

Article

Weaving as a Practice of Care for Land and Identity through the Lens of Mama Aleta Baun's Struggle

Putri Khispa Yadia, Ika Arinia Indriyany

Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Indonesia

ABSTRACT ENGLISH:

The resistance of indigenous women plays a crucial role in maintaining a spiritual-ecological relationship with the surrounding environment. In Mollo, located in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, Mama Aleta Baun have led the indigenous community's struggle against the expansion of a marble mine that has destroyed the indigenous forest ecosystem and the community's territory. This resistance is carried out in a unique way, not using violence or formal channels such as law, but through cultural practices, namely weaving. This study aims to understand how indigenous Mollo women interpret weaving activities as a form of cultural and political resistance against the threat posed by mining companies. In order to explore the narrative, symbolism, and meaning of the Mollo indigenous women's movement against marble mining, this research employs a qualitative approach using thematic content analysis. The analysis was conducted using an ecofeminist approach to delve deeper into the symbolic meaning of weaving practices and the role of women in maintaining the natural ecology in Mollo region. The results indicate that weaving is a passive resistance strategy that carries a range of highly spiritual symbolic meanings. The weaving demonstrated by indigenous women expresses ecological knowledge, traditional values, and the sovereignty of their ancestral lands. The woven threads serve as a critique of exploratory development models and as a means to strengthen the cultural and spiritual identity of the Mollo indigenous community. Mama Aleta Baun's struggle serves as concrete evidence that local culture and spiritual beliefs can be a powerful force in ecofeminist-based environmental movements.

Keywords: Weaving, Indigenous women, Struggle, Mama Aleta Baun, Mollo

ABSTRACT INDONESIAN:

Perlawanan perempuan dalam masyarakat adat memiliki peran penting dalam menjaga hubungan spiritual-ekologis dengan alam sekitar. Di daerah Mollo, tepatnya di Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), perempuan seperti Mama Aleta Baun memimpin perjuangan masyarakat adat melawan ekspansi tambang marmer yang merusak ekosistem hutan adat dan kehidupan masyarakat adat. Perlawanan ini dilakukan dengan cara yang terbilang unik, bukan melalui kekerasan atau jalur formal seperti hukum, melainkan melalui praktik budaya, yaitu menenun. Untuk mengeksplorasi narasi, simbolisme, dan makna gerakan perempuan adat Mollo dalam menentang penambangan marmer, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis konten tematik. Analisis tersebut dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan ekofeminisme guna mendalami makna simbolis praktik menenun serta peran perempuan dalam menjaga ekologi alam di wilayah Mollo. Analisis dilakukan dengan pendekatan ekofeminisme untuk menggali lebih dalam makna simbolik dari praktik menenun serta peran perempuan dalam menjaga ekologis alam di wilayah Mollo. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa menenun merupakan langkah strategi perlawanan pasif yang dilakukan dengan berbagai makna simbolik yang sangat spiritual. Menenun yang di perlihatkan oleh perempuan adat Mollo dimunculkan dengan mengekspresikan pengetahuan ekologis, nilai adat, dan kedaulatan adat tanah leluhur mereka. Benang tenun menjadi bentuk kritik terhadap model pembangunan yang eksploratif serta cara untuk menguatkan identitas budaya dan spiritual komunitas adat Mollo. Sehingga pada akhirnya, perjuangan Mama Aleta Baun menjadi bukti nyata bahwa budaya dan spiritualisme kepercayaan lokal dapat menjadi kekuatan besar dalam gerakan lingkungan berbasis ekofeminisme.

Kata Kunci: Menenun, Perempuan Adat, Perjuangan, Mama Aleta Baun, Mollo.

Introduction

Scholarship on women's resistance in environmental conflicts has grown substantially as researchers seek to understand how gender intersects with ecological crisis, indigenous sovereignty, and cultural survival (Fahimah, 2017; Maemunah, 2015; Parastasia, 2024). This intersection is particularly evident in cases where women's bodies, labour, and cultural practices become the primary site of both oppression and resistance against extractive industries (Zhafirah et al., 2023). Just as in the eastern region of Indonesia, behind the beautiful natural landscapes and abundant natural resources, there are still many stories of women's struggles, especially in indigenous areas, who fought, risking their lives and identities to preserve the ancestral lands of their beliefs. Mollo Village is located around Mount Mutis in South Central Timor Regency, where the Mollo indigenous people make land, water, rocks, and forests their identity (Aprilia & Wijaya, 2024; Zhafirah et al., 2023). This belief has been passed down from generation to generation by the Mollo Village community, who use the metaphor of water as blood, land as flesh, forest as hair, and rocks as bones (Maemunah, 2015; Parastasia, 2024). For the people of Mollo Village, natural resources are not just an ordinary source of wealth but an existential and spiritual space still strongly believed in.

