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# Resisting Agribusiness Development: The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate in West Papua, Indonesia

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## **Resisting Agribusiness Development: The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate in West Papua, Indonesia.**

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### DRAFT

This paper looks at a new major land grab in Indonesia, the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate in West Papua, Indonesia, known more commonly by its acronym MIFEE. First of all, we introduce MIFEE and discuss some of its key defining features as well as the particular context of the project defined by the history of Indonesian occupation of West Papua. Because most of the project has yet to materialise, we have little to contribute to those questions posed by Borras et al. (2011) regarding the changes in agrarian structures, social differentiation and impacts of displacement and dispossession. We also do not discuss the policy narratives by the project proponents, as these are analysed very well in the excellent paper by Takeshi Ito, Noer Fauzi Rachman, Laksmi A. Savitri (2011). Rather, the focus of this paper is on the emerging resistance to the MIFEE land grab.

We try to find some answers the question of “to what extent have agrarian political struggles been provoked by the new land investment dynamics?” (Borras et al. 2011, 212) and argue that a new alliance opposing the project is emerging that draws on different traditions of struggle. We also look at some of the “issues that unite or divide the rural poor, organized movements, and rural communities” (ibid.) and how MIFEE is “discursively challenged and opposed” (ibid.). We argue that there are three distinct but connected narratives of opposition around the discourses of customary forest rights, Indonesian “imperialist” subjugation of Papua and land reform and food sovereignty. At the same time, there is also a division between the indigenous Papuans resisting the project and migrant small farmers living in Merauke who tend to welcome the project. This creates a key dilemma for the resistance. Although alternatives such as indigenous customary rights to land and forests, land reform and “food sovereignty” are all “relevant and useful” (ibid.), we argue that their relation to each other needs to be rethought in order to overcome these divisions and to broaden and deepen resistance. Unsurprisingly, this leads to more questions than answers, and we hope that some of these questions arising from the resistance to MIFEE can be helpful for other struggles opposing land grabs in other parts of the world.

### **MIFEE: a textbook land grab?**

The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) in West Papua, Indonesia is in some ways a textbook land grab. “Powerful transnational and national economic actors from corporations to national governments” have identified Merauke as an “‘empty’ land” as a site “fuel and food production” (Borras et al. 2011, 209). Indeed, the very name of this land grab points to the convergence of agribusiness and agrofuel interests. However, the role of private

equity funds (ibid) is negligible, with the key initiative for the project coming from regency and national government and a host of domestic agribusiness conglomerates.

Locally, the MIFEE project was preceded by a programme developed by Merauke's regent head, Johannes Gluba Gebze, called the Merauke Integrated Rice Estate (MIRE). Investors were wooed in order to transform the regency into a rice basket of Indonesia. When the plans failed to materialise, Gebze was quick to take up the opportunities offered by Indonesian's president Yudhoyono's declaration to seize the international food crisis as an opportunity and "to feed the world."<sup>1</sup> The Presidential Instruction 5/2007 on the Acceleration of Development in Papua and West Papua (the names of the two provinces now comprising West Papua) and the Government Regulation No.39/2009 on Special Economic Zones (*Kawasan Ekonomi Khusus*, KEK) established Papua as a strategic location of national development fantasies. In 2010, Government Decree No. 18/2010 on Agricultural Crops created the format of Food and Energy Estates and Merauke became *the* flagship estate project. The invention of MIFEE is framed as serving food security and agribusiness export-led development<sup>2</sup> but also coincides with ambitious national plans for millions of hectares of biofuel estates (BWI 2007).

At the launching of the project in August 2010, Agriculture Minister Suswono proclaimed MIFEE as a future "bread basket" of Indonesia and that it would eventually produce "almost two million tons of rice, two million tons of corn and 167,000 tons of soybeans" as well as 2.5 million tons of sugar and 937,000 tons of palm oil" (Ekawati 2010). Merauke's Spatial Planning and Permit Agency, the BKPMDDP (Badan Koordinasi Penanaman Modal Daerah dan Perijinan) already lists 32 companies have already been issued permits within the MIFEE project (see Map 1). Although planned as a "food and energy estate," the largest part of the project is slated for industrial plantations (over 970,000 ha), with oil palm (over 300,000 ha) and food crops (69,000 ha) in second and third place (BKPMDDP 2010, Tri and Haksoro 2010).

The announcement of the MIFEE project was accompanied by various rumours and reports in the press of planned investment from the Middle East, Korea, China and Japan. Before the announcement of the MIFEE project, a Chinese state company was reported to be planning a one million hectare palm oil biofuel investment in Papua, together with the infamous Sinar Mas Group (EIA and Telepak 2009). The Saudi Arabian Bin Laden Group was said to be planning to invest four billion USD for rice production in Merauke (Anon 2008, Ichwan 2008), and the Japanese corporation Mitsubishi and the Korean corporation LG were also associated with the project (Tapol and Dte 2010). In 2009, LG International (2009) announced that it had secured a "massive forestry concession in Papua" through a joint venture with the Indonesian Medco Group in a company called Metra Duta Lestari. However, most foreign investment has not actually been forthcoming. The Chinese and Saudi Arabian investments are on hold, and it is unclear what the real progress of the LG plantation scheme has been.

