the Marind people with the recent one.

There are four main points in this ethnic narrative. First, it positions the Marind people as the legitimate owners of the land, who have lived in Merauke for generations depending on the land for subsistence and for their culture and identity. The second element of this narrative is that the GoI has violated the rights of Marind people, not only ignoring their right to Free Informed Prior Consent but by allowing the investors to cheat, manipulate and force the Marind people to release their land. The third point of the ethnic narrative is that the Marind people as the legitimate owner of the land with their distinctive way of life have become the victims of national government's development policies that continue to deprive their live. The coalition documented many negative impacts of the MIFEE project and the abusive and illegal methods used to coerce land transfers. The fourth point of this narrative is that the Marind people, as the legitimate owner whose rights have been violated by the state, demands the state to stop the violation, restore their rights, and rehabilitate the destructions (Tempo, 2012; FPP, 2011, 2012, 2013; AwasMIFEE 2014; FORMASI SSUMAWOMA, 2013).

The use of ethnic narratives to unify the resistance movements against the MIFEE reflects two important global phenomenon: the rise of a global indigenous movement and the expansion of the notion of social justice to accommodate recognition of difference as a matter of social justice. In a few decades, the global indigenous movement has been able to get recognition for indigenous peoples and their rights within the major international organizations, despite their weakness at the national and subnational levels. They redeployed a category (indigenous/tribal/Indians) that has historically been used to discriminate and exclude them, now used as a powerful and inclusive political identity that rejects assimilation and challenges hegemonic modernist Western development discourses and practices (Brusk, 1996).

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Awasmiffee website (<https://awasmiffee.potager.org/>) dedicated to centralize information about MIFEE from all other sources, shows the highest number of report postings in 2013 with 40 reports, which decreased to 26 reports in 2014. The decreasing number of news reports is indicative of the decline of the Anti-MIFEE campaign.

This indigenous identity however, is not monolithic or lineal but being constructed as part of an open-ended process, not free of contradictions. Different groups, tribal and detribalized, pastoralists, hunter and gatherers and peasants from all continents, with a multiplicity of experiences, identities and agendas, are embracing their identity as indigenous peoples, a political identity that reflects a commitment to remain culturally distinct and autonomous, resisting assimilating. According to Levi and Dean (2003: 8), “Despite the difficulties in arriving at a precise definition of indigenous, it is clear that indigeneity provides an idiom of social belonging for a wide range of peoples whose histories, habitats and lifeways distinguish them from dominant “national” populations. Of equal or greater importance, indigenous identity provides people with a way to defend local cultural practices and world views through political mobilization.”

In regard to the notion of social justice that legitimizes claims and social movements, it has also expanded from an exclusive argument for redistribution focused on equality to include the recognition argument focused on difference as a prerequisite for parity of participation (Frazer, 1996). The advance of neoliberal globalization brought more than economic restructuring and social policy reforms; it also brought attention to human rights, especially individual rights to free choice. This focus however opened the door for discussions on good governance, the reforms of the state and the need for the state to accommodate difference so that the individual human rights of minorities could be protected. A more comprehensive human rights framework was adopted within multilateral organizations in a global context of rising inequalities, bringing attention to issues of equality as well as issues of diversity, and the need to recognize difference as an important component of social justice (Frazer, 1996) What is referred to as identity politics – a social movement that claims to be recognized different but not subordinated, has been deployed widely, either in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexuality or race, generating social movements that are no longer defined or constructed along the lines of class and/or that are no longer representing a homogenous group; this process has been also referred as “de-centering” of social movements (Alvarez and Escobar, 1998).

Identity politics can be used when referring to the resistance against MIFEE because their use of ethnic narratives was validating the Marind people as indigenous peoples with particular legitimate rights to confront the nation-state preminent rights and interests. International and national laws and agreements give indigenous peoples a special status within nation-states. In this regard, identity politics builds on the cultural politics of difference rather than on the social politics of equality. However, it is interesting to note that in the case of the resistance against MIFEE, there were other claims within the coalition, like land rights, food security or human rights that fit better within the politics of equality.

This coalition therefore seems able not only to effectively manage a tactic collaboration from a broad range of organizations but to navigate well the differences between identity politics and the social politics of equality. This is not a small achievement considering that identity politics in general and indigenous identity politics in particular have been reported as problematic when trying to build broad-based coalition social movements, such as for the case of Guatemala as reported by Warren (1998).

In this regard indigenous politics is about defending the particularistic interests of indigenous peoples vis. a vis. non-indigenous hegemonic institutions and policies. However, several situations have required indigenous peoples to act in collaboration with non-indigenous subordinated groups, for instance when fighting mining and oil operations on their lands, political repression or as in the case of Indonesia, resisting land grabbing. Varesse (1996) uses Gramsci’s notions of corporatist and collective will to explain the shift from indigenous ethnicity to indigenous hegemony, the latter referring to the inclusion of non-indigenous subordinated groups and claims and the use of external ideological influences within indigenous struggles. This shift also reflects the move from a narrow to a broader leadership built on consensus and the expansion of an identity that is solely based on cultural distinctiveness toward what he refers as “ethno-national and class consciousness”.