Mollo Village, located in South Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara, became a critical site of conflict between indigenous women's grassroots movements and state-backed, large-scale marble mining operations (Dalupe, 2020; Zhafirah et al., 2023). For the Mollo people, land is not just an inanimate object that can be bought and sold or even exploited, but a living entity that needs to be cared for and protected. Because the Mollo people believe that human life and death will be determined by the natural environment they maintain (Dalupe, 2020; Nagari, 2020). For example, to obtain food, the Mollo people must cultivate the land through farming, aligning with the management of land, water, rocks, and forests, which are always maintained in balance. This marked the beginning of the life-and-death struggle of the Mollo people against marble mining, which they believe destroys the forests they hold dear.

The belief that "Nature is Mother" ultimately places women among the main guardians of life in Mollo village. According to Mollo community beliefs, women have special abilities to care for and protect nature (Maemunah, 2015; Zhafirah et al., 2023). In the cosmology of the Mollo community, women's bodies are said to be one with nature, which ultimately confers the power to defend forests, land, and water from external threats (Blumberg & Samuel, 2019). However, the context of development in Indonesia, which tends to be modern and exploratory, has given rise to an antithesis to a belief firmly held by the Mollo community. The emergence of companies that profit from the destruction of nature has sparked this resistance. Companies must not destroy forests, because forests are the fourth main source of needs in Mollo village, along with land, water, and rocks.

Mollo community's struggle began with the formation of a community group. The initial reason for this movement was the farmers' dependence on natural resources for farming (Maemunah, 2015; Zhafirah et al., 2023). This organization of resistance was led by a female figure often called Mama Aleta Baun, along with women from the Mollo traditional village

(Nagari, 2020). Mama Aleta revealed that if the land is lost, the water, the rocks, and the forest will be lost; this will disrupt farming in Mollo village, which is the core of daily survival. The rejection became even more tense when Mama Aleta led a social movement to oppose marble mining around Mount Muitis by weaving around the mining site (Nagari, 2020). Mama Aleta's struggle was not carried out through violence or weapons, but in a very feminine, symbolic way, and was deeply rooted in the culture of the Mollo village, namely, weaving. Together with hundreds of other Mollo indigenous women, Mama Aleta occupied the mining site for months, continuing to weave traditional cloth as a form of rejection and protest against the Mollo village over the land damaged by marble mining.

The actions carried out by Mama Aleta not only demonstrate the strength of indigenous Mollo women's solidarity but also highlight how cultural beliefs can be an effective and meaningful tool of resistance. In this context, Mama Aleta conveys that weaving is more than just a work of art; it is also a political weapon, a form of communication, and a symbol of women's strength and determination to protect the land, which is central to the Mollo community's beliefs. With Mama Aleta's determination that women are in the west of nature, she gives life, cares for, guards, protects, and provides everything humans need. Unfortunately, these views are not taken into account by the wider public when it comes to the importance of preserving nature for the sustainability of human life. The Mollo community movement continued for 13 years, accompanied by a journey full of threats, intimidation, and violence carried out by mining companies against women who took action. Mama Aleta's story then became a concrete example of the local community's lived experience of ecofeminist resistance (Maemunah, 2015).

The case of Mama Aleta Baun and the Mollo indigenous women is significant not merely as a local historical record, but as a scholarly site where ecological struggle, gender politics, and indigenous epistemology converge. Crucially, these dimensions are not separable: the practice of weaving is not simply a cultural symbol of resistance, but an epistemic medium through which Mollo women store, transmit, and activate their plural ecological knowledge as a form of political agency. This study therefore pursues a single, integrated research objective: to understand how Mollo indigenous women construct and express their plural knowledge through the practice of weaving, simultaneously as an epistemic medium and as a cultural-political strategy of resistance against marble mining *extractivism*. By treating weaving as both the object and the vehicle of indigenous women's knowledge, this study aims to demonstrate how cultural practice and ecological knowledge are mutually constitutive within indigenous women's environmental movements.