In fact, most of the MIFEE investors are the usual suspects from the of agribusiness and logging conglomerates that reaped super profits under general Suharto's export-oriented "New Order". Pre-MIFEE concession permits were given to Sinar Mas, Muting Hijau and Rajawali groups, for conversion to pulp and palm oil plantations. Key players in MIFEE all have political connections. The Comexindo Group, for example, is owned by Hashim Djoyohadikoesoemo, the brother of ex-Kopassus general and son-in-law of Suharto Prabowo Subianto. Another company, PT Bangun Cipta Sarana, is connected to former Suharto

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<sup>1</sup> KADIN, 28-29 January 2010; and Feed The World, 28 January 2010.

<sup>2</sup>[http://bbp2tp.litbang.deptan.go.id/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=377&Itemid=1](http://bbp2tp.litbang.deptan.go.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=377&Itemid=1).

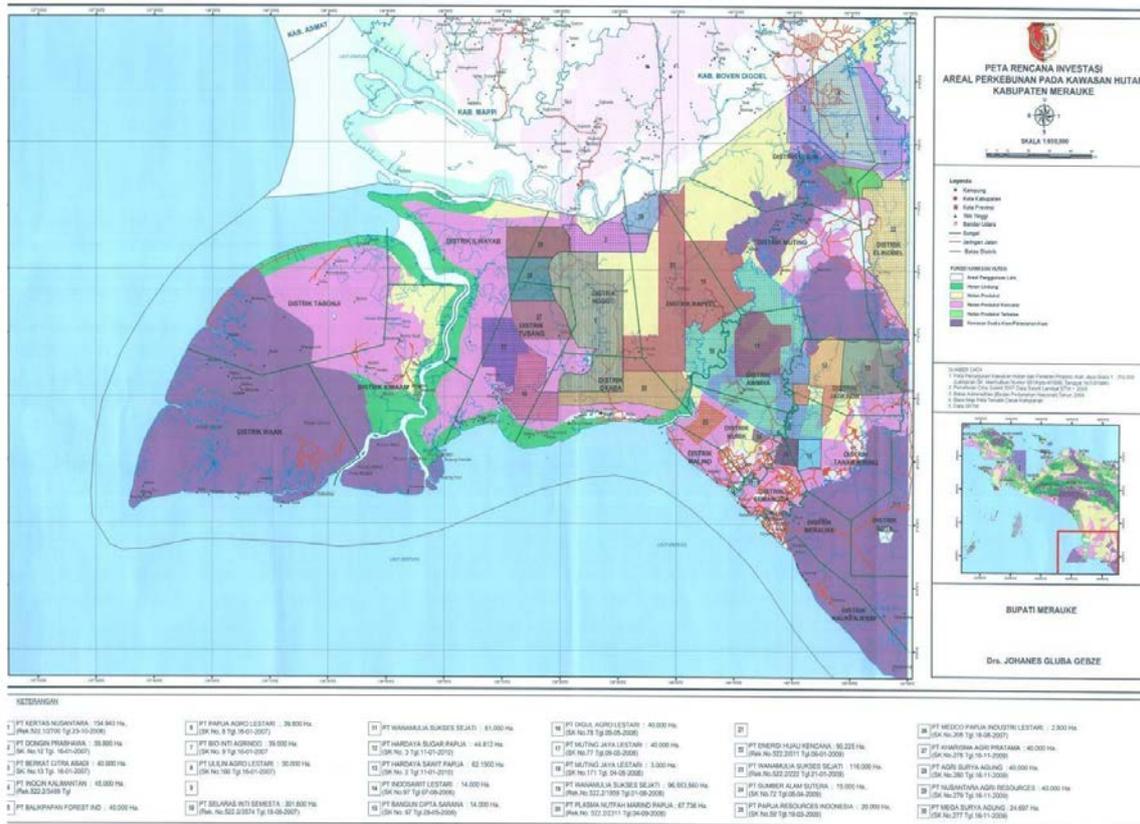
minister of interior and minister of transmigration Siswono Yudo Husodo. A third important group, Artha Graha, is owned by Tommy Winata, who is well-connected to the military in West Papua and has been involved in various infrastructure projects (Klute 2010, Papua Forest Eye 2010a).

One of the key business groups in MIFEE is Medco, an oil company whose owner Arifin Panigoro was an influential politician with the PDI-P. Typically, Medco is a conglomerate that is involved in energy, agribusiness, finance, manufacturing, and real estate and hotels. Through its subsidiary, PT. Selaras Inti Semesta (SIS), it has already developed a 300,000 hectares timber plantation in Kurik, Kaptel, Animha and Muting districts. Its chipwood mill, PT. Medco Papua Industri Lestari (MIL) needs 10 million tons per annum for chipwood production and another 2 million tons annually for pulp production. While waiting for the timber plantation which will need 8 years to mature, the mills utilize tropical timber from community forests and their concessions. Medco is an active proponent of the whole MIFEE concept, and has established its own “Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate Research Centre” that is “promoting bio fuel experiment that will support energy resilience for the country” (sic).<sup>3</sup> It is unclear whether a planned

