

Stubborn People Among the Coconut Trees: Soge Farmer Resistance in Nangahale Plantation, East Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract: Since PT KRISRAMA's permit for Right to Cultivate expired in 2013, a number of Soge local residents, namely Tana Ai ethnic, have occupied the coconut plantation in Nangahale, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. They claimed back the access to the customary land of Nangahale which, before the colonial era, was the residence of their ancestors. They put up a certain amount of resistance against the plantation company which, nota bene, is owned by the Catholic church, the Diocese of Maumere. This study elaborates the strategy of resistance of the Soge local residents. The methods used were participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted from August to October 2021. The data collected were in the form of conversations and observation on the daily activities of the local residents as well as reviews on historical literature in newspapers, books, magazines, journals, and the internet. The conversation and observation data were analyzed according to the context that occurred in the field in order to reveal the forms of resistance. This study found that the resistance of Soge farmers to the Catholic church's company was part of a sparring movement in the form of regaining access and splitting land in response to the actions taken by the company that sought to expand their territory even without renewal of the contract permit.

Keywords: Catholic church, coconut, land control, Nangahale, resistance

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, local residents of *tana pu'an* (the first cultivators) of Soge and Goban, Tana Ai ethnic, attempted to reclaim access to their ancestral land in Nangahale, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, which since 1989 had previously been used as a location for the Right to Cultivate (HGU) by PT Perkebunan Kelapa DIAG owned by the Archdiocese of Ende, part of the Roman Catholic church, which in 2015 was renamed PT KRISRAMA when the diocese was transformed into the Diocese of Maumere. The claiming of access was carried out because the validity period of the company's operations had been completed on December 31, 2013, in the sense that it had been used for 25 years, as stated in the Decree of the Head of the National Land Agency No.4/HGU/89 of 5 January 1989. Initially, the tribal leaders and traditional elders negotiated with the government and church since the 1990s (Prior, 2013). However, they did not get any response, so they agreed to go down the hill and occupy the lowland in August 2014. The Goban tribe inhabits the location of Patiahu plantation which is managed by the missionary of the Society of the Divine Word (SVD). Meanwhile, the

Soge tribe, which is discussed in this study, occupies the location of the Diocese of Maumere.

The majority of the population of Soge graduated from elementary school, which is approximately seventy percent of the total population. Most of the young people decided to travel to Kalimantan, mainly working in palm oil plantations. "There are indeed coconut plantations here. If they (coconut companies) want, we can take care of these coconuts," said a local resident whose three children went out of town and the youngest at home. *But we know what to behave, even though people already think of us as stubborn people*, another person said. The assumption of stubborn is specifically aimed at Soge tribal families who are desperate to go down the hill and force to live on the land of the former Right to Cultivate. Inevitably, the dislike for the church and regional government circulated from mouth to mouth; in and out of the ears in everyday conversation. Currently, some of them do survive there, but some have to go home to control the land on the slope.

On the hill, since the New Order era, part of the forest area they occupy has been designated as a protected forest area which limits the mobility of the activities of the population to survive (Basyir, 2009). Nowadays, the protected forest is developed into the Social Forestry system with the Community Forest scheme. The migration of the population to the hills in the previous era was an expulsion carried out by the Dutch colonial government by utilizing the power of local aristocrats to obtain vacant land for the cultivation of a number of production crops. The Agrarian Act of 1870 allowed the Dutch East Indies government in 1912 to grant land concessions to private companies to cultivate cotton as part of the world cotton trade commodity (De Porres, 2021; Metzner, 1982).

The population expelled to the hill could not come back because after the cotton crops failed to cultivate and the company went bankrupt due to the economic crisis of 1930, the location was sold to the Catholic church, in this case the Lesser Sunda Islands Apostolic Vicariate for the cultivation of coconut plantations, which in its journey with a number of dynamics and interventions from the modern Indonesian state survived to the present day. During this time, tensions between tribal and corporate people and state officials were inevitable, both secretly and openly. For example, in 1982 there were 30 local residents arrested for hunting in the country's forest sites. They were then used as lumberjacks by investors who cooperated with the state. Furthermore, in 1999 there were about 50 members of indigenous people who had to be taken to the subdistrict office by the special forestry police because they were considered to be encroaching on the forest (Basyir, 2009). Subsequently, after the New Order fell and reformation took place, negotiations were once conducted with the Sikka Regency Regional House of Representatives, but the local residents' enthusiasm to occupy the location of the Right to Cultivate came to a dead end.

There are a number of studies that addressed the problems of Tana Ai indigenous people in Nangahale, such as studies conducted by Prior (2013), (Basyir, 2009), and (Maring,

2013). The study conducted by Prior put an emphasis on the contradiction between customary law and positive law that makes it difficult for Tana Ai indigenous people to reclaim the land that is considered to be the heritage of their ancestors. The efforts were helped by the role of a number of civil society institutions and legal aid, but still did not find a solution. The existence of the church, as Prior suggested, is like a landlord and government partner, which then makes the religious institution involved in major problems related to land disputes. Here the face of the church shows its ambivalence. As an institutional institution, it has placed itself on the problem of social conflict, while the people involved in the conflict are the Catholics themselves.