Scholarship on indigenous women's environmental struggles has grown substantially, but much of it treats cultural practice and knowledge production as separate analytical concerns. This study contributes to that literature by treating them as fundamentally integrated: the symbolic meanings embedded in Mollo weaving motifs are themselves a form of plural indigenous knowledge through which women simultaneously articulate ecological relationships, assert territorial sovereignty, and resist patriarchal and extractive power. Prior research specifically on this movement include (Nagari, 2020). This study highlights Mama Aleta's struggle as a manifestation of the local ecofeminist movement by revealing how state and corporate power structures systematically disregard indigenous rights and ontologies.

This research complements previous studies by foregrounding the epistemic dimension of weaving, arguing that Mollo women's resistance is inseparable from the indigenous knowledge encoded in their cultural practice, and by applying decolonial ecofeminism and material semiotics as analytical frameworks that go beyond descriptive narrative.

This research has a fundamental framework, with ecofeminism as the initial analytical tool. Ecofeminism is a philosophical and social movement that explores and discusses the relationship between women's oppression and environmental exploitation (Fahimah, 2017). The ecofeminist movement emerged in the 1970s as a response to the intersection of feminism and environmentalism, arguing that women have historically been marginalized and dominated within patriarchal society. In a patriarchal society that is sometimes centred only on men, this causes the true meaning and value of women to be reduced or even denied. Women are always imprisoned in the private sphere, which prevents them from discussing and taking general decisions in public and ultimately makes them victims of male activities, just like nature (EraPurike et al., 2023).

Overall, ecofeminism offers several critical frameworks for analysing and understanding the root causes of gender inequality and environmental degradation. By recognizing the interconnectedness of these various forms of oppression, ecofeminism ultimately advocates for social justice and ecology, aiming to streamline efforts towards a more just and sustainable future for all people, regardless of gender (EraPurike et al., 2023). Ecofeminist theory also views the interconnectedness of the eras of oppression against women and the exploitation of nature. Both are rooted in a patriarchal system that consistently positions women and nature as objects to be dominated and exploited. In the context of Mama Aleta Baun's struggle, the Mollo women successfully demonstrate the main characteristics of the ecofeminist movement. They not only reject mining activities that will destroy their homes. It is represented through their beliefs as an indigenous community. Mama Aleta, as a representative of indigenous communities, shows how women can be the main agents in fighting ecological exploitation and structural patriarchy that has long been embedded in the wider community. Thus, ultimately, this ecofeminist theory provides a solid conceptual framework for understanding the indigenous struggle of the Mollo people, which is not only about the environment but also about identity, social injustice, and the transformation of power.

This study sharpens the ecofeminist lens by adopting decolonial ecofeminism as a more precise analytical framework for the Mollo case. Decolonial ecofeminism argues that the exploitation of women and nature cannot be fully understood without accounting for the colonial and settler-colonial structures that underpin both *extractivism* and the marginalization of indigenous epistemologies. Unlike classical ecofeminism, which tends to draw on western philosophical traditions, decolonial ecofeminism centre, indigenous women's ontologies, their ways of knowing, caring for, and inhabiting land, as legitimate and politically significant alternatives to the dominant development paradigm. In the Mollo context, this means treating Mama Aleta Baun's cosmological relationship with land not merely as a "cultural" backdrop to resistance, but as an epistemological challenge to the state's extractive rationality. The colonial history of land nationalization in Mollo (beginning in 1974), which dispossessed the Tiga Batu Tungku communities of customary control over their territory, makes this

decolonial framing analytically essential. Decolonial ecofeminism thus provides the theoretical basis for interpreting the act of weaving at the mining site as simultaneously an ecological, cultural, gender-political, and anti-colonial act of resistance.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach using thematic content analysis as its primary method. According to [Creswell & Creswell \(2017\)](#), qualitative research aims to understand the meanings individuals construct regarding a social issue within the context of their lives. Rather than functioning as a standalone methodology, the literature review serves as the principal data source for applying thematic analysis, consistent with established practice in qualitative secondary data studies. This approach allows researchers to explore the narrative, symbolism, and meaning of the Mollo indigenous women's movement against marble mining without requiring physical fieldwork, while still maintaining analytical rigor beyond a descriptive review. Given that the Mollo resistance has generated a substantial and growing digital footprint, including campaign archives, documentary videos, and activist social media content, this study also employs netnography ([Kozinets, 2010](#)), to systematically observe and analyze the movement's online dimensions. Netnography is defined as participant-observational research conducted through online fieldwork, adapted from ethnographic methods to study digitally mediated communities and social practices ([Kozinets, 2010](#)). This is methodologically feasible without physical fieldwork, as high-quality images of Mollo weaving, documentary footage, and digital campaign archives are publicly accessible online. The research subjects are Mama Aleta Baun and the Mollo indigenous women's community as active agents of cultural and ecological resistance. The research objects encompass the practice of culturally based social movements and ecofeminism by the Mollo indigenous women's group, with a particular focus on the symbolic and semiotic dimensions of weaving as political resistance. The analytical focus is on the forms of symbolic resistance and collective action deployed by Mollo indigenous women to maintain environmental sustainability and defend their customary territorial rights.