One Malaysian timber and palm oil corporation, the Genting Group, has been awarded 300,000 hectares (see Map 2) on which it plans palm oil and biofuels production. Another palm oil giant, Wilmar, has also been reported to have been offered 200,000 ha, this time for sugar cane (Tempo Interactive 2 September 2010). As to its “nationality,” who can say? Its largest shareholder is the Malaysian agribusiness Kuok family (who founded the company in 2005 together with the Indonesian millionaire Martua Sitorus) the US agribusiness giant ADM has a 10% holding, its headquarters are in Singapore, and the fastest expanding areas of business are in China and Indonesia. It is the biggest palm oil corporation in the world, but has received financial support from the World Bank (for pro-poor development?). The Rajawali Group, owned by billionaire Peter Sondakh, has also announced sugar investments on 70,000 ha in the MIFEE project (Papua Forest Eye 2010).

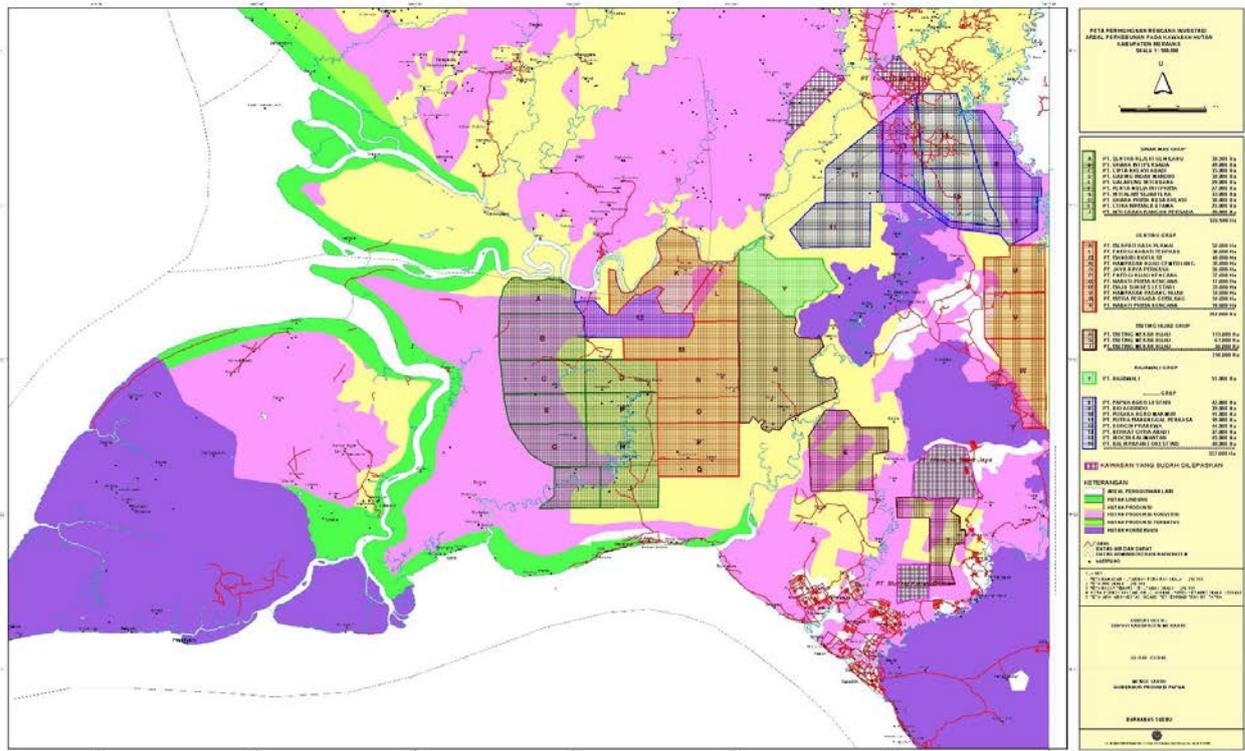
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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.medcofoundation.org/miffee.php?strlang=eng>



Map 1: MIFEE: Allocated permits by the District Government of Merauke. Source: BKPM DP 2010.

## PETA RENCANA INVESTASI DI KABUPATEN MERAUKE



Map 2: Industrial Plantations Concessions in Merauke. Source: District Government of Merauke.

### Or a Papuan exception?

At the same time, West Papua is in many ways an exception to most land grab contexts. It has been under Indonesian military occupation since 1962 and was coerced into joining Indonesia in the “Act of No Choice” in 1969. Since then, the politics in West Papua have been characterised the military repression of the widespread underlying separatist sentiment of the Papuan population and a West-Papuan political elite that is co-opted by the Indonesian state. Freedom of speech is massively curtailed and activists often jailed or harassed. Occasional raids by armed separatist forces (the Organisasi Papua Merdeka, OPM) are used to legitimise continued occupation and the criminalisation of any discussion about independence, including raising the flag of West Papua, the Morning Star. The special Papuan context of the MIFEE land grab and how resistance to it develops is defined by this historical experience and how the relationship with Indonesia has changed since the *reformasi* movement and the fall of Suharto in 1998.