The study conducted by Basyir provides a closer exposure to the socio-cultural life of Tana Ai indigenous people as well as the dynamics of their spatial control, in which it alluded to conflicts between local residents and state as well as religious (church) institutions. In his research, it is explained how indigenous people today still have a deep knowledge of the history of the arrival of their ancestors and the activities to maintain the sustainability of the environment that are continued by the generations after. The details of cultural behavior and other data collection of archaeological trails are also elaborated, giving an idea that the community holds firm and preserves the heritage of their predecessors. Meanwhile, the explanation related to land disputes is sorted by chronological time from the stories of the locals in conjunction with their aspirations.

Furthermore, the anthropological study on the cross-cutting relationship of political and capital power in the control of resources in the eastern Flores region conducted by Maring is related to the control of Egon Forest in Waigete Subdistrict, about 30 kilometers from Nangahale. This study, inspired by the political perspective of Foucauldian power, explains how the setting of national forests and the Green Revolution project in the form of reforestation during the New Order led to horizontal conflicts between residents, especially local residents and those who were settled as labors or immigrants. Changes in the dynamics of the conflict had occurred especially since the 1990s when communities began to be intervened by a number of donor agencies, NGOs, and other environmentally conscious institutions and made the originally closed and silent conflicts turn into open, broad, and complicated. However, the increasing opening of the conflict also led to the collaboration among the residents to figure a way out. This study then criticizes the Marxian approach that puts the pattern of mastery of resources on the purely class and conflictual sides and views the minor practice of collaboration as well as the Foucauldian approach as an initial inspiration that does not explicitly address the issue of collaboration in the perspective of power.

The above studies provided a large framework related to land acquisition in Flores involving a number of actors, such as state institutions, corporations, religious institutions, and other feudal elites, as well as showing the socio-cultural picture of the life of the local

community. In addition, the dynamics of the conflict of the population, in this case the group referred to as indigenous people, towards large institutions were also explained. However, no closer depiction was found regarding the daily life of the "against" society, which of course consists of human individuals who also have choices, interests, or hopes for a better life. Moreover, the party they face in this daily resistance is a corporation belonging to the religious institution of the Catholic church led by a pastor, the head of the plantation. The church-owned coconut company often take arbitrary actions on various parts of land that are considered sacred places by the local residents, in the form of evictions for the purpose of planting other production crops. Strange stories sprang up in the hope that, "The local Catholic church has had enough, the stubborn people are the shepherds as well."

Adding to the previous studies, this study aims to show the dynamics of resistance of Soge farmers who nota bene are Catholics in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, towards the church-owned company. A number of questions were raised. First, since going down the hill, how is the survival strategy carried out by some of the Soge people and their relationship with the coconut company or the church? Second, why do they still want to survive there even though their daily activities are constantly monitored? Ultimately, how is the resistance going?

METHODS

This study was conducted in the coconut plantation area of PT KRISRAMA in Nangahale Subvillage, Tuabao Village, Waiblama Subdistrict, Sikka Regency, Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. It is about 60 kilometers east of the city of Maumere, the capital of Sikka Regency, which is crossed by the Maumere-Larantuka state highway to East Flores Regency. The Nangahale lowland area itself faces directly to the Flores sea, while at the top is the Tana Ai hills. The total number of heads of household who inhabited the location of Right to Cultivate in Nangahale is 225 heads of household. The total population is 1357. However, this number is fluctuating because there are local residents who suddenly come to build a house, but then return to the hills. There are also those who decided to get out of there, whether moving out of town or getting married.

This study took place from August to October 2021. The method used was participant observation and semi-structured interviews to take a closer look at the daily activities of the Soge local residents and how they resisted the diocesan coconut company. In this method, the researcher developed his observation based on the developments that occurred in the field, mainly referring to certain events that allowed open conversation or discussion. Furthermore, the data collected from conversations and observation in daily activities were investigated and analyzed. In addition, other data used were historical literature in magazines, newspapers, journals, books, and the internet related to the research topic. In

the technical analysis of the data, the researcher combined the results of field study and library research to produce a type of historical ethnographic writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Cotton to Coconut: The Removal of the Losers

During the reign of the Dutch East Indies, precisely in 1912, the trading company *Syndicaat ter Bevordering van de Katoencultuur op Flores* obtained a 1450-acre land concession on the lowlands of Nangahale, eastern part of Central Flores. The company cultivated cotton plants there but only lasted two years due to the financial crisis, so the plantation was sold to another company, *Amsterdam Soenda Compagnie* (Metzner, 1982). The company's operations led to the removal of the population of Soge people of Tana Ai ethnic up and down the slope. The colonial government used traditional aristocrats to carry out the removal. King Nai Roa who was appointed as the ruler of the kingdom of Tana Ai burned the village of Nangahale. After the land was cleared, the company began to grow cotton (Prior, 2013). Based on the *domein verklaring* in the Agrarian Law of 1870, it is likely that the local rulers sold or leased the land to capital owner entrepreneurs because local residents were unable to show proof of land ownership. However, these residents were not turned into laborers; plantation laborers came from other areas of Flores.