The data sources for this study encompass documentary videos of Mama Aleta Baun's resistance actions, academic journal articles, news reports, activist websites, and social media content documenting the Mollo indigenous women's movement. Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis, a method chosen for its capacity to identify patterns of meaning, symbols, and values across multiple text and visual sources. The analytical process follows the three-stage model of [Miles & Huberman \(1994\)](#): (1) data reduction, in which raw materials are selected and coded by relevance; (2) data display, in which coded themes are organized into a coherent interpretive framework; and (3) conclusion-drawing and verification, in which analytical insights are linked back to the theoretical framework. It should be noted that this three-stage linear model is characteristic of [Miles & Huberman's \(1994\)](#) approach, which is distinct from [Creswell & Creswell \(2017\)](#) spiral model of qualitative analysis; both are valid but should not be conflated. The key thematic categories applied in this study are: ecofeminism, cultural resistance, Mollo indigenous identity, the semiotics of weaving, and women's ecological leadership. In addition

to thematic content analysis, this study employs material semiotics drawing on Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to treat the woven Mollo textile as a cultural "text" to be read and interpreted. Barthes posits that any cultural artefact, including cloth, functions as a system of signs carrying denotative and connotative meanings embedded in social and historical contexts. Applied to Mollo weaving, this means analysing specific traditional motifs (such as *kaif*, *fauna*, and *flora patterns*) to decode how they represent ancestral territorial boundaries, water sources, land ownership, and cosmological beliefs. This analytical layer strengthens the study's claim that weaving is not merely an aesthetic practice but a semiotic act of ecological and political communication.

This research was not conducted on-site; it is a qualitative secondary data study focused on Mollo Village, South Central Timor Regency, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Media sources published within the past ten years were reviewed and deemed relevant to the research questions. Data were collected and analysed via online sources documenting the trajectory of Mama Aleta Baun's movement and the Mollo indigenous women's community. To establish trustworthiness, this study employs three following frameworks. First, credibility was addressed through source triangulation, understood here in its proper sense as cross-checking findings across qualitatively different types of sources: peer-reviewed academic journals, independent documentary footage, news reportage, and activist digital archives. This triangulation goes beyond using multiple sources of the same type and instead draws on methodologically distinct forms of evidence to corroborate interpretations. Second, transferability was strengthened by providing a thick description of the Mollo context, including the cosmological, historical, and gender-relational dimensions, enabling readers to assess the relevance of findings to comparable cases of indigenous women's ecological resistance. Third, dependability was addressed through a systematic and documented analysis process, in which coding decisions and thematic categories were applied consistently across all data sources throughout the study.

Result and Discussion

Women and nature: cosmology of the Mollo indigenous people

The struggle of the indigenous people of Mollo Village to preserve the natural environment that has been destroyed by mining companies has not been easy. There has been a long process of debate and struggle over the community's identity and the maintenance of its beliefs (Maemunah, 2015). The majority of the people of Mollo Village adhere to and believe in customary law, which has its own system of government regulations and a unified customary territory that applies within the Mollo indigenous community (Zhafirah et al., 2023). According to (Kirihiyo et al., 2021), indigenous peoples are groups of people who have lived for generations in a certain area, who still believe in customs and traditions passed down from generation to generation, and are held firmly by continuing to defend rights to land and natural resources in their area. Indigenous peoples also have legal systems, beliefs, and structures that differ from those of society (Gajah, 2022; Kirihiyo et al., 2021). The context of indigenous peoples in Indonesia has, in fact, been regulated in the amendment to Article 18B of the Law of 1945. Even the formation of a national land law based on it has been regulated by special laws for indigenous peoples (Gajah, 2022).