Of major economic, political and symbolic significance is a huge gold and copper mine in the central highlands of West Papua owned by the mining corporation Freeport. Based on the violent expropriation of indigenous lands, the exploitation of migrant labour and the environmental degradation of rivers, Freeport generated billions in revenue for the Suharto regime. Military occupation and human rights abuses were intimately connected to the Freeport mine. Recently, the Amungme people sued Freeport for 32.5 billion dollars for the

legal appropriation of their land. Other foreign investment and the exploitation of Papuan natural resources are therefore always seen within the context of this violent history.

Another characteristic of Indonesian occupation was its integration within the state-organised transmigration program that sought to relocate millions of landless farmers from the densely populated Java to the “idle lands” of the “outer islands” (Adhiati and Bobsien 2001). In West Papua, the transmigration program was closely connected to political and security considerations. The national government in Jakarta wanted to change the demographic character of key lowland areas and build up a political base of Muslim Javanese to counter the Christian Papuans. Military occupation regularly used the symbolism of Muslim festivities etc. in order to shore up the identification of the migrants with the Indonesian state and the occupation project. From the Papuan perspective, therefore, transmigration is seen as part of an Indonesian strategy of domination.

The national *reformasi* movement that toppled Suharto and his “new Order” in 1998 represented a historical shift in this history of occupation. Crucially, the *national* movement in Jakarta adopted the demand for the autonomy of Aceh and West Papua as part of their list of ten demands. The resultant Special Autonomy status passed by the Indonesian parliament in 2001 was a partial fulfilment of this demand. It included a much larger share of taxes from West Papua being returned by the national government, with transfers rising from under 5.000 billion Rupiah (500 Million USD) in 2001 to over 20.000 billion in 2008 (World Bank 2009). However, ten years down the track, these extra billions have not reached most of the Papuan inhabitants. Instead, the political elite use the funds for its own (private) version of development whilst basing their power on compliance with Jakarta, the military and votes from the increasing number of Javanese migrants. Papua has become a kind of New Order Time Warp: military business involvement is as ubiquitous as it used to be for Indonesia as a whole. West Papua has become their favoured “retreat” from the less friendly atmosphere in many other parts of Indonesia. It remains an attractive destination of the more informal public-private forms of transmigration (Li 2011, 288).

The MIFEE project is set firmly within this framework of military-business-politicians networks and of political intimidation and oppression. According to an NGO report by EIA and Telepak (2009, 20), the “combination of Gebze’s political aspirations, central government interests and the potentially huge investment in plantations expansion, has created a climate of intimidation towards anyone who opposes the plantations or new province. Local sources report that irregular groups allied to Gebze work in unison with the state security forces to monitor and intimidate any dissenters in the region.” Military personnel is very visible in the proposed project area and the recent suspicious death of the journalist Ardiansyah Matra’is, who had been writing critically about the MIFEE project, is seen by NGOs as a sign of the authorities determination to squash any dissent to the plan (Tapol and DtE 2010).

### **Emerging Resistance**

The emerging resistance against MIFEE is located within a national (and international) alliance against land grabs *and* within the movement against Indonesian occupation and exploitation. Both operate with preconceived assumptions, ways of working, frameworks and networks and both, on their own, can lead to different strategies of resistance. A critical dialogue and engagement between the two can also lead to new and innovative ways of criticising and stopping the land grab.

Indigenous opposition to the MIFEE project has been widespread. In the few areas where companies have been already working their concessions, local communities already feel angry and cheated. For example, a subsidiary of the Medco Group, PT. SelarasInti Persada (PT.SIS), operate in land belonging to the village of Zenegi. PT.SIS plans to set up a wood chip plantation in Zenegi village. In order to receive the permission of the local indigenous leaders, they tricked them into signing off their forest resources by presenting them with a gift of 300 Million Rupiah in December 2009. At a subsequent focus group discussion, village youth blamed their elders for signing away their forests. An attachment to the signed “gift” gave Medco the right to log timber for a fee of 2000 Rupiah per m<sup>3</sup> although a normal rate is ten times higher (Zakaria et al. 2010, 37-42). Learning from the experience in Zenegi, villagers from Kaliki rejected the proposed MIFEE project. One villager complained that Medco had not developed or planted anything, but had already cut down all the trees (Zakaria et al. 2010, 44).

In another group discussion organised by the National Commission on Human Rights, indigenous people from the Yeinan tribe expressed their worries over a permit given out by the district government to a large palm oil plantation (Zakaria et al. 2010, 45). The extent to which MIFEE was devised without consultation with the customary land rights holders of the region is epitomised by Serapu village. MIFEE was officially launched here by regency chief Gebze shortly before his term of office ended. However, it emerged later at a YASANTO discussion meeting that villagers had not been informed what was actually being launched. After hearing the facts, the villagers rejected MIFEE. The project totally bypassed them, was without their involvement and not for their benefit, but on their customary land (YASANTO 2010).

Indigenous representatives on the official Papuan Adat Council also reject MIFEE. The secretary general of the Papuan Adat Council of Region V (Ha-Anim), Johanes Wob, denounced the agribusiness interests behind the project as a threat to the indigenous people of Merauke. Indigenous people are structurally disadvantaged because companies often use the law to their own benefit. He announced that indigenous peoples land is “not for sale” (Hardianto 2010). On July 18, 2010, the Papuan *Adat* Council of Region V sent a letter to President Yudhoyono stating that they reject the MIFEE project. They warned that continuing with the project would cause serious dissatisfaction with the government. The *Adat* council now plans to map their territory and to provide legal assistance and training to the indigenous people in the area. The *adat* council enjoys the full support of local Malind people and also works together with NGOs such as YASANTO and with the Catholic Church organisation SPK-KAM. As members of the Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (*Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara*, AMAN), they are also well-connected nationally (Wob 2010).

