

## Development, Depoliticisation, and Manggaraian Peasants' Resistance in Western Flores

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### Abstract

*This article explores how certain elements of society show resistance against the process of depoliticisation that works through development. Drawing on the case of peasants in Lembor, a regency in Western Flores, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), this article argues that, by offering a so-called 'alternative development', civil society actors attempt to show their resistance against the process of depoliticisation that has been implemented through the rice monoculture farming system. To this end, the theories of depoliticisation and alternative development as resistance shall be used as analytical tools. Depoliticisation is defined in the literature as the process through which the regime of mainstream development relocates politico-economic questions in dealing with the problems of peasants, in this case those in Lembor. Meanwhile, the theory of alternative development will be used to frame the form of peasants' resistance in Lembor. The ultimate end of this study is to restore power to political analysis. As such, this article seeks to conflate development and democracy in discussing citizens' welfare.*

**Keywords:** *Development; depoliticisation; alternative development, resistance; peasant.*

### Introduction

Following the Trans Flores Road from Ruteng (the capital of Manggarai Regency) to Labuan Bajo (the capital of West Manggarai Regency), we will find large expanses of rice field, particularly in Lembor. Known as the granary of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province, Lembor was developed in the early 1980s as part of the New Order's Green Revolution project. Going through the area for the first time, stories of peasants' success are likely to come to mind.

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How could they not? Assumedly, the modern farming techniques used in Lembor—more advanced than in other parts of West Manggarai Regency—has made it more promising for the welfare of Manggarai peasants.

However, such an assumption is not always true. Take, for example, the fact that peasants are trapped in debt cycles, that rice is subsidised, and that there are indications of corruption in agricultural development. These facts are the *raison d'être* for the emergence of two peasant communities in Lembor: Apel (Aliansi Petani Lembor, the Lembor Farmers' Alliance) and Liang Sola Sovereign Peasant Community (Komunitas Daulat Tani Liang Sola). Over the past ten years, these communities have countered mainstream developments in agriculture by offering an alternative model, a peasants' approach to agriculture.

This article argues that, by offering an alternative model of agriculture, Apel and Liang Sola Sovereign Peasant Community have shown resistance to the process of depoliticisation that works through mainstream development. To that end, in this article the author will present two stories of how depoliticisation works through development and how the two communities have offered so-called alternative development as a way of resisting mainstream agricultural practices in Lembor.

To start building my argument, it is useful to first review studies of development and democracy in Flores over the past two decades of decentralisation in order to highlight this article's insight on resistance. Contemporary critical development and democracy studies in Flores tend to confine their analysis to how the process of depoliticisation occurs through development. On the one hand, these studies are important in assisting us in obtaining a better understanding of the political economy of development in Flores, including Manggarai, as the context of people's resistance against mainstream development. On the other hand, epistemologically these studies are limited as they portray the people of Flores entirely as depoliticised subjects under mainstream development, paying

little attention to the possibility that resistance may emerge in their interactions with mainstream development.

Such previous studies have put into question the argument that decentralisation is the best way to strengthen the process of democratisation in third-world countries. They show that, instead of paving the way for democratisation, two decades of decentralisation in Flores—following the main thesis of some local democracy researchers in Indonesia—has instead offered a new arena for various forms of elite capture, including local predation (Hadiz, 2010), local bossism, (Sidel, 2004) and patronage-clientelism (Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015). This phenomenon has notably occurred in mining and tourism, the two main development sectors in decentralisation-era Flores.

Soon after the enactment of Regional Autonomy Law in 2002, the provincial government of NTT opened the door for mining investment in the area. However, studies with varied perspectives (Jebadu, Raring, Regus, & Tukan, 2009; Regus, 2011; Hasiman, 2014; Denar, 2015) have argued that the mining sector in Flores has simply benefited the elites (i.e. the government and mining companies) without positively affecting local economic empowerment.