An unresolved problem faced by indigenous communities is the perception of their nonexistence. Tragically, their struggle for existence requires a series of complex requirements (Gajah, 2022). Therefore, it is not surprising that the rights of indigenous communities are often denied, from the colonial era to the present (Gajah, 2022). One of the oldest indigenous communities in the Timor region, which has evolved over time and continues to practice its customary law, is the Tiga Batu Tangku, Mollo, Amanuba, and Amanatun communities. These three regions have a history of unity and cultural kinship within the Tiga Batu Tungku community, namely Mollo, Amanuban, and Amanatun. The three are siblings who share the same ancestors, but at different stages of development, they settled in different areas (Maemunah, 2015). Mallo customs are very closely related to natural conditions. For the Mallo people, nature is a part of the human body. The land they consider as flesh, water they consider as blood, forests they consider as hair and skin, and mountains and rocks they consider as bones (Nagari, 2020). Over time, changes in the traditional structure of the Tiga Batu Tungku (including Mollo) occurred from the colonial period through the period after Indonesia's independence. The government at that time changed the land ownership system of indigenous peoples in a way called "nationalization," where this was carried out by the state taking over and claiming land belonging to citizens as state property (Zhafirah et al., 2023).

The Mollo region was state-owned beginning in 1974. At that time, the government forced the Mollo community to plant pine trees on 200 hectares of grassland, claiming that the land in the Mollo region was "critical land" because it could only grow grass. However, planting pine trees was actually less suitable for the Mollo area, because pine trees have a structure that cannot absorb rainwater into the soil, so if left untreated, it would damage underground water reserves. Pine trees, besides having difficulty absorbing water, were also considered to have no economic value for residents, so they could not be used for daily needs. Even sadly, after 5-6 years, residents were no longer allowed to care for, or even plant anything around the pine trees because the land was claimed to belong to the state, not the indigenous community. In essence, this is what then causes indigenous communities to lose control over their own land, even though, if we look at it as a basic thing, resistance is an important part of the life and culture of indigenous communities or *masyarakat adat* (Maemunah, 2015).

This process then became a breath of fresh air for the state, which was able to easily issue mining business permits after designating the customary land area during the Tiga Batu Tungku period as state land. This resulted in many mountains and rocks, which the Mollo people believed were strong, like human bodies, being cut into pieces and then taken to Mollo for marble companies. Thus, when the mountains in Mollo were cut down and shipped to the marble company, it was like the state cutting Mollo's bones. The natural condition of Mollo is increasingly worrying due to marble mining. The Mollo people saw and held firmly. Women in the Mollo community have a symbolic closeness to nature. As previously explained, the Mollo community believes nature is a "mother" who should be protected because of its role in nurturing, giving birth, and sustaining generations (Zhafirah et al., 2023). The symbolism of nature as a "mother" ultimately connects nature with Mollo indigenous women spiritually

and culturally, as they believe. Through practices such as weaving, farming, and traditional rituals, Mollo indigenous women build a life with nature. For the Mollo people, weaving is not just a thread of cultural work, but far more; it can be a medium for conveying knowledge about the colors of nature, ancestral history, and the seasons. The Mollo people also believe that motifs printed on weaving often depict natural landscapes in depth, including symbols, lakes, rivers, and forests considered sacred to them.



Figure 1. The former marble quarry in Mollo village (<https://mamaaleta.org/>)

The Mollo people's belief in ancestral culture remains deeply rooted. The relationship between women and nature in the Mollo community serves as a bridge between the ancestors. In many rituals, women lead communication with ancestral and nature guardian spirits, strengthening the community's connection to its ancestors. This process demonstrates that women are not only the primary actors in daily life but also the holders of local wisdom passed down through generations in the Mollo people of East Nusa Tenggara. Essentially, when the Mollo people care for nature, they are also indirectly caring for the "Mother," believed to be the source of all life for the Mollo people, from the present to future generations. Understanding the cosmological framework of the Mollo indigenous community, which sees the struggle of Mollo women not only as a matter of women's resistance to the environment but also as a means of maintaining their culture and beliefs. Natural threats such as marble mining that enter the Mollo indigenous community's territory are not only seen as damage to the physical environment, but as a violation of the values of belief and the balance of life of the Mollo community. When mining companies destroy mountains and seize community lands, the Mollo community feels that part of their body has been forcibly taken away. Therefore, resistance to mining is not only driven by ecological interests but also by an awareness of the cultural and spiritual values held by the indigenous community of Mollo village. By understanding this cosmology and by looking at the struggle of women in Mollo, we reveal the spirit of women's resistance against the loss of meaning in life and of their identity as part of nature, which is considered "Mother" itself.