From then on, until the beginning of the 1990s, the Soge people lived and spread on the foothills and slopes of Tana Ai hills. Although Indonesia is already independent and colonial companies have gone, they still have difficulties reclaiming the land on Nangahale lowlands because it has been cultivated by the company belonging to the Catholic church (De Porres, 2021). Earlier, the church, in this case the Apostolic Vicariate of Lesser Sunda Islands, bought the plantation from the *Amsterdam Soenda Compagnie* for 22500 florins in 1924 because of the economic crisis facing the company due to World War I. This purchase was also based on the missionary interest to build educational and health facilities in Flores as it took place in other parts of the world, such as in Africa or South America, where there was a mix between the practice of colonialism and the mission of the church (Daudelin, 1995; H. B. Hansen, 1985). If in the Philippines the land that the church got from the Spanish colony regime in the early 20th century was developed for sugar cane plantations (Allen, 1938), in Flores the missionaries cultivated coconut plantations in the hope of the Dutch East Indies government that the copra was the answer to the subsistence crisis in the region (Klinken, 2015). At the same time, the missionaries in Flores also founded the Parish of Nangahale in 1926 (Uran, 1961) as an effort to catholicize even though many residents refused, so that the early Catholics there were immigrant laborers and not Tana Ai people. The Dutch missionaries did not enter Flores in a religious vacuum (Jan Sihar & Steenbrink, 2008). There have been Portuguese-heritage Catholics since the 16th century in the southern coastal villages and religious tradition followers in the inland.

Post-independence Apostolic Vicariate of Lesser Sunda Islands handed over the plantation management rights to the local church of the Archdiocese of Ende which established PT DIAG and obtained the Right to Cultivate for 25 years since 1978 and cultivated 875 acres of land. Some of the other land became state-owned land and on the hills was used as a protected forest area. In addition to due to the government regulations, the establishment of the Right to Cultivate plantation was also due to the decreasing number of donors from Europe so that the local church must strive for its resources independently (Boelaars, 2005; Erb, 2010). In the midst of the development of the church plantation, in the 1990s the Soge people of Utan Wair Village, located in the Tana Ai hill valley and regularly flooded, formed the Tana Ai Indigenous People's Federation (LPMA) with the support of a number of non-governmental organizations. For the first time, they also held a formal meeting with the Regional Government of Sikka in 1996 to obtain recognition of the indigenous territories. However, no decision was reached. Subsequently in 2000, when they had joined the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN), they moved to occupy the plantation land in search of a place free from flooding. During the 2000s, this movement was frequently filled with demonstrations in Maumere through meetings both with the government and with the church having the Right to Cultivate. This contestation was also marked by the arrest of a number of citizens for being considered doing illegal occupation of the Right to Cultivate land or accused of taking over the land without the permission from the diocese. Indigenous peoples with the help of a number of NGOs also met with the Archbishop of Ende in 2001, but the bishop stated that the location belonged to the diocese and that citizens could file civil lawsuits (Prior, 2013).

The meetings did not reach an agreement, so the residents waited until the end of the Right to Cultivate contract period. However, this hope was in vain. After the contract ended on December 31, 2013, the coconut plantation company PT KRISRAMA, which in 2005 was established as a continuation of PT DIAG due to the realignment of the Diocese of Maumere from the Archdiocese of Ende, remained in operation. Moreover, two weeks before the Right to Cultivate contract ended, the residents found the National Land Agency of Sikka Regency (BPN) officers secretly measuring the land boundaries. They saw the pillars being built. Gossip circulated that the land would not be divided and the government measured it to be given to the church. The residents argued with the National Land Agency of Sikka officers. They were dissatisfied and organized themselves under the leadership of the tribal leader and went down to the lowlands to build settlements in the former the Right to Cultivate land (Abulat, 2014). The massive post-contractual occupation occurred on the night of August 9, 2014. Their number was 147 heads of household and most of them came from Tuabao Village.