Moving from the mining sector, in the past ten years the Flores government has promoted tourism as the new leading sector of development. This has become particularly prominent due to, among other things, the recognition of Komodo dragons as one of the new seven wonders in 2012 and the central government's recognition of Labuan Bajo as a priority tourist destination. No doubt, tourism has been promoted by many international development agencies as more sustainable than the extractive sector. It is claimed that the tourism sector is environmentally friendly, embraces local culture, and focuses on community empowerment.

However, as shown by many scholars, rather than providing for local economic empowerment, the tourism sector has paved the way for the expansion of the neoliberal economic model in third

world countries. This is exactly what has happened in Flores over the past ten years, when tourism became the new leading sector of development. As pointed out by some tourism scholars, tourism in Flores has not empowered local communities, but rather resulted in the exploitation of local communities.

Maribeth Erb, who previously focused on cultural anthropology issues in Manggarai, has recently begun focusing on the political economy of development, particularly as related to tourism. In several of her articles, Erb has put forward a key thesis on the process through which local communities are marginalised in the tourism sector. This is linked to the promotion of luxury tourism (Erb, 2005), as well as the local government's alleged corruption in tourism events such as Sail Komodo (Erb, 2012).

A comprehensive study by Cypri Dale, published in his book *Kuasa, Pembangunan dan Pemiskinan Sistemik* (2011), explains in more detail the irony of tourism development in Labuan Bajo, which is well known as a magnet for tourism in NTT Province. He summarises the neglect of local communities in tourism development through the expression “dollar meets dollar” (*dolar ketemu dolar*), highlighting how foreign businesses have gained control of much of the tourism sector in Labuan Bajo. Klimmek (2013) puts a particular emphasis on foreigners' control of the diving industry in Labuan Bajo.

Related to the above situation, using the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, Djalong (2011) has explained the continuation of two Manggaraian subjects: the *tuang pegawai* as the ruling class and the *roeng pembangunan* as the depoliticised subjects. According to Djalong, these two subjects have long been preserved in the hegemonic discourse of developmentalism. Using the actor and institutional approach, Hargens (2009) identifies several local elites with a strong influence in hijacking local democracy in Manggarai, including political parties, bureaucrats, conglomerates, the church institution, indigenous groups, and the middle class.

This article tries to take another route, asking “How do Manggaraian peasants put forward their resistance against the

process of depoliticisation that works through development?” Epistemologically speaking, it is argued that, rather than creating total domination over peasants, depoliticisation as a process of power operation inherently invokes some kind of resistance.

What does resistance mean here? Unlike the limited studies of resistance to political power and mainstream development in Manggarai (Erb & Widyawati, 2018; Dale, 2015; Regus, 2011; Djalong, 2017), this study interprets resistance not as direct confrontation with power holders (the government, corporations). James Scott—in his book *Domination and the Art of Resistance* (Scott, 1990)—mentions public and hidden transcripts as two kinds of resistance against the ruling class. However, in this article, I refer to post-development thought’s theory of alternative development to explain peasants’ means of resistance against the process of depoliticisation that works through mainstream agriculture in Lembor. As such, unlike previous studies of resistance in Manggarai, this article refers to resistance as an alternative development that is confronted with mainstream development.

To realise this goal, the concepts of depoliticisation and alternative development as resistance need to be explained first. In critical development studies, depoliticisation functions by ignoring power-relation analysis in framing development programmes. This can be clarified by referring to some critical development studies. Studies by Ferguson (1994) in Thaba-Tseka, Lesotho, and Tania Li (2012) in central Sulawesi have used the concept of depoliticisation to explain how the regime of truth of development becomes a dominant discourse by pushing aside the real politico-economic conditions at the root of local communities’ poverty. In these two studies, the core meaning of depoliticisation is relocating structural political analysis in dealing with problems such as underdevelopment, poverty, famine, etc.

