

# **MANGGARAIAN INDIGENEITY: THE POOR, THE SACRED, AND *DEMOS* IN POST-REFORM INDONESIA®**

## **Abstract**

This paper engages the question of how indigeneity emerges as central historical figure and plays out its multiple subject position in negotiation with the state and the church. Drawing on current experience of indigenous movement in East Manggarai, Flores Island, this study argues that the increasing significance of indigeneity as active citizenship relates to the convergence of three dominant discourses introduced by the state and the Catholic Church in post Reform period. Local State treats indigeneity as the poor of development intervention and the *demos*, or political subject of local democratization in terms of general election (Pemilu) and regent's election (Pilkada). While the Catholic Church targets them as the sacred of ecology-oriented theology. Instead of being mere object of such discursive interventions in New Order and early years of Post Reform, this urban poor under the name of indigeneity currently seeks to negotiate with the two dominant institutions in both developmental policy making and pastoral policy of the Church relating to special autonomy in undertaking customary practices. This study also points to the need for more sustained advocacy of this movement against the backdrop of the state and the church's crisis of popular legitimacy.

**Keywords:** *Indigeneity, Ecology, Development, Democracy, Discourse*

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## Introduction

Nowadays indigeneity has become one of the most keywords in identity politics. It connotes to variety of meaning, usage and actors or certain segment of population. This differing connotation and applicability of the term have much to do with both multi-disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity that characterize rapid change in epistemological orientation of social-political science. With the development of identity politics in the last twenty years, indigeneity has been transformed from specific object of anthropological study into more nuanced approaches with strong emphasis on the contemporariness of its rise, historical development and challenges. Economic and political aspects are increasingly perceived as equally crucial as its cultural traits in the construction and articulation of its existence, demands, and negotiation with powerful forces and dominant trends of nation-state and globalization.

One of the most recent treatment on indigeneity is the emphasis on its present articulation as both special subject of neoliberal discipline and anti-neoliberal resistance in many parts of the world. Indigeneity movement is considered being located in the tension between neoliberal depolitization targeted as 'cultural community' and its opportunity as political site for popular resistance against state developmentalism and other forces of economic globalization and cultural homogenization working through multiple social institutions including religious institutions. Latin American experience, for instance, shows how indigeneity changes historically from cultural containment of developmentalist state in early sixties up to eighties of Cold War period into site of resistance in current neoliberal era (Escobar 2008; Mignolo 2007). It is coined as 'decolonial project', in which rural poor-based movement takes the historical place and role of working class of urban socialist-communist movement in the struggle for justice and equality before the neoliberal state.

Similar trend of its significance can also be found in many regions of Asia and Africa. Chatterjee (2004) points out that in South Asia, particularly India, indigeneous movement has emerged as subaltern subject to resist and negotiate with caste-elite ruling power that dominates local politics and local development bureaucracy. Narratives of rural culture are restructured and reoriented as means and norms toward radical critique of both colonial and postcolonial legacies of Indian political-economic structure and governance of broad based rural population. In many of parts of Southeast Asia indigeneous movement marks the agrarian politics of rural population as response to either deep presence or overt absence of developmentalist-security state (Scott 2013). While in African countries, indigeneity as political identity and resistance has been the persistent feature of popular struggle for political equality and economic redistribution in postcolonial governmental settings (Mamdani 2001, 2012). Experiences of the three continents indicates how indigeneity becomes political, resurfacing in variety of specific context of postcolonial societies in current neoliberal ordering through state and other dominant institutions.