Anything but Coconut

The establishment of houses and land acquisition, following the mechanism of shifting cultivation practiced in the past without the previous location being used as property rights, has been happening since 2014 and has been going on until now. Most of the houses of the Soge people on the land of the former Right to Cultivate was made of bamboo. In the subregion of Pedan, the center of the plantation and the initial location of the arrival of the ancestors of the Tana Ai people, there are about 70 Soge heads of household (KK) who have settled to this day and are considered illegal. The data obtained from the Tuabao Village Office show that out of the 70 heads of household, there are 17 households that do not have land, 10 household that only have 15-20 square meters of cleared land, and dozens of others that have 0.5-3 hectares of land on the hill and have been used for monoculture plants, such as candlenut and cashew. The village itself seemed helpless to witness the occupation and stated that the problem was an indigenous people's problem with the church. There is a kind of reluctance on the part of the local village officials to interfere further. Historically, the role of the large and strongly rooted church mission in Flores in educating the population to fill the country's bureaucratic posts (Tolo, 2016) has been one of the factors of such reluctance.

The way they got the land to live in the location of the former Right to Cultivate was to report to the tribal leader who agreed as long as the place was not in the sacred location. "They'll just have to tell me. The important thing is to build there is a place to live," said the leader. He also added that for now, because they are still in a fighting situation, there is no detailed calculation for the distribution of the communal land. "Let's see who really wants to make an effort. To divide the land, later we'll talk into it, now the important thing is everyone can unite," he further explained. However, not everyone can unite because there are some families who leave their houses empty for a few months, or maybe even years, and they return to the hills to cultivate the land there and some others decide to travel. Most of these people already have land on or behind the hills but are overwhelmed because they have children and grandchildren who also need a place to live. On the other hand, their lands have been sold out for the benefit of the market in the form of monoculture plants in addition to the land structures that are not suitable for building permanent residences. The emergence of commercialization in agriculture, according to Penny (1978), causes farmers to be increasingly plunged into worsening poverty. As a result, even if there is large land, it only functions as a small farm or is rented and sold to other people who have greater capital for long-term plant investment. Stories of friction about land grabbing are also frequent, even occurring in one lineage or family. There are not infrequently open physical conflicts, but there are also those who utilize supernatural powers to incapacitate people who are considered competitors.

However, those who went down after post-residency in 2014 seemed to do so because of the difficult situation, in the sense of the need for housing and cleared land to grow food crops. This choice to go down is part of rational considerations (Popkin, 1979; Scott, 1985) because most of them grow papaya, corn, sweet potato, and peanut for their daily consumption. There were also those who lived by the beach and decided to look for fish in the sea even though they did not work as fishermen. This group is somewhat different from those who have settled since the early 2000s and have experienced increased social mobility, especially the early movement elites who took advantage of their proximity to patrons from a number of NGOs. Some used to travel and after returning to Tana Ai, they built new establishments, such as kiosks or workshops. These kiosks and workshops were built on a number of vacant land within the former location. In that place, anyone can indeed build houses and small and medium enterprises as long as they can speak well and have a connection to the tribal leader.

However, in that land, despite the potential for conflict that can happen at any time, the company is also increasingly posing a threat. Stories about company members who came to pick coconuts and intentionally dropped the fruits or leaves on the roof of a common citizen's house circulated, although what was often targeted were huts of the people who did not have any socio-economic status in the tribal sphere and usually occurred when the owner was not at home, whether going to the market or working in someone else's plantation. In early August 2021, the pastor of the head of the plantation also showed up with a bulldozer to one of the vacant land locations to clean the bushes without talking to or telling the surrounding residents. "They only control the coconuts, why are they messing with the lands below," one of the residents said in protest. Consequently, the day after being displaced, which in the rumors of the residents to be planted with cashews because the demand for the plant was again skyrocketing, the surrounding residents instead used the land by planting the cassava. They argued that it was for planting only, not for eating, and did not care if it was cleaned up again by the company.

The assumption that the company only controls coconut fruits is an argument for the residents in occupying the disputed land. Every time they meet, they always say that the important thing is that they do not take/pluck coconut fruits: *the company takes care of the coconut, indigenous people manage the land below*. This statement is certainly not a mere form of symbolic resistance, but rather an important repertoire if it is linked to the historical context of the domination of natural production factors since the late colonial period. As elaborated by Peluso & Vandergeest (2001), in the early 20th century, land or forest gained a new category of arrangement by colonial officials with control centered first on the species, then territories and the people. Thus, the statement of the Soge people seems reasonable that they do not want to control the coconut, but only need the land itself. This

at the same time shows the still entrenched memory of the history of the domination of their ancestral lands.

However, coconut trees certainly do not grow on empty land, so when there is fruit that falls, there are some residents who secretly collect it to be processed as food, especially making vegetables. Morally, socially, and religiously, these actions are indeed considered wrong, but in a critical perspective what is done is part of the daily resistance (Scott, 1985) to survive in the absence of access to various factors of production. Different stories were obtained from young people who either day or night sometimes pick young coconuts to eat. Usually, they wait for the employees of the company to finish operating and then launch their actions. However, like most local residents, the fruits picked are not for sale, let alone processed into copra. They are wary because if they are caught and considered to steal, their struggling position will become weaker and inevitably get customary sanctions. The company itself does not necessarily seek opportunities to criminalize. The 'peaceful path' effort is also carried out even though it usually happens if there is information that the government, in this case the regional representative of the National Land Agency, wants to measure the land. The strategy carried out is that the pastor of the head of the plantation invites representatives of Soge tribe farmers to the pastor's house and have dinner, then begin negotiations as will be explained in the following.