Drawing on the above concept, Stoke and Törnquist (2013, p.4) summarise some critical points about depoliticisation. First, there are exist pacts between powerful elites in building core democratic

institutions that exclude ordinary people and their representatives. Second, government decentralisation is based on the idea that people in local communities have common interests and that the power relations between people and regions are unimportant. Third, there is a technocratic and 'non-interest'-based 'good governance' involving governments, market actors, civil society organisations, ethnic and religious communities, but without considering power relations. It is precisely at this point that situations such as unequal citizenship, unequal access to justice, poorly implemented human rights, elite and money-dominated elections, corrupt administration, middle class-dominated civil society, and the otherwise pre-dominance of 'illiberal' democratic practice are never presented when talking about development.

In this article, the concept of depoliticisation shall be used to explain how the regime of truth of development neglects the real politico-economic question in dealing with peasants lives in Lembor. It examines how institutions, documents, and programmes are arranged to stabilise the truth of mainstream development.

Post-development tradition, aside from recognising depoliticisation, put forwards a concept of alternative development as a means of countering mainstream development. Stemming from decolonial epistemology, scholars such as Escobar (2008) have consistently confronted the expansion of the neoliberal economy in Latin America by valorising indigenous knowledge through place, capital, nature, development, identity, and networking.

Based on decolonial epistemology, Pieterse (2010, p. 123) attempts to summarise the epistemology of alternative development by comparing it with that of mainstream growth economic theory, as in the following table.

**Table 1. Constructing development models**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Growth</b>	<b>Social Transformations</b>
Objectives	Accumulation	Capacity, human development
Resources	Capital, technology, trade, foreign investment, external expertise	Human resources, social capital, local knowledge
Features	Growth led	Equity led
Agency	State-led or market-led	People, community, synergies between society, government, market
Epistemology	Science	Critique of science, indigenous knowledge
Modalities	Exogenous examples, demonstration effect, modernity vs tradition, technology transfer	Endogenous development, modernisation from within, modernisation of tradition
Methods	Import substitution industrialisation, export-led growth, growth poles, innovation, structural adjustment	Participation, sustainability, democratisation
Social policy	Trickle-down, safety net	Trickle-up, social capacitation through redistribution
Development cooperation	Aid, assistance	Partnership, mutual obligation
Indicators	GDP	Green GDP, human development index, institutional densities

In this article, the alternative development concept, as opposed to mainstream development, will be used to explain peasants' resistance in Lembor.

In conducting this research, data was collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) with peasants and persons in agriculture development institutions. Through semi-structured interviews, it was easy to ascertain peasants' understandings of development and how depoliticisation

works through development. FGDs were also used for data collection. The researcher recognises the shortcomings of these two data collection methods in gathering deep information on how depoliticisation works; the formality of interviews and FGDs make informants reluctant to speak. Field research was conducted over the course of three months, from September until November 2016, with some information updated in early 2018. Published and unpublished documents were also reviewed to make sense of the message of this article.

To this end, the arguments of this article will be presented in several sections. First, to make sense of how the development regime works in Lembor, the context of Lembor as part of the Green Revolution needs to be explained. Afterwards, the process of depoliticisation—in which the real politico-economic situation of peasants in Lembor is clearly overlooked—will be discussed. Third, this article will present the stories of Apel Community and Liang Sola Sovereign Peasant Community as forms of alternative development through which peasants in Lembor have resisted the process of depoliticisation that works through mainstream farming. This article closes with an emphasis on the importance of engaging the state in the future of the peasant movement in Manggarai.

### **Lembor, Part of the Green Revolution Project**

Long before the traditional government of Manggarai collapsed and was replaced by the state model of government in 1958, Manggaraians achieved welfare through their tribal system of government. Some Manggaraian historians tell that, under the leadership of the *wa'u* (Manggaraian tribal government), the Manggaraians practiced agriculture through *lingko* (the Manggaraian system of land distribution) (Hemo, 1987; Toda, 1999). As trade gained increased importance in the Manggaraian economy, the Manggaraian tribal government was controlled by the Bima and Goa kingdoms. Some Manggaraian historians mention goods such



as *dea wara* (brown rice), *lalong rombeng* (roosters), *acu rembong iko* (dogs), *jarang pitu pagat* (horses), and *haju benge* (sandalwood) were bartered for Goan commodities such as sarongs, trousers, clothes, gold and silver headbands, spears, jewellery, knives, and food trays. The political influence of Bima and Goa, in turn, transformed the tribal system of government into the so-called *kedaluan* system. When the modern state system took control, the *kedaluan* system was replaced by the district (*kecamatan*) system.