This type of identity politics according to Varesse (1996) is behind the diverse forms of indigenous political participation since the 1970s, from peasants to transnational migrants, a political identity that has articulated anti-hegemonic resistances against particular mining or oil interests, against assimilationist and repressive policies of nation-states and against the modernist neoliberal globalization. This is the type of indigenous politics that can be inclusive to accommodate different agendas and claims from different groups, indigenous and non-indigenous, who share a situation of oppression, exploitation, vulnerability and marginality.



What is particular about the MIFEE resistance movement is that even though it was not led by an indigenous leadership, it was guided by an ethnic narrative that while clearly positions the Marind people as the social group being wronged by this project, also serves as an umbrella to accommodate other claims, like land rights, food security and human rights.

The use of ethnic narratives brought many advantages to the resistance movements, allowing them to gather support from local, national and international communities; it also brought some contradictions within the West Papuans communities that are the main actors of the resistance movements. The strategy adopted by the global indigenous movement and by the resistance movements to MIFEE is to frame their struggle for autonomy within a reform of the nation-states where they live. For the West Papuan Freedom Movements however, their struggle for indigenous rights can only be achieved through a separated sovereign West Papuan state.

The platform of independence does not recognize the legitimacy of the Indonesian state in this region, differing from the ethnic narrative used by the resistance movement. Recognizing the authority of Indonesia government it demands the full implementation of the Papua Special Autonomy Law, which recognizes and protects the rights of West Papuan as indigenous peoples within the state of Indonesia and recognizes the need to stop human rights violations, intimidation and repression that still dominate the daily life in this region. In practice, this claim elicit less violent responses from the state, which helped the anti-MIFEE movements to grow their influence at the national level.

Identity politics in regards to indigenous peoples face some dilemmas related to the issue of representation. Who is or not indigenous and who represents indigenous peoples can become problematic when self-determination is the main criteria to define indigenous identity; this becomes more problematic in a region where local elites can claim to be indigenous as well<sup>12</sup> --to support MIFEE and to try to delegitimize NGOs representing the Marind people, and where indigenous peoples are not well organized nor represented.

The difference between separatist indigenous movements and the indigenous struggle for autonomy within the Indonesia state can also raise issues about what position legitimately represents the interests or the will of indigenous peoples in this region. Lack of democratic political representation of indigenous peoples at the national, provincial, regency and district levels in Indonesia and the militarization of West Papua prevent the use of public spaces and legal administrative mechanisms to openly debate the short and long-term interests of the indigenous peoples in the region. These challenges are shared by other indigenous struggles around the world, since most developing countries adopted the nation-state model after independence as well as assimilationist policies towards indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities (Maybury-Lewis, 1997). Actually the need to focus on building capacity at the national and subnational level, addressed during the UN Second Decade on Indigenous Peoples clearly recognizes this weakness (IWGIA, 2005).

Despite these challenges and limitations, the use of ethnic narratives and identity politics has shown a tremendous potential not only to oppose land grabbing but to unveil the destructive and exclusionary character of modernist capitalist development focused exclusively on economic growth and capital accumulation. However some important limitations faced by the resistance movement include dependency of NGOs and grassroots organizations on international funding. This made the coalition vulnerable to the ebbs and flows of international trends affecting external funding, which certainly weakened the resistance after 2013. This is a common problem faced by NGOs and grassroots organizations especially in developing countries. In order to cut dependency from foreign resources these organizations need to find autonomous ways of securing sustainable income to properly fund their operations; for instance using social enterprises to generate profits in ways that are socially fair, environmentally friendly and culturally appropriate. There are some successful examples to learn from, such as the case of BRAC in Bangladesh, currently the largest NGO in the world<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The media coverage presents several examples of this – For instance Arifin Panigoro, the owner of MEDCO group that has invested in MIFEE, was inaugurated as a Marind leader with a given name, Warku Gebze, by the former regent of Merauke, Johannes Gebze (Tempo, 2012). By this inauguration, Panigoro has the right to use the customary land of the Marind people.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.brac.net>.

The resistance movements against MIFEE aim not only to stall and stop the project and rehabilitate the damages created by its implementation but to address the poverty among the Marind people and to obtain their recognition as Indigenous People with the right to be included and represented in the state and society of Indonesia with parity and distinctive status. While the coalition needs to regain momentum to achieve the short-term goals in regard to MIFEE it also needs to deal with these long-term goals. The most important alternative promoted by the resistance movements is the implementation of FPIC in the process of land transfer, which gives right to Marind people to accept or reject the implementation of MIFEE project in their land; however, this alternative does not address long-term goals.