Resistance through weaving as a structural strategy for Mollo village women

The Mollo indigenous community in East Nusa Tenggara, led by Mama Aleta Baun, demonstrates a very different model of resistance. While social movements are typically associated with violent demonstrations, lawsuits, political maneuvers, and other acts of rebellion, the women of Mollo village resist through weaving (Oematan et al., 2020). This action also provides a profound introduction to cultural resistance rooted in their identity and daily practices: *weaving* or *menenun*. Their weaving is not merely a form of cultural expression but a political strategy deemed effective and meaningful for confronting mining corporations.



Figure 2. Women weaving, in Mollo traditional village (Antara News, 2013)

The weaving culture of the Mollo people is inseparable from their way of life. They use cotton as their primary weaving material, employ natural dyes and motifs, and even use weaving tools derived from the surrounding environment. The colors poured into the woven fabric have various meanings; the dyes are usually derived from root fibers, leaves, tree bark, and stones considered sacred to them. The motifs produced by the Mollo people carry spiritual meanings that are not mere ornaments but markers of historical narratives, ancestral myths, relationships with nature, and even customary territorial boundaries (Turu et al., 2016). Therefore, the act of weaving was chosen by the Mollo people because it is considered a way for Mollo women to "reread" and record nature and their histories into visual forms filled with meaning and sacred symbols of their beliefs.

For the Mollo people, weaving is not merely a domestic activity or a handicraft for Mollo women, but rather a medium for transmitting Mollo ecological and cultural knowledge. Each woven piece contains knowledge about the garden seasons, wind direction, soil color, and ancestral stories that serve as the spiritual foundation of the community. When Mollo women weave, they are actually reaffirming their relationship with the land, mountains, water, and all the natural elements around them. Therefore, weaving is not considered trivial to the Mollo people, because each piece of knitting they make carries the meaning of the beliefs they hold to this day (Oematan et al., 2024).



Figure 3. The traditional village community of Mollo using Mollo woven cloth (Turu et al., 2016).



Figure 4. Mollo woven cloth with a Pauf motif (Turu et al., 2016)



Figure 5. Mollo woven cloth with a Lotis motif (Turu et al., 2016).

The motifs on Mollo woven cloth are not mere decoration; all their arrangements, strokes, lines, colors, and shapes convey meaning (Velrahga et al., 2023). As shown in the picture above, there are Lotis and Pauf motifs in Mollo woven cloth. The weaving skills of the Mollo people are also considered a form of respect for traditional Mollo women (Turu et al., 2016). This means that in Mollo society, women who are good at weaving will be respected by the community more than those who are less skilled. In addition to being a sign of respect, this woven cloth is also a welcome gesture in certain missions. Usually, this expression is followed by traditional religious speech, commonly called "*natoni*," or a form of acceptance (Turu et al., 2016).



Figure 6. Mollo woven cloth with a Lotis motif (source: Turu et al., 2016).

The Pauf motif of the Mollo people is woven into sarongs and blankets, which are usually used by kings and rulers. This motif usually has a red-and-white base, often slightly filled with yellow, blue, orange, purple, black, and green. The Pauf motif is woven vertically, composed of patterns resembling small purple triangles that contain black, orange, and green. Next, there is woven cloth with the Lotis motif, usually cloth with this Lotis motif is used by ordinary people. Lotis woven cloth is made into sarongs or scarves and is often worn by women in the village of North Mollo. In appearance, the Lotis woven cloth motif usually has a diamond motif, with green and brown colour arrangements as shown in the picture (Turu et al., 2016).

The implicit meaning and message the Mollo indigenous people seek to convey ultimately make weaving a form of resistance against mining companies in Mollo (Frans et al., 2020). When marble mining companies began entering the Mollo customary territory, they brought not only waste-disposal tools but also a modern development logic that eliminated the land's meaning as a "Mother" for the Mollo people. Sadly, this will also disrupt the daily lives of the Mollo people, whose entire lives depend on the wealth and availability of customs. For indigenous communities, especially the Mollo community, mining not only damages the physical environment but also destroys the cosmological and social ecological order that has been built between humans and nature. This is a serious threat to the Mollo community. For the Mollo community, resisting mining companies with violence or physical force is not a primary option. This is especially true in the context of indigenous communities, who often lack access to formal legal authority. National media and laws are useless for them, as they

lack political support. This is where the idea of collective creativity emerged, with Mollo village women, led by Mama Aleta Baun, weaving at the mining site as their primary form of resistance (Oematan et al., 2024). This action became powerful and symbolic, attracting considerable political attention, even on the international stage. Weaving on land about to be destroyed is a peaceful act of occupation, a form of reclaiming a living space that has been continuously seized by capitalist forces.