Government plans and media hype on projected huge investments in Merauke soon alerted NGOs in West Papua and Jakarta who were already operating within established networks. During 2010, a loose coalition came together as the Civil Society Coalition against MIFEE (*Masyarakat Sipil Tolak MIFEE*) that coordinates exchange between around 30 local and national organisations. A key member is Foker LSM Papua, the NGO umbrella for 118 member organisations all over Papua that was founded in 1991. Foker has a strong focus on human rights, natural resources exploitation and development issues. Church organisations are also central to the alliance, for example the Sekretariat Kemanusiaan dan Perdamaian Keuskupan Agung Merauke (SKP KAM), the catholic church’s organisation dealing with peace and humanitarian issues. Important national organisations include AMAN, the Indonesian Environmental Forum (WALHI, Friends of the Earth Indonesia), the mining

advocacy network JATAM, Greenpeace Indonesia, and the think tanks PUSAKA and Sawit Watch.

The Foker member Yayasan Santo Antonius (YASANTO), a local development NGOs that provides education and health services to communities in Merauke is one of the most active groups dealing with MIFEE. YASANTO has become a focal point for the NGOs/groups from outside who are concerned with the MIFEE issue. It plays a key facilitating role, connecting local communities and indigenous people from the area with NGOs from Jayapura, Jakarta and beyond. Foker also helped set up the Papua Peoples Solidarity against MIFEE (Solidaritas Rakyat Papua Tolak MIFEE, SORPATOM) that is a mainly student activist group. This offers students and other interested citizens in Merauke and Jayapura the chance to become active against the project without being a member of one of the established NGOs.

The first primary objective of the coalition is to exchange information and research about MIFEE. In addition to research such as the PUSAKA report “Beyond Malind Imagination” groups are cooperating to develop a spatial analysis on who will be affected and the environmental impact of the project. Another area of cooperation is awareness raising and trainings for local people in the area. Various members of the alliance organised a series of consultations, public meetings and trainings for local people in the area (12 of which are listed by Zakaria et al. 2010, 5-6). SPK KAM is running series of research and training for communities while other Foker members give trainings on rights of communities, the principle of Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), local reporting via sms etc. Meanwhile, Jayapura based members are lobbying provincial governor and parliament, who were sidetracked out of the decision making process by the direct agreement between president Yudhoyono and regency head Glebze.

### **Counter-Framing MIFEE**

The groups opposing MIFEE operate with three different basic frameworks that are used in varying intensity and combinations. Because of their different background, they discursively challenge and oppose the MIFEE deal in different ways and this is relevant for how resistance is organized and developed (Borras et al. 2011). Three basic counter-narratives seem to be relevant. These are firstly, a narrative of indigenous peoples living with the forest and threatened by commercial interests, secondly a story of resistance against the occupation and exploitation of West Papua by foreign interests, and thirdly a framework of land reform and food sovereignty against agribusiness food estates

The potentially huge conversion of forests by MIFEE development has been criticised by environmentalist organisations, and the NGO Greenomics Indonesia estimates that up to 90% of the area is still covered by natural forest (Ekawati and Satriastanti 2010). Locally, forest protection is usually associated with the defence of indigenous customary land rights. The discourse around indigenous peoples and their harmonious relation with forests has been a powerful one in Indonesia and in related international campaigns. It has been systematically developed in Indonesia by the environmental justice movement, particularly by AMAN and WALHI in order to defend customary land rights against the territorialisation of state control (Peluso et al. 2008). Reminiscent of the situation in Indonesia under the Suharto regime, the forest issue is also seen by Foker as something that activists can work on without seeming “too political” (Manufandu 2011). This critique of MIFEE dovetails with a more general campaign called “Save the People and Forests of Papua” launched a year earlier by Foker. Here, the livelihoods of indigenous people are depicted as at one with the forest: “forests are life,” the “forest is the mother of the Papuans.” Land is not something that can be owned

individually (Anon 2009). According to this framework, the “Indigenous Peoples’ living in this area depend on hunting and collecting sago as their main food” and MIFEE would lead to a “loss of cultural traditions and values” (AMAN 2010). The loss of culture and tradition is taken up by other critics:

“The Gebze with their coconut symbol, the Mahuze with their sago symbol, the Basiks with their pig symbol, the Samkki with their kangaroo symbol, the Kaize with their Kasuari and Balagaise (falcon birds) symbol; everything will get lost. In other words, the MIFEE food project will lead to the annihilation of the Malind people.” (Moiwend 2010).

The basic strategy of this framework is to strengthen the traditions that celebrate indigenous knowledge and reinforce the position not to sell land but only to rent it and even then not for huge plantations (Manufandu 2011).