Indonesian experience with indigeneity today reflects in slightly similar pattern global contexts mentioned above. Since early 2000s marking the start of 'post New Order' period, rapid reconfiguration of governmental power, called regionalism or local autonomy, bears witness to the rise of indigeneous movement as part of broader trend in local response to the arrangement (Erb, 2005). In sharp contrast to thirty two years of New Order's cultural containment of local culture, local experience of rapid decentralization highlights the rising significance of 'indigeneous' people or the 'native' as the legitimate stakeholder of local politics and local development. Many studies shows that not only the local elite garners popular support by alluding to nativeness of their legitimacy and ruling but the fact that more and more nativeness being renarrated and employed by rural population in their struggle for economic resource, ecological concerns and developmental funds (Klinken, 2007; Li 2005, 2014). Horizontal and vertical conflicts come along in this struggle out of which indigeneity turns to be political articulation of the rural poor in the background of decades of depolitization and underdevelopment. All this study argues for its historical and sociological transformation from the excluded into the assertive, stronger voice and concern in local policy making and local politics (Demos/PWD Research Report, 2009, 2013). With the continued advocacy of NGOs working in development and ecological fronts, indigeneity has turned to be national concerns and response as indicated in multiple state policy including the most notorious one Undang-Undang Desa No 6 2014 on Village.

It is precisely in this political and sociological setting that this study engages the question of how it becomes central historical figure capable of **exercising active citizenship**. It raises the question about what discourses make it possible as political subject and how it transformed historically from object of developmentalist-security discourse into demos or trend setters of local autonomy discourse. Our focus on East Manggarai District, Flores Island, discloses its general pattern as found in many part of the country but with its specific historical-discursive condition, tension and projection into the future. It is argued that its standing and role take place againts the backdrop of deep crisis in popular legitimacy of both local state and the Catholic Church as well as active response to the need of both dominant institutions to regain its diminishing legitimacy in post-reform period. We interrogate this subject in the successive phase of New Order, early years of decentralization (1999-2004) and current period (2005-present). However, most of our attention focused on how the crosscutting discourses of local state-led development, church-advocated ecological theology and electoral democracy set the breeding ground for this subject to emerge and articulate autonomy and demands of the rural population in Western Flores, Eastern Indonesia.

## Placing Indigeneity in Context: *Subject, History, and Discourse*

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To make more sense of indigeneity as both historical figure and political subject, our analysis draws upon Foucaultian interrogation of how subject constitutes in certain discourse. Discourse in Foucaultian treatment refers to a set of ideas and practices that defines or marks certain time-span with certain characteristics out of which subject is given name or capabilities to act in compliance with regime of truth or to perform in resistance within the discourse (Foucault 1991, 1982). The ways through which discourse operates are called governmentality, that is, rationality, strategy and mechanism with which power operates to define what is society or order and its function as well as to define certain type of subject and subjectivities either as normal or abnormal, legal or illegal and so forth. In this analytical treatment, state and religious institution are both institutions of discourse, or being governmentalised by certain discourse. As consequence, a subject or identity in certain discourse reflects both subjugation and resistance. Discourse makes possible the emergence of identity as object of discursive intervention and identity as subject of resistance or transgressive acts.

However, discourse analysis developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 2005) takes us to the next level by considering how the emergence of transgressive identity or resistant subject is conditioned by the contingency of the discourse itself in practice. Discourse can never be fully hegemonic in producing and controlling subject in durable time and place. Resistance always occurs because the subject enjoys multiple subject-position that cannot be succumbed into one single identity or patterns of action. Discourse tends to produce a sense of dislocation or crisis that incites subject to rethink other possibility of identity and action to cope with the crisis. In our case, indigeneity contains in its name multiple subjects that are produced through the working three discourses, development, ecology and democracy. They make use of this discursive attribution as to negotiate with the 'masters' of the discourse, namely, the local state the Catholic Church and local politicians. Equally important is the notion of antagonism with which they consider the masters as 'enemy', not to be entirely abolished but to be continuously tricked and ridiculed as the masters in desperate need for popular legitimacy of rural population.

Singularity of a name for multiple subject, in this case indigeneity, marks a historical transformation of certain targetted population in their intricacy with the discourses. Like the name of 'people' for populist politics (Laclau, 2005), indigeneity marks distinct name of the rural-agrarian politics in our time of intensive neoliberal policies through the state and other ruling social and cultural-religious institutions. As clearly evident in contemporary latin american experience, the construction of indigeneity and its political articulation have been the historical legacy of socialist and populist politics of

the seventies and eighties in the region (Escobar, 2008). With indigeneity as singular name, it covers broad spectrum of rural poor, ethnic communities, and local religious streams that seek to govern their own well-being while still in constant negotiation, often violent, with the state and Catholic Church. They are not in total negation of the institutions but creatively exploring within their discourses, such as development and democracy, another ways of being in modernity.