Fighting Over Boundaries

Around the location of the company, there are rice plants that grow and the area is approximately three hectares. Local residents told that the rice fields do not belong to them, but are owned or managed by the company and get irrigation from the springs near the hill. The rice fields has existed since the '80s. At that time, the mission of the church was increasingly massive in mastering the agricultural technology, welcoming the Green Revolution program of the New Order (G. E. Hansen, 1971) so that tractors were also used to work on rice fields. In Flores, church institutions for about 150 years were barely able to escape their long-term partnership with the state (Jan Sihar & Steenbrink, 2008; Prior, 2013). Government policies in the form of technological modernization and agricultural intensification were also welcomed with open arms, let alone the church as a large 'landlord'.

However, it was not the pastors who took care of the rice, but those who worked and were considered loyal to the company, especially the workers who were immigrants and were the early Catholics in Tana Ai. In addition to obtaining land to build houses, these workers also cultivated rice fields based on a profit-sharing system with the company. Rice from rice fields as well as the plantation and livestock from the cages around the presbytery then became daily nutrition for the pastor of the head of the plantation. However, the area of the rice fields actually increased as the years went by. The local residents suspected that the expansion was part of the company's strategy in 'eliminating' the vacant land so that it could not be inhabited or measured to then be divided. One of the activists on a visit in

October 2021 was surprised to see the changes that had taken place so quickly since the last time accompanying the residents five years before. "These people are scary," he said, referring to the tactics undertaken by the company.

Witnessing the expansion, the local residents of the Soge tribe did not stay silent. As a form of competitive exclusion (Hall et al., 2011), they opened new plantations, planted with rice and corn, which they thought was to give a sign so that the company's rice fields did not continue to expand. This new plantation was also a warning so that the company did not arbitrarily expand its territories, especially those that were not related to coconut trees. A Soge farmer instead openly built a house and made a pigsty not far from the location of the company's rice fields. Previously, he lived on the road adjacent to the Nangahale market, but decided to move away so that not all vacant land was converted into rice fields. Currently, his house and several other residents' houses that have existed since 2014 stand jostling with the Talibura State High School building that appears to have no boundaries and there are a number of buildings that have just been completed. If we take a closer look at the buildings, it will be difficult to distinguish which houses are the residents' and which is the school building. In another perspective, the issuance of legal rights to assets in the form of rights or permits can indeed result in the abandonment of land. This occurs due to the absence of adequate verification of the capacity of the prospective beneficiary of the right/permit and evaluation or control of its implementation as well as the possibility of manipulation in the process of granting it. The further consequence is that the land becomes a source of disputes and conflicts when the process of granting previous rights is carried out in a way that still leaves problems, as well as reclaiming and occupying by the community of the lands left by the Right to Cultivate holding company (Lutfhi et al., 2013).

The problem with the rice fields continued. Seeing the company's rice fields continue to shift, some young men also looked for opportunities to stop the irrigation rate. At night, they secretly went to the location of the springs around the forbidden forest and blocked the flow of water that led to the rice fields. A number of pipes were also made damaged by accidental hoeing of the ground. "*During the dry season, water is rare, we need water, too,*" they said. Such patterns of destruction often occurred, but the company, precisely the pastor of the head of the plantation, seemed not to care, perhaps because most of the rice fields were managed and to meet the needs of their workers and their families. The pastor does not need too much rice; all they need is rice field as a barrier to the company's land. However, the people who were actually disadvantaged, the immigrants, did not protest and as if to let the social friction run like that. Breman (1990) said, disciplining workers from the outside was easier than having to hire locals. In daily activities, these workers also have relationships of neighborhood and reciprocity with the people of the Soge tribe, for example attending each other during wedding parties, deaths, or gathering together when there are village/village events. In such meetings, the pastor of the head of the plantation often verbally ostracized the Soge people in front of other communities by saying lazy, stupid, or

stubborn. This is kind of reminiscent of the statement of the United States military officials against Vietnamese farmers as "the black ragged bastard" as noted by anthropologist Eric Wolf (Wolf, 1969).