The second framework is one of Papuan independence. Here, MIFEE is seen as a continuation of occupation and exploitation of the Freeport kind: foreign companies moving in to extract maximum profit from the natural resources of West Papua. For example, the West Papua Advocacy Team argues that:

“these planned food estates will deprive Papuans of their traditional resources for hunting and fishing and destroy the very basis of their livelihoods. This would follow the pattern of other such “development’ schemes, most notoriously the Freeport McMoran copper and gold mine, which has displaced thousands of Papuans and has destroyed vast stretches of pristine forest.” (WPAT 2010).

In this view, MIFEE, and the politicians like Gebze who pursue it, are merely serving imperialist interests, particularly the USA, who want to use West Papua to solve their food and energy crisis (SORPATOM 2010). The presence of a large number of army units in the MIFEE area testifies to the role of the military in protecting the interests of foreign investors against the local population (Manufundo 2011). In this context, the potential recruitment of migrant workers to work the food and biofuel estates is interpreted as a calculated means of control and ethnic subjugation by Indonesia. Huge numbers of migrant workers are predicted to arrive with the MIFEE project. Several accounts predict four million workers coming in from outside. SORPATOM (2010) extrapolates this (with wives, children and relatives) to a total of 24 million, concluding that “*genocide* or extermination of the indigenous community will occur spontaneously.” AMAN also speaks of the “structural and systematic genocide” (AMAN 2010) that will occur if the Papuans (already in a minority in Merauke) are marginalized by an influx of migrants.

The third framing argues for land reform and food sovereignty against agribusiness food estates. Here, the main contradiction is seen as between big business interests and small farmers, although, again, foreign capital is seen as paramount (SPI 2009, Idham 2010). As part of the neoliberal restructuring of agriculture, the food estates will exacerbate the food crisis by feudalising independent peasants into cheap labourers and dependent smallholders, thereby undermining food sovereignty (SPI 2009). WALHI connects the large-scale destruction of forests with the loss of food sovereignty, and draws a parallel with the “Central Kalimantan Mega Rice Project” that had converted forests and swamps into ricefields with the help of transmigrant labour. The project collapsed mainly because of inappropriate land use and environmental problems, and was cancelled after the fall of Suharto. Sustainable and family based farming is put forward as the alternative to the predicted failure of the food estate project.

### **Strategic Questions in Resisting MIFEE**

In view of the relatively young status of MIFEE and the modest amount of actual investment and “land grabbing” on the ground, the speed of indigenous and NGO reactions to the project has been impressive. Also, the breadth of involvement of and cooperation between NGOs at the local and national level and good links with the indigenous population in the area promise a potentially sophisticated, enduring and even successful campaign against the project. However, resistance is still in a very early stage and to date basically involves information gathering, networking and awareness raising. It is still a long way away from “grabbing land back” (Borras et al 2011). Indeed, there is a real possibility that a lot of the deal can still be stopped before it materialises. This will depend on how the emerging coalition can extend the base of the opposition beyond existing NGOs, how political pressure can be built up (so that the national or district/provincial governments back out), how economic pressure can be developed (targeting existing and potential investors), and what people living in the area can do to prevent agribusiness development if the project does go ahead.

The early stage of both deal and resistance opens up the opportunity to think through some of the strategic questions in developing a successful campaign. In this sense, the campaign coalition against MIFEE can benefit from international linkages and experiences, and also critical reflection by and dialogue with activist scholars. The Brighton Land Grab conference is a key moment of this, but further exchange and critical analysis around the issues will be useful. This is particularly important in Merauke because of the way the resistance builds on existing networks and “modes of resistance.” This is at once a strength and a weakness because these “modes of resistance” operate within certain assumptions and ways of working that may not be helpful for tackling some of the key challenges posed by the land grab. This also applies to international networking and campaign strategising that can fall into a “default mode” – paths of connection and ways of operating that have been in place and are therefore repeated.

**The forest option:** using “indigenous peoples and forests framing” could be a way of generalising resistance amongst the indigenous Ha-Anim. It also seems to be promising in terms of creating a split within government agencies, particularly between the forestry ministry and the ministry of agriculture. The Forestry minister has already declared that much of the land earmarked for MIFEE is forest land and cannot be converted into farm land (Simamora 2010). Zoning issues have already slowed up project implementation and could lead to MIFEE being scaled down to only 500,000 hectares. These turf wars between ministries can be understood within the context of REDD, which could redefine forest conservation as a major source of funding via the carbon market. The forestry ministry is therefore reluctant to relinquish control over potentially lucrative areas. REDD money could also be a powerful economic alternative to agribusiness investment.

However, the celebration of indigenous forest communities on its own will not be enough to stop agribusiness development. In the indigenous communities themselves, people are not content with just continuing the traditional “hunting and sago” way of life, but want some kind of cash income as well. This is shown clearly by the debate in Zenegi village mentioned above, in which the anger directed against Medco was partly to do with the price of logged timber. The practice of renting out land for logging and receiving a commission per cubic metre is one way of generating income, even if it undermines the traditional subsistence economy. In this context, REDD money could also be attractive for indigenous communities as an alternative way of generating cash income.