As the Dutch colonial government and Catholic Church gained increased power in Manggarai in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they changed some basic aspects of Manggaraian life. For example, in the agriculture sector the Dutch colonial government began replacing the traditional Manggaraian agrarian system (*lodok*) with a terrace system (Gordon, 1975). Politically, Manggarai instituted a new royal government in 1930, with King Alexander Baroek the first leader. Under Baroek, the Manggaraian people gradually began to experience the process of modernisation.

In 1958, when the Manggarai Kingdom officially became a modern government (the Manggarai Regency), development began to be controlled by the central government in Jakarta (Allerton, 2001, p. 11). Carolus Hambur (1960–1967), the first regent of Manggarai, initiated important changes in public infrastructure. Serious efforts were made to lift the people of Manggarai from poverty; for this, Hambur chose agriculture as the leading sector of development in Manggarai.

Further exploration of the agriculture sector continued when Frans Sales Lega (1968–1978) was selected as the second regent of Manggarai. This new District head, known by Manggaraians as the Father of Development (Bapak Pembangunan), continued his predecessor's agenda by promoting a modern agricultural system. Still relying on agriculture as a means of ensuring the well-being of Manggaraians, the next regent—Frans Dula Burhan (1978–1989)—chose Lembor, a huge swath of land along the main road from Ruteng to Labuan Bajo, as the site of the largest rice fields in NTT.

This agenda went hand in hand with the main agenda of governor Ben Mboi (1978–1988) to transform NTT into a green province by improving the agriculture sector. Today, Lembor remains the largest expanse of rice fields in NTT, covering 3,528 hectares.

Given its privileged position in Manggaraian development, it is necessary to highlight Lembor not only as the site of the largest rice fields in NTT, but also as a space, a contested arena wherein the ideology of developmentalism gained and maintained dominance. To do so, it is necessary to start by placing Lembor's history within the context of national and global food policy, starting with food political studies' focus on the massive penetration of agriculture industrialisation in third-world countries between the 1950s and 1970s (McMichael, 2009, p. 141). The entrance of modern agriculture into Manggarai, which began in the early 1960s, needs to be explained in this context.

The direct effect of global food policy on national policy was marked by the New Order regime's focus on increasing national food production and creating food self-sufficiency through the popular five-year development plan (*Repelita*) programme. The central government also ran the *Bimas* (Bimbingan Masyarakat, or community guidance) programme that made villages centres of agricultural development (Antlov, 2002, p. 56). Through *Bimas*, the central government offered pesticide and chemical fertiliser subsidy programmes as well as farmer credit. At this point, it can be seen that the Lembor rice fields, which were built as the part of the Green Revolution project, absorbed the principle of developmentalism ideology as their main principle from their outset.

In the past ten years, the local government of West Manggarai has chosen tourism as the new leading sector of development. Supporting this agenda, agricultural development—including in Lembor—has been fully oriented towards supporting the tourism sector. Under this new agenda, the Lembor rice fields have more massively absorbed the modern farming system.

## The Path to Depoliticisation

Based on the above understanding of depoliticisation, this section explores how the development regime has relocated the politico-economic question of peasants' situation in Lembor. It works through what is called the technicalisation of problems and the wide acceptance of market principles as the only way to well-being.

First, the process of depoliticisation is strongly underpinned by the role of technocrats to decide how development should be employed. Current critical development studies called it the technocratisation of development. In this, development discourse is dominated exclusively by technical experts, while peasants are positioned as the targets of technical intervention. Under the control of technocrats, technical knowledge, scientific rationality, and modernism are used as principle for boosting economic growth. At this point, the state is articulated in a technical way as a rational actor, its role confined to improving economic effectiveness and efficiency. Meanwhile, little attention is paid to non-economic factors, and political aspects are overlooked (Bryld, 2000, p. 703).