However, the boundaries of the rice field were not only responded with other rice fields. Some Soge local residents also cultivated corn, vegetable, and other secondary crops. These crops, in addition to being consumed on a household scale, are sold to the Nangahale market and other markets in Maumere. These plantations were jointly opened by the local residents and located adjacent to each other as a form of solidarity between them, so that if intercepted by the company, they could face them collectively. In addition, around the boundaries of the plantations, there were many coconut trees that had dried up; leaves fell, buds did not exist. This is different from other coconut formations, especially on the right side of the company which looked green. These dried coconut trees were deliberately made to be damaged by the residents. *We use electrocution*, one farmer said. He explained that the destruction had apparently lasted for many years along with the opening of new rice fields and plantations. They used an electrical tool from the accumulator that is commonly used to catch fish or shrimp and attached it to the roots of a coconut tree. According to them, the company did not have any suspicion because the activity was carried out more or less at the same time as the activity of looking for side dishes in the swamp or river. "That's why the coconut tree is drying slowly," they said. It seems that the opportunity to fight, no matter how small, is sought to uphold sovereignty over the land.

The aforementioned resistance is carried out in secret, but there are also other stories where there is a direct confrontation between the residents and the company leader which can be said to be a real manifestation of an extra-legal form of resistance (Afandi, 2013). The incident took place in mid-September 2021. One afternoon the pastor of the head of the plantation went near the hill in search of an empty and flat plot of land. He wanted to create a pond for fish so that it needed a location not far from the spring. After the vacant location was found, the pastor put up a sign/pillar confirming that no one should disturb it. However, not far from where the pastor stood, a farmer was also opening a new plantation where the flat land was as much as he needed. He then asked the pastor why he put up the sign and the pastor replied that he wanted to make a fish pond. The farmer also expressed his intention if he wanted to work on the land. The pastor did not respond, continued his activities, and returned to his residence. The next day, this farmer came early in the morning to the location and immediately hoed the land to be used as a fish pond. When he was hoeing, suddenly the pastor came and was surprised to see that the ground for the fish pond had been stirred up abruptly. This time, the farmer did not care about the pastor even though the pastor reprimanded him. He did not reply much and said that he needed to plant corns to eat. *I had a fight with the pastor*, he recalled in front of the neighbors of the other members of Soge tribe.

Persuading the Stubborn People

In 2018, in a field in Nangahale, Regent Candidate of Sikka Regency Robby Idong, who was then elected for the 2018-2023 period, gave a speech in front of the indigenous people of the Soge tribe and stated that if he was elected as regent, ninety days after that the Right to Cultivate land would soon be returned to the local residents through a fair distribution and measurement mechanism in accordance with the rights of the community, church, and state. This promise gave fresh air for the residents after they had previously considered the regency's political elite, even from among Tana Ai's own people, had never cared about them. Every member of the community who came to the campaign ceremonies was distributed packaged rice; they not only ate full but also were satisfied to hear what the tribal leader called "political contract with *Mo'at* Regent". However, a full stomach and joyful ears, especially just for a while, were not enough to solve the problem that had long been rooting and developing increasingly more complicated.

"And I know the regent may be busy," said the Soge tribal leader regarding the realization of the political campaign promise earlier. He had a flat face, perhaps implying the disappointment, because, "... until today not yet, even though the regent promised ninety days after he was elected, the problem here was soon solved ...," he added. Actually, the Regent of Sikka had visited Nangahale in 2020, two years after his appointment, but not in order to talk about the status of the Right to Cultivate land. He came to announce officially the opening of the Nangahale market as a daily market which was later expanded at the expense of the football field and was protested by the youth around. Instead of issuing regional regulations on indigenous people, that year the Regent of Sikka formed the Integrated Team for the Settlement of the Land Dispute of the Former Right to Cultivate in Nangahale because it received constant complaints from the community as well as answering the requests of the diocese. In 2019, the local community along with the regional AMAN had indeed asked the regency government to issue regional regulations regarding indigenous people, but there had been no response at all which led to no recognition of indigenous forests. Meanwhile, in the integrated team work plan, the problem would be resolved soon at the end of 2020. This is closely related to the Constitutional Court Decision on Case Number 35/PUU-X/2012 (Constitutional Court Decision 35) which stipulates that indigenous forests are no longer classified as state forests, which not only gives rise to a variety of critical responses, (Savitri, 2015; Tobroni, 2013) but also different ways of looking at policies from state institutions, for example the Ministry of Forestry which issued the Regulation of the Minister of Forestry Number P.62/Menhut-II/2013 concerning the strengthening of forest areas which requires the community to provide official (written) evidence on land claims (Siscawati, 2014).

The problem was not resolved until in February 2021, the Integrated Team for the Settlement of Land Disputes of the Former Right to Cultivate in Nangahale returned to work by holding a dissemination in the Hall of the Official Residence of the Regent of Sikka in Maumere which was attended by several subdistrict and village heads, indigenous peoples' companions, and residents' representatives. At the meeting, the head of the National Land Agency of Sikka explained that before the Right to Cultivate land contract expired, the Right to Use holder had applied for an extension, but the people who knew the plan claimed that the land was of their ancestors', so it should not be extended (Metrotimor.id, 2021). Here, the head of the National Land Agency of Sikka seemed to assume that before that time, the community stayed silent and suddenly came to attack. In fact, the struggle had been going on for decades and the residents were waiting for the right momentum.