## **Manggaraian Indigeneity: *Historical Trajectory***

‘Masyarakat adat Manggarai’ (customary community), or referred here as Manggaraian indigeneity, has existed since colonial period up to the present. Its practice and meaning have also changed across the time-span in which differing powerful discourses define and regulate them as object of policy intervention. Before exploring their identity and function relating to specific discourse or power relation, let us present its descriptive cosmological features as evident in antropological writings, popular narratives, official documents of the local government and regularly published documents of Ruteng Catholic Diocese.

In East Manggarai District, there are various number of Gendang/kampung (Beo), as the smallest unit of Manggaraian indigenous community, which located within 12 larger customary structures called Kedaluan, as follow Lambaleda, Pota, Congkar, Biting, Rembong, Torok Golo, Sita, Riwu, Manus, Ronggakoe, Kepo, and Rajong. As the smallest unit of Manggaraian indigeneity, Gendang is the most active and increasingly assumes crucial role in representing local indigeneity before the state, the church and other civil society organizations. Nowadays Gendang has no longer tied to larger structure of Dalu and Manggaraian Kingdom as it had been since early twentieth century of Dutch indirect rule and postcolonial rearrangement of local govermental structure during the period of Old Order and New Order.

As customary community, it binds closely to land, forest and water as its material bases around which the community develops and sustains. Governance of these material bases is conducted referring to five infrastructure of customary cosmology. First, Mbaru Gendang, customary building as center of customary governing and signifying position and role of customary leader. Second, Natas, public space of the community located in the middle of the Kampung/Beo. Third, Compang, table for conducting ritual ceremony to pay tribute to Mori Karaeng (God), Wura agu Ceki (ancestors), and Naga Beo (guarding spirits of the Kampung), located in the middle of Natas. Fourth, Boa, Kampung’s cemetery, located outside the Kamppung, as to indicate the spatial demarcation between the living and the dead. Fifth, Wae Teku, water source, located nearby the kampung, being guarded by spirits to ensure the continuity of their agricultural activities. Sixth, Uma and Lingko, customary land for their agricultural activities and livelihood.

In order for the structure of communal governance to function, the customary community has strict division of labor among its five leadership figures. First is Tua Golo or Tua Gendang, the supreme leader of the Beo, responsible for all Kampung's affairs except land distribution and regulation. Second is Tua Tembong, responsible for conducting ritual ceremonies in both life cycle of its members and in agricultural cycle of the community. Third is Tua Teno, tasked with responsibility to distribute and regulate the use of customary land, forest and water. Fourth is Tua Panga, leaders of clans comprising of families with direct genealogical bonds. And Fifth, Tua Kilo, leaders of families living together in one or two houses next to each other. These five types of leadership form the governing structure of the community, remains in place until now, and constitutes the most binding force in articulating community's negotiation before the local state and the Catholic Church.

In colonial period, particularly during short presence of Dutch indirect rule in early 1900s, Gendang was integrated into the ruling of Manggaraian 'Kingdom' established with the initiative and support of Dutch colonial administration through the issuing of *Vorte Verklaring* in 1929. Historians argues that there was no kingdom before the issuance except communal communities called Gendang and the inauguration of the first Manggaraian King, Raja Bagoeng of Gendang Todo, marked the dominance of one Gendang over other onward up to the New Order period particularly in local state bureaucracy (Toda, 1999). However, main objective of the colonial power is not to exploit natural and human resources but solely to ensure its ruling over western part of the island as means to bordering the ruling of Goa and Bima in the region. While it is during this period that the Catholicism spread rapidly with the conversion of the Raja Bagoeng and the Church's acculturation campaign over local religious practice lasted until its heyday in 1984 when the Church started to focus more 'soul caring' after this religion became majoritarian (Puspas, 2008).