It is easy to trace how this logic works through how development documents, ranging from the national to the regional level, have framed agriculture problems in NTT, particularly in Lembor. Starting from the national context, the Indonesian National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas, 2014) has depicted NTT as a backward province in many ways. Together with Papua and West Papua, NTT is ranked last in the National Human Development Index. Interestingly, the agency reproduces technical knowledge in justifying the situation. For example, in examining famine in NTT, Bappenas focuses more on climate change and land fertility as technical factors limiting peasants' productivity.

At the regional scale, looking at the development document of West Manggarai Regency, more technical formulations are evident. Take, for example, the strategic plans of the West Manggarai

Regency government (i.e. Renstra Kabupaten Manggarai Barat 2011/2015) clearly mention increasing agricultural productivity and quality through intensification, diversification, and rehabilitation programmes as the main targets of agriculture development. Stemming from this main goal, the strengths and weaknesses of agriculture development in West Manggarai Regency have been formulated mainly in technical terms.

**Table 2: SWOT Analysis  
of Agriculture Development of West Manggarai Regency**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. High tropical season,</li> <li>b. Large size of uncultivated area,</li> <li>c. Good human resources,</li> <li>d. Functioning peasant groups,</li> <li>e. Widespread technical knowledge among peasant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Lack of empowerment,</li> <li>b. Lack of capital,</li> <li>c. Wrong post-harvest management,</li> <li>d. Disease and pestilence.</li> </ul>

More tangibly, the document *Manggarai Barat dalam Angka* (West Manggarai in Numbers, 2017) presents detailed information about peasants' agriculture products. This document presents detailed information about the distribution of agricultural products in all of the districts of West Manggarai Regency. At the same time, however, it does not present information on peasants' access to fair market. Similarly, another agriculture document in West Manggarai Regency focuses on how to increase the growth of agriculture products. The central role of expertise in peasants' well-being can be traced through the dominant role of the extension officer (PPL) as the technical body for agriculture development in Lembor. Flipping through this document, one can find many technical formulations of peasants' problems in Lembor.

Secondly, in the process of depoliticisation, market principles strongly guide the way governments and peasants imagine poverty

and welfare. This is called market citizenship (contrast with democratic citizenship). In market or neoliberal ideology, citizens are framed as individualistic customers who are fully guided by the principle of maximising self-interest (Haque, 2008).

I have several stories about this. First, on 25 October 2016 I had the opportunity to conduct an FGD with a group of peasants in Wae Bangka, in the southern part of Lembor. Our discussion answered a main question, “what is the key factor for being a successful peasant in Lembor”. From the peasants’ opinions, it was very clear how the development regime works by privileging individual factors over structural ones. In reference to one villager’s success over that of his neighbours, respondents mentioned that he had enough money to support his farming because of his main profession as an elementary school teacher; as such, he was able to produce piles of rice during a recent harvest. Referring to individual responsibility, they also often highlighted individual behaviours and attitudes, particularly hard work versus laziness, as main factors leading to welfare in Lembor.

Second, to respond to peasants’ lack of food security in Lembor, the government of West Manggarai Regency offers a rice subsidy program. For example, in Liang Sola, 75–85% of residents rely on local government handouts. Due to this programme, I had an interesting experience while listening to a speech delivered by Gusti Dulla, the regent of West Manggarai, in Poco Koe Village during the sorghum harvest of March 2018; this village is the home base of the Apel peasant community. At the time, Dulla expressed appreciation for Apel’s initiative of developing sorghum as an alternative foodstuff for dealing with food insecurity in Lembor. In contrast, Dulla indicated that he was surprised by peasants’ rejection of the rice subsidy programme, saying, “I was very disappointed that some peasants here rejected the rice subsidy programme. They were not aware of their poverty. They didn’t want to be called poor people”.