That was the last formal meeting between Soge ethnic people and the government in 2021. The next thing that happened was an informal meeting or a small talk meeting between the company PT KRISRAMA and a number of representatives of the Soge tribe. Based on the story of the residents, the pastor of the head of the plantation often secretly called the community group to come to the residence of the pastor, or the company office, and invited them to dinner while discussing the land dispute. The farmers did not refuse the invitation. They fulfilled the pastor's invitation as well as wanting to show negotiation or bargaining position of the farmers to the company as was also the case in other Southeast Asian regions (Rutten et al., 2017), especially if they themselves are Catholics. The pastor feasted on them well, ate meat and drank cola, but then persuaded them to stop being stubborn. As a result, there was no agreement. In a luncheon in mid-September 2021, one of the leaders of the struggle, who also played a catechist role, was even accused of subversive actions by inciting other residents to remain at the location. The other farmer who had been invited, instead joked, "The pastor told me to take the cola, I took it all, brought it home. After that I was gone, didn't show up anymore, haha."

The more frequent spontaneous meeting invitations, a strange thing because in some formal meetings church/company representatives were rarely present, perhaps with regard to the National Land Agency of Sikka's business which began to measure the land, were held as a follow-up on the meeting in February 2021. This step often became a discussion among the residents. The reason is that these measurements were carried out secretly, without the public knowing, so that the story only circulated from mouth to mouth, and suddenly there were new pillars installed. This incident precisely took place in early October 2021 when the National Land Agency of Sikka's team went to the field and built the pillars at a location near the boundaries between the Soge and Goban tribes. When this team came, the residents just stood there and looked from afar because they did not know anything. Just like the previous incident, the pillars only lasted a day and a night; the next

day a number of residents lifted the marks and buried the installation under the ground. This story was in a great deal of excitement among the locals. Furthermore, they also conveyed that the people who installed the pillars were not only people from the National Land Agency, but also from the church/company. They even pointed to the head of the plantation that they '*stole the start*' by carrying out the measurements first and providing the data to the government. The invitation to have dinner together earlier was then associated with this silent measurement, which was as an effort to talk peacefully; if there was a formal meeting again, the residents would just accept the decision.

The company itself did not want to lose non-coconut plantations that had been developed for other commodities, such as cashew or wood that is sold as blocks/boards and rice fields. *This is no longer a coconut company, but a kind of private land*, a number of residents said. As mentioned earlier, in their minds, the company has the right to only take care of the coconut plants and not other species. After all, so far the 'tolerant' attitude of the people of Soge is due to the consideration that the existence of coconut plantations helps financial resources for the operational sustainability of the diocese. However, if there are other efforts developed, the residents then wonder about the clarity of the church's company's performance. In relation to this, in Indonesia, the country does not yet, or even does not, have data that show the amount of funds managed by the church, including congregational and community service organizations affiliated with the church, such as educational institutions, hospitals, orphanages and elderly, as well as other social institutions that have significant assets (Kristanto & Wibowo, 2017) Midkiff (2004). The church and religious organizations are entities that have a high potential for financial irregularities.

Facing Uncertainties

"I just came home last night to a meeting at the tribal leader's house," said a Soge mama at the junction outside the Nangahale market. She just came home to sell sweet potato leaves and buy fresh fish for lunch because there were workers who wanted to build sanitary facilities (shower, wash, lavatory) in the location where she lived in the subregion of Pedan. Her husband who had just returned since three years ago from Kalimantan now worked as a *papalele* (a profession as well as a designation for people who buy commodities from the first hand for later resale), and in the house they lived with their daughter and husband and a granddaughter who was still a baby. Previously they lived in Tuabao, but their concerns over the later residence of her grandchildren, for which there was no inheritance of land, made them have to go down in the lowlands, especially after her husband returned from afar. Whenever there was a tribal meeting that discussed land disputes, the mama or the women were always present and usually brought groceries as solidarity to gather. They did not seem to want to be considered opportunistic tribal members, in the sense of waiting for rations for the division of land, and wanting to show seriousness.

However, when sitting and chatting at mama's house with her husband and son in law, she who sat in the kitchen had made a sound of complaint. *E pertemuan poi, kopi gula di sawe* (sugar and coffee run out only for the meetings), *masalahnya e ami* (the problem is in us, the society itself), she said. Usually the meeting took place once a month, which was then stopped due to the policy of physical distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but since August it began to be intensified even with an irregular schedule. Sometimes in a week, the meeting could take place twice. However, the meeting was sometimes held in response to a call for a secret banquet from the company.