But using REDD as an alternative to MIFEE has its own dangers. The forestry sector is firmly in the hands of the Government of Indonesia and powerful timber companies, and in West Papua, is entwined with the military and is notoriously corrupt (EIA/Telepak 2005, 2009). It could become a Trojan horse, facilitating a “forest grab” by military-linked companies, and further marginalising indigenous communities by plugging their forests into a global carbon market controlled by carbon brokers and hedge funds. There is also the risk that, with the help of large conservationist NGOs like WWF and CI, it “greenwashes” MIFEE, by taking out some of the most “high conservation value” areas in “partnership” with the large agribusiness corporations involved. For example, the Medco Group is one of Conservation International’s “corporate partners.” The Papuan NGO forum Foker is therefore sceptical towards REDD, and has adopted the position of “No Rights, No REDD” (Manufandu 2011). Nevertheless, this glosses over different positions within the coalition against MIFEE. While WALHI rejects REDD, AMAN, for example, has adopted a position of critical engagement in order to use REDD to strengthen indigenous rights to forests. A REDD based strategy to stop MIFEE would therefore generate intensive debates between the different opposition groups, and could potentially split the coalition.

**The Autonomy/Independence default mode.** Based on the framing of MIFEE as an example of (Indonesian) imperialism marginalising the Papuans with a kind of military/corporate/transmigrant block, this uses Papuan identity as a resource to mobilise local communities to reject the project. The strength of this option is that it is integrated within the broader movement for Papuan independence, which is gaining strength with the rejection of the Special Autonomy Status. Disgust with the connivance of local political representatives with military and Indonesian business interests finally burst in January 2011, when thousands of people, including thousands of church members and hundreds of students from the Indonesian Christian Students Movement (GMKI) (a member of the World Student Christian Federation) occupied the Papua People’s Council (PRC). In an extraordinary statement, Church leaders criticized the “present tyrant state authorities, who is on a rampage of internal colonialism, ethnic cleansing (genocide), and disguised slavery against your own Nation” and called for the rejection of the Special Autonomy status and a referendum on the future of West Papua mediated by a third party (Elly et al. 2011).

It also plugs into an existing network of international West Papua solidarity groups (and churches) that can help to fund activities (particularly “Christian Aid”), organise watch dog and solidarity actions, and generate international pressure on Indonesia. This path is already being followed by Foker in order to generate political pressure (pressuring the new district head of Merauke who is less gung-ho about MIFEE, lobbying the provincial parliament and governor, who were sidelined by MIFEE) and also to ward off (potential) investors. Here, the threat of indigenous rejection and potential unrest is used as a resource to undermine trust in the viability of MIFEE as a safe investment (Manufandu 2011). Internationally, MIFEE has already become quite well known via the solidarity groups and church networks in operation.

However, there are two major problems with this strategy. The first and fairly obvious one is that a movement for Papuan real autonomy or independence that is based on indigenous identity opposition and international solidarity and pressure has not been successful for perhaps 50 years. The whole modus operandi of Indonesian control over Papua is to ignore and criminalise any sentiment for independence. Military occupation and repression is backed up by building a political base amongst an increasing number of Muslim migrants and among some Papuans and creating enough profit via the exploitation of Papuan natural resources to do so. While West Papuan solidarity is important in providing a space for activists to operate

and to prevent some of the most atrocious human rights violations, it will not upset this Indonesian occupation regime. In fact, significant progress in the direction of autonomy was only made in the context of the *reformasi* movement, i.e. a national movement for more democracy that challenged key political cornerstones in Jakarta. “Nationalising” the Papua question, perhaps by creating Papua solidarity groups *in Indonesia* could be one way of encouraging policy change on this issue.

One sign that there could be potential allies for a further revision of national policy towards Papua is a recent report by the highly respected Indonesian Institute of Sciences LIPI (Wijojo et al. 2008). Based on a three-year intensive research project in West Papua, the report titled “*Papua Road Map: Negotiating the Past, Improving the Present and Securing the Future*” concludes that the roots of the conflict in Papua are 1) a systematic marginalisation and discrimination of the Papuans (b) the failure of development programmes to address issues of education, health and economic empowerment (c) the conflict between Jakarta and Papua over their perceptions of history and identity and (d) past state violence against the the Papuans. The report also calls for an Aceh-type solution to the problem. This suggests that there is scope for a much higher degree of regional autonomy.

The second and perhaps most challenging question is that of the transmigrants. Migrant small scale farmers from Java, Sulawesi and from other parts of Papua now make up more than half of Merauke’s population. Although understandable given the political and economic marginalisation of the indigenous Papua and the role migrant farmers play in this process, polarising against these migrants can only be counter-productive because it encourages unity within the military-corporate-transmigrant block. On this basis, politicians like Gebze can continue to control the district government by mobilising the migrant votes. Some of the anti-MIFEE arguments also tend to sensationalise the problems of immigration by exaggerated numbers and by the claim of “structural genocide.” As Li (2011, 282) points out, the labour required for plantation agriculture and forestry are grossly exaggerated by government and corporate land grabbers, and range from 10-400 per 1000 ha depending on the crop. A rough estimate using an average of 150 workers per 1000ha would give us a total number of migrant workers of 180,000 for 1.2 million hectares of fully developed MIFEE. This is still large in relation to the current population, but nothing like the oft quoted number of 4 million and the extrapolated 24 million migrants (!) feared by SORPATOM.