Third, the wide acceptance of market values has also

been conditioned by microcredit programmes, in the sense that these programmes mark a controversial shift in the development rationality that devolves responsibility for securing economic opportunities to individuals acting as responsible agents of their own well-being (Rankin, 2001). In Lembor, there are many forms of microcredit programmes, provided either by private cooperatives or banks in order to reduce obstacles to peasants' full integration in the market. At present, there are six credit cooperatives and two banks in Lembor that provide loans to peasants. Normally, such loans are not available to commercial lenders; they are dedicated especially to poor peasants.

What is overlooked in the above stories? It is clear that, in market society, poverty and well-being are framed as cultural, moral, or individual responsibilities. Following Harriss (2007), it is precisely at this point that depoliticisation frames poverty reduction through the characteristics of individuals, without considering class or power relationships.

### **Looking for Alternative Development**

In this section, the author will explore how the peasant communities Apel and Liang Sola Sovereign Peasant Community have, to some extent, attempted to offer a kind of alternative development in confronting the process of depoliticisation that works through mainstream development in Lembor. Apel was founded in 2008 by a group of peasants who were concerned with the negative effects of chemical farming; it has sought to revive sorghum as a local Manggaraian food. It currently has 167 members, who consistently plant sorghum every year. When receiving assistance from Sunspirit for Justice and Peace, a local NGO that has recently been concerned with agricultural issues in Lembor, the Liang Sola Sovereign Peasant Community found its own way of farming in the spirit of community.

Why do I claim that these two communities are peasant

resistance in the form of alternative development? There are three points to argue.

### *1) Organic Farming versus Chemical Farming*

The massive penetration of chemical farming in Lembor has made money take a central role in peasants' ability to cultivate their land. Mikael Kaus, an older peasant in Lembor, said that having much money is like a panacea for successful farming. He stated that, as modern farming grew massively in Lembor in the late 1990s, money became king in all farming activities (MK, interview, October 20, 2016). Similarly, another peasant named Tadeus Bahur mentioned the central role of money. He said, "as peasants here, we need money from the beginning, to buy seeds from the government. We then have to spend a lot of money to pay workers to plant the rice. During growth time, we also need enough money to buy pesticides and fertilisers. Finally, during harvest time, we need more money to pay workers" (TB, interview, October 20, 2016).

As part of its concern for agricultural issues in Lembor, Sunspirit for Justice and Peace conducted a small survey in 2013. It identified the high cost of chemical farming in Lembor, as shown in the following table.

**Table 3: Estimated Cost of Cultivating 1 Ha of Paddy in Lembor**

Item	Cost	Explanation
Tractor	Rp 650,000	Tractor Cost
Bund Cleaning	Rp 140,000	Wages for 4 workers (men)
Rice Field Cleaning and Planting	Rp 1,160,000	Wages for 24 workers (women, @ Rp 25,000) and 16 workers (men, Rp 35,000)
Fertiliser	Rp 1,500,000	8 sacks (4 sacks of urea, Rp 95,000/sack; 2 sacks of SP, Rp 110,000/sack, and 2 sacks of KSL, Rp 450,000/sack)
Pesticide	Rp 1,750,000	Insecticide and Herbicide

Item	Cost	Explanation
Scolding	Rp 200,000	Cost of Scolding Tool
Grass weeding	Rp 1,000,000	Wages for 40 workers (women, @Rp 25,000)
Harvest	Rp 1,160,000	Wages for workers
Total	Rp 7,560,000	Estimated cost of cultivating 1 ha of rice paddies, between Rp 7,500,000 and Rp 10,000,000

*Source: Sunspirit for Justice and Peace document*

The high cost of chemical farming, in turn, leaves farmers caught between farming for subsistence or farming for economic accumulation. This situation compels them to live in what Tania Li (Li, 2014) identifies as a capitalist relationship. Tania Li's ethnographic study of Lauje, Central Sulawesi, neatly written in her book *Land's End*, uses these capitalist relations to explain the process of individualisation among peasants, in which the capacity to survive is governed by rules of competition and profit.