As mentioned in the introduction, at the center of the former location of the Right to Cultivate land, there were several empty houses, abandoned by the owners, which sometimes complicated the land registry for the tribe. These people were also often absent during the meetings which made the tribal leader confused about their commitment to the struggle. However, those who have also lived there, who only depend on the source of their livelihood from the land that was split, are not always active in the meeting. These people complain that if they gather, there must be one or two items/foodstuffs donated, while on the other hand, the clarity of the results is not yet visible. Some farmers have even had one meeting since July and they spend more time slicing neera and taking care of the plantation. These families seem to have been "comfortable" with their place of residence. The important thing is to have a place to live, thus legal-formal affairs are furthermore the responsibility of the tribal leader and activists. They hold the principle of, just follow, as long as they can still eat for one day.

The tribal leader still insisted even though there were those who lived in settlements, there still had to be reorganization or talks related to the management of the area because it is communal land. No recognition causes the people, in kinship relationships, to be free to establish residential buildings as long as they report to the leader. There is a kind of dilemma here (Hall et al., 2011). The tribal party on the one hand requires that many people come to live, in the sense of establishing a house, which symbolically shows the seriousness of indigenous people in suppressing the company and state, but on the other hand the land of the former Right to Cultivate can also be excluded without any clear regulations. So far, there have been no social frictions related to land split, such as fighting over land or determining boundaries. However, in the location there is also a land plot that is worked on by immigrant traders, especially for pig herds. In addition, families who have enough income also start developing other businesses.

This kind of situation seems to have been deliberately left unchecked by the church and regional governments until, for example, there is an internal conflict that arises. That is when they show up as adjudicators blaming the community and carry out regulatory practices. In fact, the existence of indigenous legal communities is recognized by the 1945 Constitution Article 18 B Paragraph 2 which states that the state recognizes and respects

the indigenous communities and their traditional rights as long as they live in accordance with the development of society and the principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. Law No. 5 of 1960 Article 5 on Basic Agrarian Principles also states that customary law is recognized as long as it does not conflict with national interests. PT KRISRAMA belonging to the diocese of Maumere, which for eight years has not obtained an extension of the Right to Use contract permit, continues to operate as if it considers that nothing has happened in the surrounding environment. Meanwhile, Soge local residents in their own way continue to resist to simply survive and fight further to regain their customary land. They themselves are aware that what is at hand is not an ordinary company, but rather a church-owned company led by a Catholic pastor who is a shepherd or leader of their own religion. In other words, they dealt with three major social-economic systems: feudalism demonstrated by the ownership of vast lands by the church, capitalism through the dredging of surplus commodities from coconut monoculture, and the religious system in which the role of the church have long rooted in Flores. Moreover, the state is also not in a clear position to side with its citizens, the poor and marginal.

The absence of regional regulations that regulate the indigenous people causes Soge local residents to increasingly live in uncertainty. They do not actually claim the entire plantation themselves. They just need clear talk and fair division, not secretly measuring the ground and then calling them in for a meeting. In fact, they themselves claim not to be against the church and the state. The tribe itself said that if the former Right to Use land, which was communal land, is returned to the indigenous people, they will redistribute it or discuss it internally regarding the land management system. However, the reality does not fit their expectations. After all, what must be faced today is how they get recognition so that they can claim the customary land, later to be able to eat and drink daily.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that there are various strategies of resistance of the Soge farmers as part of rational economic considerations and not to subvert the ruling class, in this case the church plantation company. This is not immediately due to the status of the farmers who are Catholics but the historical memory of land control that the company since the colonial era did only take care of the species (cotton and coconut plants) and did not control its territory. This memory becomes a daily repertoire in the direction of their long struggle and a simultaneous narrative of the back argumentation to gain legitimacy of access to the customary land. The resistance also occurs spontaneously, either individually or collectively, and is mostly a response to what the company did first. Opening new gardens, damaging crops, and closing irrigation channels were carried out by Soge farmers to limit the expansion of coconut plantation by the company. Moreover, the church also utilized the existence of rice fields to affirm its boundaries. As a result, in the location of the former

Right to Cultivate plantation in Nangahale, there were mutual claims and open or closed contestations with coconut plants as its symbolic weapon. Local residents were trying to destroy coconuts so that they could assert the sovereignty of their land, while the company needed these plants to turn off the arguments of the local community even though not only coconuts were developed, but also rice fields and other crops.

The resettlement is one of the factors why the local residents of Soge still defend their location at the former plantation. This is also what made the tribal leader let them build houses on the former Right to Cultivate land even though there were no residents. However, the collective effort seen on this surface is somewhat different from the personal actions of each farmer who, for example, confronts directly with the head of the plantation or grows plants for daily nutritional needs, including picking coconut fruits. This situation occurs because there has indeed been a differentiation in the mastery of production facilities among Soge farmers themselves, which is also shown by complaints during the meeting as well as an invitation for everyone to unite. In the end, the relationship between the local residents of Soge and the church plantation company that still operates, even though it has not yet obtained a contract permit, is like a parade of the sparring movement. Local residents secretly do an investigation to gain legitimacy of access to the customary land, while the company waits for somebody who can be criminalized just to stay on Nangahale land.

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