The Mollo community ultimately raised symbolic attention. The resistance carried out by women in Mollo Village through weaving is read as part of the politics of the body and space. In this context, women's bodies become a medium of resistance against violence, harassment, threats, and intimidation. When they place their bodies in the area to be excavated by the company, the bodies of Mollo women are marked as witnesses and barriers to such destruction. This symbol also signifies the essence of the female body, which is often underestimated by patriarchal power but becomes, instead, a shield for the main actors in the ecological struggle. Mollo indigenous women are not merely "victims" of mining activities, but also active subjects who defend their land, water, and mountains using tools they possess and make from nature, supported by local knowledge, solidarity networks, and cultural practices. The Mollo weaving movement also serves as an antithesis to the cold, greedy, and highly mechanized industrial machinery. Thus, weaving is not a culturally threatening barrier, but a silent critique of hegemonic development models. Weaving demonstrates that resistance need not be direct and can occur through consistent cultural processes rooted in customs and spiritual beliefs.

The women's resistance in Mollo is also seen as a form of ecofeminist framework, namely through the articulation of a theory that examines the relationship between the era of the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women. Within this theoretical framework, women are considered to have a closeness to nature not only because of their biological nature, but rather because of social, economic, and cultural experiences that make women more sensitive to environmental damage. The ecofeminist movement in Mollo village was initiated by Mama Aleta Baun, an indigenous woman at the forefront of preserving the ecosystem, who has experienced environmental damage firsthand (Dalupe, 2020). She realized that saving nature cannot be done solely through a technocratic approach; it must also involve restoring the emotional, spiritual, and cultural relationships between humans and nature. By encouraging Mollo women to weave at the mining site, Mama Aleta is demonstrating that women's strength lies not only in muscle but also in the ability to care, steadfastness, and the patience to uphold principle. Mama Aleta Baun said that:

"Rocks, trees, and water are our names. We Easterners do not destroy stones, water, names, or trees, because that is where our ancestors reside. Stones are not just empty stones; they contain surnames. Our surnames are born from stone, from water, from wood. And that is why we call them *Faut*." *Kanaf* , *Oe Kanaf* , and *Haut Kanaf* " (Aleta Baun).

Ultimately, the Mollo women's resistance attracted widespread attention, from the media, NGOs, and other indigenous communities. Their peaceful action became an inspiring example of how culture can truly be a tool of resistance. After years of peaceful action, the mining company finally ceased operations, proving that cultural strategies are as effective as

confrontational or formal legal approaches. Furthermore, more than simply halting mining operations, this struggle also restored the dignity of the Mollo people's culture, which was once been threatened with extinction. Ultimately, weaving regained a significant place in the lives of indigenous communities, not only as a legacy but also as a form of cultural resilience that persists to this day. Mollo village women are known not only as weavers but also as the vanguard of their homeland and the mountains, protecting the environment and nature around Mollo, East Nusa Tenggara.

The figure of Mama Aleta Baun as a leader of indigenous women in the environmental movement



Figure 7. Mollo indigenous women (source: mamaaleta.org)

Aleta Baun, commonly known as Mama Aleta Baun, comes from Mollo, South Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara. She is a strong representative of indigenous women's resistance in maintaining the living space and dignity of the indigenous people of Mollo village. Mama Aleta has a history of resistance against the exploitation of nature by the *PT So'e Indah Marmer Company* and *PT Karya Asta Alam*, which began in 1996 (Oematan et al., 2024). The Sowe customary territory is a source of life for the local community which is threatened with extinction due to the marble mining company that ignores the ecological and spiritual values of the indigenous community. In Timorese cosmology, the earth is reflected as the human body. This philosophy ultimately became the foundation of Mama Aleta's struggle to maintain harmony between humans and nature.

As a form of resistance, Mama Aleta mobilized women to weave at mining sites as a peaceful protest strategy full of symbolic meaning, this traditional weaving activity is a form of cultural expression of Timorese women that is transformed into a unique and effective political action. This movement is not only a symbol but also a manifestation of local cultural resilience, while dismantling the patriarchal assumptions inherent in the local social structure. Amidst ecological, social and cultural injustice, Mama Aleta succeeded in closing five mining sites and transforming one of the former mines on Mount Naunus into a community-based ecotourism (Mongabay, 2013). Aleta's success has come with significant risks. She has faced numerous trials, ranging from threats, physical violence, terror, to gender intimidation paid for by the company (Mongabay, 2017). Mama Aleta has been beaten, then stabbed in the leg,

and even hid in the forest for three months with her newborn baby. Tragically, this reality shows that environmental advocacy, especially that carried out by women, is not free from structural dangers and repressive actions brought about by state interests. Nevertheless, the fighting spirit of the Mollo community has never waned. Indigenous communities continue to voice that direct environmental destruction is a form of violation of human rights, because the impact of mining that does not care about ecosystems has an impact on people's access to basic resources, such as clean water and food shortages.