Avent Turu, a senior peasant and Apel member, sarcastically said, "as peasants here, we fail before planting rather than fail during harvest" (AT, interview, October 25, 2016). How could this happen? In Lembor, there is a market system known as *sistem ijon*, in which local traders can buy rice from peasants by paying for it long before the harvest; this has conditioned peasants to live in a debt cycle. Normally, most traders—who come from outside Lembor—are also owners of rice grinders. The debt cycle begins when traders give capital loans to peasants to support cultivation, including paying tractor costs, buying pesticide and fertiliser, and paying workers' wages. After harvest, peasants sell their rice to rice traders to cover their debts. Describing this situation, Bertolomeus Dugis, another member of Apel, cynically said that "at first glance we seem to be successful farmers, judging by the piles of rice sacks that we accumulate after the harvest. But, in reality, we sell this off in a matter of days to cover our debt" (BD, interview, October 21, 2016).



This situation can explain why most households in Lembor still rely on government handouts through the rice subsidy programme.

To cope with this situation, since Apel was established in 2008, members have cultivated sorghum (a traditional Manggaraian food). They cultivate it organically. For them, it is very difficult to pay the high costs of monoculture rice farming, especially as most of the peasants in Lembor live under the poverty line. Responding to this situation, Apel's peasants have cultivated sorghum as an alternative food. Members of the community using their yards, gardens, and uncultivated areas in places such as Pocokoe, Raminara, Sambir Lolang, and Munting to plant sorghum.

Meanwhile, since 2012 the Liang Sola Sovereign Peasant Community has cultivated red rice (locally known as *mawo laka*) as an alternative foodstuff. Assisted by Sunspirit for Justice and Peace, a local NGO, they have run a programme called the Mutual Concern Agricultural School (*Sekolah Tani Baku Peduli*), through which they learn many things about organic farming, such as how to process manure into compost.

Based on the above explanation, it is clear that, by promoting alternative development through organic farming, the peasants of these two communities have struggled for two things in dealing with the negative effects of rice monoculture farming. First, the fulfilment of household food needs, given the food insecurity experienced by peasants in Lembor. Second, greater benefit from the capitalist nuance of farming, in which money plays a central role in their farming activities.

Such alternatives have been found elsewhere. In Argentina, for example, the Campesinos in Santiago del Estero has developed a number of communal activities for processing raw materials to cope with the intensive use of agrochemicals. The economic impact of these activities is not particularly significant at current levels of production, but they provide a tool for enhancing solidarity and developing socioeconomic consciousness in marginalised rural groups; as such, they have the potential to contribute to economic

development (Wald, 2015).

## ***2) Community Farming versus Free Market***

As broadly explained above, depoliticisation functions by ignoring the accumulation process in market society. Coping with the pressure of free market control in Lembor, peasants in Apel and Liang Sola have attempted to farm by working with and involving the community. Aside from increasing income, peasants' willingness to engage their communities can also be attributed to the motive of making themselves well-versed in market information.

Since modern farming gained control over agriculture in Lembor, market rule has exerted pressure on small peasants, making them less competitive than their peers. Anton Adol, one member of the Liang Sola community, blamed the local government of West Manggarai Regency for seemingly underestimating their work. He said, "pricing rice at just Rp 7,000 per kilogram only benefits the rice trader in Lembor. They can resell the rice at a much higher price" (AA, interview, October 23, 2016). Similarly, Adrianus Hasri, another Liang Sola community member, said that a key constraint experienced by peasants is the absence of a fair market (AH, interview, October 23, 2016). In this situation, peasants' involvement is limited to the production of the product; subsequent processes are fully guided by the free market's rule.

In responding to this situation, both communities have felt it necessary to help members by supporting land cultivation and facilitating post-harvest management. Apel has initiated a savings and loans cooperative to help members get more money from cultivating land. Richard Pambur, an Apel leader, said that the savings and loans cooperative has helped Apel's avoid the moneylender trap (RP, interview, October 25, 2016).

Similarly, the Liang Sola Sovereign Peasant Community has developed co-production (cooperative production) in order to help members generate income and share risks. Two groups in Liang

Sola Village (a total 22 households) have remained active until present. The main focus is to support access to vegetable seeds and the production of brown organic rice, as well as to promote to use of livestock (pigs) husbandry.