In the Merauke context, therefore, rejecting the land grab by defending indigenous customary rights based on “ethno-territorial identity” that excludes migrants who have been living there for some time creates a particularly “troubling dilemma” (Hall et al. 2011, 11). This dilemma As discussed by Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch and Tania Murray Li (2011, 170-191), “counterclaims” based on “indigeneity and ethno-territory” collide with those based on land reform and the “need for land as the basis of an agrarian livelihood” (p. 183). Creating a “migrant scare” albeit from an indigenous rather than a supremacist perspective also risks the more sinister danger of “ethnic violence” witnessed under similar circumstances between indigenous Dayaks and Malays and Madurese transmigrants in Kalimantan and Acehnese and Javanese migrants in Aceh at the end of the 1990s (Peluso 2008, Hall et al. 2011, 176-177). This can lead to local elites using “ethnic identity as a resource” (van Klinken 2008, 44) in order to create “racialised territories” (Peluso 2008, 62) and in the Papuan context, could well be answered with a military or para-military crackdown against the Papuans.

**Land Reform and Food Sovereignty.** The critique of MIFEE as part of agribusiness expansion at the cost of small farmers can be seen as the default resistance strategy of national organisations SPI (La Via Campesina Indonesia) and WALHI (Friends of the Earth

Indonesia). The advantage of this strategy are that it offers a way of struggling for an alternative kind of development rather than harking back to a solely traditionalist (indigenous people living in harmony with the forest) or a nationalist/ethnic perspective. The fight against MIFEE in Merauke could thereby become part of a generalised movement against Food and Energy Estates in Indonesia and be connected to a global reaction against land grabs.

However, there are various complications in the Merauke context that mean that the strategy would have to depart from its default mode and become something else and new. The first is fairly blatant: neither SPI nor WALHI have local organisations in Papua, let alone Merauke, i.e. there is as yet no organised social force that could struggle for land reform or food sovereignty as an alternative to MIFEE. The polarisation between Papuans and migrants also complicates things. If land reform is seen as distributing land “in areas where population is sparse” to smallholders rather than to agribusiness and in providing supporting government services (Li 2011, 285), what would this mean in a situation where the “potential for conflict between locals and transmigrants over both land and jobs is clearly very high” (Li 2011, 288)? How would an alternative development path based on food sovereignty look like for Merauke? And how could a different future look like that could balance a wish to maintain traditions and a successful co-existence with the forest with the desire for some kind of development, perhaps along the lines of successful smallholders?

## **Conclusion**

The MIFEE land grab is a show case piece in many ways. The proactive role of the national and local government, the key involvement of domestic agribusiness conglomerates, and also the state condoned violence are some aspects that are typical for other land grab projects. Indeed, this particular constellation of forces could be part of one type of land grab that is different from those characterised more by the role of foreign investment and financial equity funds. Another typical feature of the MIFEE land grab is the gap between planned territorialisation and investment and real investment and action. This opens up the opportunity for resistance to the land grab. As we have argued, this resistance is already quite well organised and therefore, it has a real chance of stopping or seriously downsizing the planning fantasies of the government officials and corporations involved. At the same time, the emerging resistance also shows some of the potential strategies and also some of their limitations. The contradictions between the forest-livelihoods strategy, the ethno-territorial strategy and the land reform strategy are evident and these are probably relevant for many other resistance settings in other parts of the world. However, all three strategies are also very much interconnected, and finding those connections that can complement and enhance each other might be the key to developing new and successful models of resistance.

Following De Schutter (2011, 258), the challenge for the emerging resistance to MIFEE would be to develop an alternative and better way of agricultural investment around a locally adapted program of land reform. As Li (2011, 289-292) shows the success of which would depend very much on *how* it is developed, and particularly on whether smallholders are in the driving seat and government supported or become indebted contract workers within a corporate-dominated landscape of liberalized agrarian relations. It is clear that this will not be achieved by good governance initiatives De Schutter (2011, 250), as most if not all the “Seven Principles for Responsible Agricultural Investment” (ibid 254) certainly do not apply in West Papua. Rather, “hard-fought struggles” (Li 2011, 292) will be necessary. In addition given the current schism between indigenous people and transmigrants- imaginative and creative

strategies will be needed in order to create an alternative that could appeal to both groups of small scale farmers.

This kind of alternative cannot be developed by scholars at a conference but will have to be the result of discussions and arguments between activists engaged against MIFEE. To be successful, it would have to draw on the different traditions of struggle and political strategies that have come together to form this new alliance. Whilst respecting the different traditions and positions, however, an open debate is necessary in order to question some of the presumptions inherent within them that could prevent some of the key challenges, particularly the issue of migrant farmers and workers, from being resolved constructively. Expanding the narrative of indigenous forest rights by connecting them to land reform and a food sovereignty development strategy for both indigenous and migrant farmers could be one way of doing so. One step in this direction has been taken by Foker and allies. After the two separate consultations with Papuans and migrants had led to seemingly irreconcilable positions, Foker then brought the two groups together. Migrants and Papuans listened to each other's problems, and agreed that neither of them were to blame, but the government was (Manufandu 2011). Without representing a common programme of any kind, these discussions could be the start of one.

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