In postcolonial period of Old Order, third Manggaraian King, Karaeng Hambur, appointed as head of newly established District of Manggarai in 1958 and this started to have deep impact on the position and function of the Gendang. All Kedaluan, second layer of the aristocratic territorial structure, transformed into Kecamatan, with most of the Dalu (head of kedaluan) appointed as Camat (head of subdistrict). Discourse of economic and cultural modernization brought about by the local state coincided with the Church's campaign of reedeming theology over the backwardness of local religious beliefs. Perceived themselves as target of policy interventions, communities of Gendang began to subjectivise as part of the state and the church since most of the leaders of both institutions descending from aristocratic family of Manggaraian Kingdom and Kedaluan.

In more intensive patterns, three decades of New Order ruling (1968-1998) resulted in producing what we termed as 'tuang/roeng' binary in identifying those belong to place of power in the local government and the church called Tuang and those confined into object of developmentalist project and Christian salvation containment. In our study, sense of being part of aristocratic order diminished and replaced with the sense of being

remote, inaccessible and in need of getting out of 'entrenched poverty' and 'sinful life of cultural backwardness'. This subjectivity has been prevalent in the mid 1980s and early 1990s at a time when most of the Church's governance of the rural Christians was entirely similar with the districts's institutional and territorial governance. Official narratives of both institutions defined Gendang community as Roeng while the latter perceived the former as inaccessible leaders of knowledge and cultural morality wherein being state officials and Catholic priests were the beacons of highest achievement they could only dream. This widening separation brought about by developmentalist and salvation campaigns have paved the way for such sociological contradiction to evolve in post New Order period as discussed below.



## **Negotiating the Boundaries:** ***Three Subjects of Manggaraian Indigeneity***

The rise of Manggaraian indigeneity situated within newly induced discourses that has gone together since the early period of post New Order. Such discourses are development decentralization (local autonomy) with concentrating authority into district government, electoral democracy with political liberalization in form of Pemilu (direct general election) and Pilkada (direct election of district regent), and ecological concern of the Ruteng Diocese's contextual theology. At the surface, the discourses mark fundamental change in the ways the state officials, local politicians and the priests look at rural population and their cultural-agrarian practice. However, as our study shows, this shift in discourse gives birth to visibility of the cultural and sociological contradiction between the powerless Roeng and the powerful Tuang, and facilitates the transformation of the Roeng or Gendang community as political subject with two distinct phases of their political articulation in early 2000s and in 2005 onward until present. As we argue in preceding session, discourse produces certain type of subject but the subject is capable of distracting the objective of the discourse and exercising new political subjectivity and action. This is to further argue that gendang as smallest unit of Manggaraian cultural order since colonial period has turned today to be almost

entirely autonomous in its negotiation with the local government, local representative board and the Catholic Church.

### ***Indigeneity as the Active Poor***

Page | 8 With the election of Anton Bagul Dagur as Manggaraian Regent by the local representative in 1999, district government became more attentive to cultural questions in development. As response to nation-wide inducement of local cultural primacy and call for grounding public services into local context, his administration exercised dual policy toward rural population. On the one hand, the government promotes and conserves what is perceived as Budaya Manggarai, while on the other hand, it is the government's officials having legitimacy to define what is Manggaraian culture to be preserved and which one to be eliminated allegedly antithetical to economic development (Dagur, 2004; Hargens, 2005, 2009). Even he considered his position as regent as being *Landuk*, the founding pillar of the Gendang, meaning the highest cultural leader (Erb, 2006). Variety of cases show how during this period violent tension as the rural population resisted the governmental policy relating to customary lands and customary forests.

Year 2004 marks the turning point in the tension when local police with the support of the district government killed seven coffee peasants as they were conducting general strike in front of the police headquarters to show their discontent against the arrest of their fellow peasants. This is widely known as 'Colol Case' or 'Bloody Wednesday', triggering nation-wide attention particularly KOMNAS HAM advocacy for the next three years. Not different from district government response, Catholic Church condemned the strike and offered 'moral' justification for the killing (Mirsal, 2004). Following the tragedy, various advocacy conducted by the NGOs and certain segments of the church started to raise question of rural poverty and call for the government to meet the multi-sectoral interests of the peasants including recognising their rights over customary land and forest that the government sought to proclaim as belonging to state jurisdiction. A year after the tragedy, he lost peasant's support for winning the election and the new elected regent, Christian Rotok, considered not elitist, pro-rural poor as he originates from Gendang community still connected to Colol Gendang. His administration lasted for ten years, considered as real *Landuk* belonging to rural peasant population.