For post-harvest management, both communities have attempted to link peasants with a wider market network. In the case of Apel, working with the KEHATI Foundation (Yayasan Keanekaragaman Hayati Indonesia; Indonesian Food Diversity Foundation) has enabled them to reach wider markets, as far as Jakarta. Meanwhile, with the assistance of Sunspirit for Justice and Peace, the peasants of Liang Sola have been connected with the market in Labuan Bajo.

By doing farming in a community spirit, both communities have tried to escape state- and market-led farming. In this regard, it is beneficial to refer to *Vía Campesina*, an international peasant movement in Latin America that has attempted to counter the effects of neoliberalism on agriculture (McMichael, 2006). It is important to note that the neoliberalisation of agriculture in Latin America has had two deleterious effects on farming activities there: increasing the cost of chemical farming and limiting state involvement in farmers' welfare. Responding to this situation, *Vía Campesina* has tried to promote family-based agricultural production.

### ***3) Creating Democratic Space***

Besides striving for food and economic sovereignty, the two communities have offered members a democratic space in which they can collectively solve their problems. In Lembor, depoliticisation through development has become a pact between elites and their cronies, ignoring the representative function of democracy. It is precisely at this point, following Törnquist (2009, p. 5), that state-citizen relations in market society become characterised by patron-client relations.

In the case of Lembor, such problems are so commonplace

that most peasants distrust government programmes. They often protest the contractual pattern through which infrastructure, such as irrigation, is constructed, as well as the dominance of the private sector in fertiliser and pesticide distribution. Farmer groups, according to the peasants, may be formed just for projects. Normally, farmer groups that have special relationships with government officials can get access to many government programmes. These privileged groups, due to their strong networks with the ruling political class, develop paternalistic and clientelist relations through which they can use state power in their favour.

Filling this gap, these two communities have also become political media for critically discussing their problems. For example, Apel arranges monthly meetings to evaluate and plan its programmes. In March 2018, I participated in a public hearing held by Apel in Poco Koe Village. Interestingly, this event was attended by Gusti Dulla, the regent of West Manggarai, the leader of West Manggarai Regency's agriculture service, as well as another government official. According to Apel's members, such experiences were never had by peasants when they relied on democratic institutions such as political parties and legislative bodies.

### **Conclusion: From Resilience Movement to Political Agenda**

The idea of resilient subjects has become a concern of today's post-development scholars, who view it as a new form of neoliberal governance to discipline global subjects. How is it explained as a form of neoliberal governance? There are two points. First, resilient knowledge is prone to reducing economic development to self-anticipation by framing global situations such as "undetermined", "uncertainty", and "unpredictable" (Chandler, 2014). Therefore, resilient subjects with qualifications such as flexibility, adaptability, and anticipation are basic virtues for dealing with global situations. Second, depoliticisation through resilient practices is inclined to replace the government's role (destratification) by giving society

freedom to develop its economic affairs (Joseph, 2013, p. 42).

Without ignoring the resistance aspect of Apel and the Liang Sola Sovereign Peasant Community, as broadly explained above, the argument of resilient thinking as a new form of depoliticisation can also explain the character of the two communities to some extent. There are two points of argumentation. First, the two communities' path to neoliberal governance was obviously traced from their meaningful present to create a self-anticipative subject capable of coping with the unpredictable market in Lembor. Second, the neoliberal governance of the two communities devolves economic affairs to peasants, at least to some extent. In answering the question of whether local governments have responded to this organisation, Bene Pambur, the head of Apel, said that during a recent local food harvest in Lembor, the regent of West Manggarai praised the movement and identified Apel as exemplary of Lembor peasants' ability to compete in today's global market (BP, interview, October 25, 2016).

In escaping the neoliberal trap, it is necessary to incorporate communities' alternative development into the political agenda. This must also be a concern of democratic institutions such as political parties in West Manggarai Regency. In the case of Bangladesh, for example, peasant movements have been able to influence the candidates running for parliament when they voiced their views (Kerkvliet, 2009).

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