A problem to be addressed in this regard is the lack of long-term alternatives to replace the large scale-investment model; the lack of specific proposals for sustainable and inclusive development for the West Papua region in particular and for Indonesia in general. The absence of long-term strategies for sustainable, fair, inclusive and culturally appropriate development is a vulnerability of the resistance against MIFEE, considering the need to solve problems like poverty and marginalization while conserving the natural environment and respecting the right of indigenous peoples to remain culturally different.

However, this lack of long-term alternatives to modernist exclusionary capitalist development is not limited to the coalition resistance to MIFEE. It reflects several limits within the social movements, NGOs and grassroots organizations as well as within the academia and development institutions. Actually, the crisis of development paradigm and praxis has been recognized since the 1990s, for instance the sustainable development paradigm was an attempt to change the course, narrative and practice of development to make it more responsive to the need of conserving the environment and guaranteeing inter and intra-generational justice in regard to access and control of natural resources. However, the neoliberal wave that since the 1990s reshaped global and local economies, cultures and politics, neutralized this attempt, leaving critical discussions about capitalist development at the margins.

There is a need for a pragmatic but radical critique of the hegemonic neoliberal development paradigm based on capitalist accumulation. The expansion of land grabbing and the emergence of the anti-land grabbing global movements fits with Rahman (2011) use of the “double movement” concept from Polanyi. According to Polanyi (2001), the world is constructed through “double movements” that go in opposite ways, one is a movement to create and expand market systems that lead to the destruction of society through commodification of human and nature; and the other is the counter-movement to protect the society and nature. The movements against land grabbing can be seen as part of the movements against markets hegemony.

While they are important for building democracy, social movements are also important for development, since they are a political response to development and its failure to respond to the needs and interests of the poor and marginalized. This is quite pertinent considering that policies promoting land grabbing follow global hegemonic neo-modernist model of development that privileges economic growth under large-scale investment schemes, where there is no room for small farmers or indigenous peoples to define their own path to development. In this regard the resistance movements to land grabbing are challenging not only national states that impose those policies but the logic of international development that impose and threaten their livelihoods, their way of life and their identities and their cultural and political rights to remain different.

The question is whether activism can provide alternatives to hegemonic development and globalization, and what the role of indigenous movements and identity politics is in this regard. The experience of the resistance to MIFEE shows that ethnic narratives and identity politics can be inclusive and foster a broader coalition where many of the claims are about social justice as redistribution and equality. Furthermore, we would agree with Nash (2001) that indigenous peoples are key to challenge hegemonic paradigms and values guiding development and globalization, since they have managed to resist dominant discourses and rationales, defending their own paradigms that are based on different values, meanings and epistemologies. The critique of development cannot be reduced to economics but need to engage in a critique of culture, of the values that give meaning to our world, that justify priorities, entitlements and power distribution among us.

Indigenous peoples are then not just another constituency to be included but one that has the keys to unlock the development impasse, to deconstruct the narratives that have been used to justify the oppression of a growing majority of people for the benefit of a smaller group and the destruction of the natural environment on a planetary scale.

The use of indigenous hegemony within social movements like the MIFEE resistance shows the potential of identity politics to expand the notion of social justice and the social base of the global resistance to neoliberal globalization, in the search for true paradigmatic alternatives to dominant development.

### **Final remarks**

We have shown how effective this type of coalition can be fighting land grabbing and bringing together different organizations with different agendas under the umbrella of ethnic narratives. We have also shown the vulnerabilities of such coalition, especially the need to gain access to sustained funding and support and the need to develop a strategy that combines short and long term goals providing not only a critique of large-scale investments and capitalist globalization but a road map towards a counter-hegemonic development model that can be started at the regional and local levels.

We have also shown the limits of indigenous politics as well as its potential to develop indigenous hegemonies that can build social movements and alternatives to development. In order to build the capacity of indigenous organizations at the national and sub-national level, and to strengthen the role of indigenous peoples especially the Marind People as protagonists of this alternative “development”, there is a need to stop the militarization and repression in West Papua, mobilizing global support for the opening of negotiations towards a peace agreement between the GoI and the separatist movements. The platform for indigenous rights and autonomy could reconcile the GoI and West Papua Freedom Movements, and the resistance coalition against MIFEE could play a key role in this process.

Even though the global attention and protest against land grabbing is now declining, West Papua is still an international sensitive affair and the international recognition of indigenous rights is growing stronger. In the context of West Papua, the indigenous rights has a great potential to demand the national government to fully implement the Papuan Special Autonomy Law, which recognizes indigenous peoples rights and grants autonomy status to this region. Framing the MIFEE resistance within ethnic narratives has articulated the agency of different groups and agendas and mobilized broad support from the local, national and international level. It has also elicited less violent responses from the GoI. What remains a challenge is the articulation of long-term alternatives to address poverty and marginalization among the Marind people and other subordinated groups affected by land grabbing. Pragmatic alternatives to current development policies and narratives, and viable alternative, fair, sustainable and inclusive futures is what remains to be imagined and collectively constructed. What the role of the indigenous resistance to land grabbing is in building indigenous hegemonies leading a process of democratization and reform of the Indonesian nation-state, remains to be seen.

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