Intensive response to peasant problems in East Manggarai after the redistricting in 2007 has substantive rationale, that is, the only existing popular actors in the area is gendang communities with strong genealogical bonds and agricultural bases. Elected twice in 2008 and 2013, the regent, Yosef Tote, exploited this popular bases as source of his political legitimacy and his developmental policy directly reaches out to the Kampung/Beo as he introduces partnership between state-led village administration and Gendang leaders in undertaking policy cycle at grass root level. This overall process offers ample opportunity for them to exercise the rights as citizens with community based articulation, getting them regularly exposed to and actively engaged with



governmental affairs that matter most for their well-being as community. Being indigenous then means being politically active in asking and questioning governmental performance of the district officials including subdistrict and village administration. New narratives of indigeneity contain critique of New Order elitism of the *Tuang Birokrasi* that still exists before their eyes and often ridicule the officials as 'useless' or the 'real poor' as label once attributing to them in New Order period.

At present Colol Gendang is the most active articulator of indigeneity movement in the district. Its leaders take central role in mainstreaming AMAN agenda in three Manggaraian districts. This also stimulated by the issuing of UU Desa No 6 2014 instructing national government and district government to be highly responsive to the demands of indigenous groups including establishing both *Masyarakat Hukum Adat* (customary Law-based community) and *Desa Adat* (customary village). As the poor, they asks the government for more coherent policy framework in rural area such public service provision (education and health) in line with agrarian development policy. Equally important feature is their resistance to mining corporation in northern part of the district. Being the poor is no longer an attribute to be passive but as subject actively engaging the state, its officials and its developmental policies.

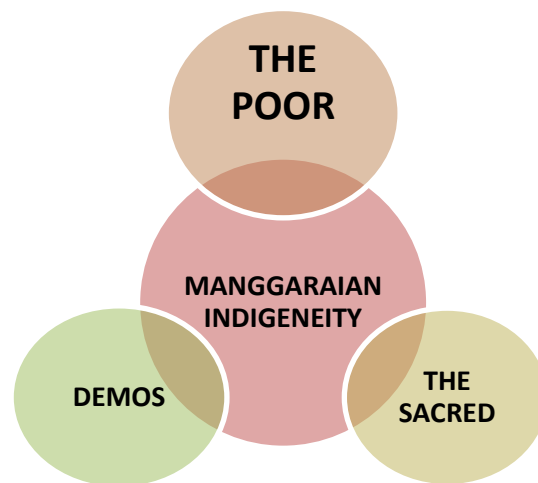
### **Indigeneity: *from Ethnos to Demos***

Pemilu and Pilkada have proven as contributing factor in getting the rural population in contact with the practice of electoral democracy. Series of 'pesta democracy' starting with Pilkada and Pemilu in 2004 have affected the ways they perceive political behaviour of the urban based elite seeking voters in rural areas. Instead of building strong constituency or electorate through political parties, incumbent and candidate in Pemilu, including less popular candidate of Pilkada, have been overtly aggressive in making deal with the Gendang leaders where the Gendang building becomes the most effective arena for face-to-face 'socialization' of less programs than their own faces. For the most popular candidate or incumbent the space has been the regular place of meeting with the community during five years of their tenure as higher rank government official or as active politicians. But this is rare case. Most of the candidate belongs to urban middle class and their families are the 'owners' of political parties at district level (DPC).

Having no other means to garner popular support, they have to buy electorate of rural population by providing them with material assistance and money for cultural brokers such as *Tua Teno* and *Tua Golo*. Unfortunately, this short termed tactic does not guarantee their electoral gain. Leadership in Gendang knows how to exploit the candidate and justifying his failure by pointing to the high number of the candidate to whom they must share their votes. Lesson learnt for the gendang community is that they have to vote for candidate whose proposed programs considered responsive to their long term demands such as small scale irrigation, forming elementary and junior high school, and other related to public service provision. Once they decide certain

candidate to be their choice, economic transaction during electoral campaign rarely takes place.

It is worth noting that their active engagement with governmental affairs and development policies enables them to evaluate the capability of the candidate before making electoral decision. This is particularly the latest feature of their political rationality after series of pre-2014 election. In order to have durable political affiliation and agenda, AMAN and other NGOs in the last two years build political block or alliance among Gendang to have coherent demands to be put into negotiation with future regent candidates in 2018 Pilkada considering the fact that the current regent is not allowed to join the contest. Central message behind the rise of political rationality is that against the backdrop of the crisis in substantive representation, 'citizenship' of the gendang community can move discursively from etnos to demos, from mere cultural to political subject asking for high quality of governmental leadership in local bureaucracy and representative board.



### ***Being Indigenous, Being the Sacred***

Ecology based theology of the Ruteng Diocese does contribute to the emergence of indigeneity politics in concerted fashion with developmental policies of district government and electoral democracy. This theological shift since 2010 has been in contrast with official policy of the church in early 2000s. Losing popular legitimacy following the 'bloody Wednesday' case in 2014 the Church approaches the rural peasants with ecological discourse, With this discourse in practice, rural peasants are endorsed to be the leading actor in preserving living ecosystem where the earth being considered as mother of all living beings. At this point the Church based NGOs such as JIPC SVD and JIPC OFM cooperated with AMAN in their joint resistance to mining corporation in late 2000 up to the present. It is in 2009 that the Diocese established its own JIPC (Justice, Peace and Integration of Creation) after advocacy of those other

congregational JIPC increasingly welcomed by gendang communities around areas of mining exploitation.

During three decades of New Order, the church sought to disentangle rural population from cosmological-affective attachment to forest, land and water as considered animism and consequently, non-christian. Quite in contradictory fashion, Gendang community's revitalization of local 'religious' practice is also endorsed by the local official teaching. There has been taking place an intricacy between theological treatment of 'mother earth' and reeffacement of nature with spirits by the Gendang communities. The end result of this converging discursive process is the repositing of Gendang community as both 'locus theologicus' and 'homo spiritus'. Having so far gained the status of the sacred, the community however seems in perplexing position. On one hand, they enjoys the Church' embrace of their cultural practice while on the other hand, they are witnessing elitist behaviour of the church governance within which they remain outsider or not prioritized in other pastoral services such access to expensive catholic schools and health centers.

This sense of being simultaneously embraced and excluded has raised critical questions among proponents of indigeneity movement. One of the most noted narrative on the ground is that the church is in desperate need of popular legitimacy in its current contestation of institutional reputation with the local government in post-New Order setting. Another aspect fuelling the contest is the fact most of priest with higher rank in the Diocese belongs to aristocratic background similar to those higher rank officials in the government and local parliaments. Moving beyond this issue, the seemingly theological advocacy of their cultural practice does affect their confidence and performativity in negotiating variety of rural concerns particularly with the local government and representative board. Combined with being active poor and demos, their reclaimed status as the sacred facilitates their identity and practice as prime articulator of rural agrarian articulator of resistance and negotiation.

## Conclusion

Our analysis highlights how indigeneity can be central political subject in changing historical context. Manggaraian experience with the rise of indigeneity bears witness to the fact in certain structural and historical setting it can be a contemporary articulation of rural citizenship either as member of nation-state or as autonomous subject responsible for their communal affairs. After experiencing decades of exclusion, changing developmental and political context offers them practical opportunity to cope directly with the state officials and the church priests. Three discourses introduced by both the two dominant insitutions, in contrast, become the breeding ground, spaces for regaining cultural autonomy, economic and ecological sustainability upon which material bases of their community are sociologically grounded. As political subject, what they are performing today is not mere 'rights assuming politics' but moving further to play out 'rights producing politics' by creatively combining historical legacy of their

cultural practice with their contemporary needs for sustained well-being in neoliberal era. Our analysis also lays out the call for more institutionalized arrangement of their participation into local development and pastoral governance as to secure their current position and advocate their rural demands.

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