Mama Aleta continues to emphasize the importance of women's roles in the environmental movement (Ndamunamu & Mesa, 2024). In a patriarchal society that tends to marginalize women's voices and rights, Mama Aleta's leadership also represents a new form of struggle and resistance. She successfully demonstrates that women are not merely victims of ecological damage but also agents of change capable of organizing, leading, and fighting for ecological justice. This reflects an ecofeminist approach that also highlights the close connection between the oppression experienced by women and the oppression experienced by women within a social and political system that is increasingly exploitative.



Figure 8. Mama Aleta receiving the *Goldman Environmental Prize* in 2013 (Goldman Prize)

Aleta's critique of the state's top-down conservation model is also a key point in the discourse on natural resource governance. She rejects the idea of designating customary areas as national parks or state forests (Oematan et al., 2020). This approach often segregates the rights of many indigenous communities. According to Mama Aleta, the state is a "tourist" that only profits without understanding the ecological, social, and spiritual context of local communities. Instead, Mama Aleta also advocates for the recognition and strengthening of community-based management, in which indigenous communities play an active role as agents of ecosystem stewardship, having inherited natural resources from generation to generation.

The long struggle of Mama Aleta and the Mollo women paid off, when in 2013, Mama Aleta Baun received an award as *the Goldman Environmental Prize*. She also donated an award from *The Goldman Environmental Prize* as an endowment fund, founding Mama Aleta Fund (MAF) in 2107. Mama Aleta's struggle is not over. To ensure the sustainability of the

struggle, Mama Aleta took a strategic step by establishing a traditional school in collaboration with Gadjah Mada University. They not only aim to preserve local wisdom, but also to instill the values of local wisdom with spiritual ecological awareness in the younger generation. In its curriculum, the traditional leaders teach the philosophical meaning of the relationship between humans with the earth, God, and ancestors. In addition, a weaving school called *Sekolah Tenun Nausus* was also held here. Mollo village women are taught in more detail how to weave properly. This activity is also accompanied by knowledge and teaching on women's leadership to reduce shame and change body behavior. With this, it is hoped that the shame that Mollo women have can be reduced, so that at least they no longer hide or avoid conversation.



Figures 9. Mollo women attending traditional weaving schools (source: mamaaleta.org)

Aleta's spirituality is also a crucial dimension of the movement she founded. She combines religious values with environmental conservation principles through initiatives such as "*Green Christmas*" which aims to align faith teachings with ecological responsibility. These efforts significantly strengthen the moral destiny of Mama Aleta Baun's struggle and broaden the commitment of community to environmental sustainability. The synergy between spirituality and ecology in Mollo reflects how faith can strengthen commitment to sustainable living together. Aleta's story is living proof that courage, consistency, and grassroots organizing can spark collective action to protect the environment and human rights. This struggle teaches us that change does not necessarily come from centers of power, but can grow from remote villages, from the voices of women, from indigenous communities, and from the unwavering courage to fight injustice. Amid the ongoing global environmental crisis, Mama Aleta Baun's struggle in Mollo Village serves as an inspiration and role model for equitable, community-based environmental movements worldwide.

Conclusion

The resistance of indigenous Mollo women against various mining activities through weaving is a unique and very feminine form of struggle. Amidst the various threats of marble mining expansion that threaten the land they consider "Mother" and their ancestors, Mollo women do not choose violence, but instead present a resistance strategy based on symbolic culture. Weaving is not only a cultural practice inherited from their ancestors, but also a political tool

used to reclaim the living space and dignity of indigenous communities. Through weaving, Mollo women, led by Mama Aleta Baun, convey that land, forests, water, and mountains are not only resources but also parts of their bodies and souls, considered like Mother. By positioning their bodies in the mining area while weaving, the Mollo people are not only introducing tradition and culture but also asserting weaving as part of their identity. This resistance ultimately shows that culture can be a source of resistance no less powerful than violence or formal legal instruments.

Aleta Baun's struggle is a concrete representation of the reality of indigenous women who maintain the sustainability of life and maintain cultural identity. Through her weaving, Mama Aleta Baun seeks to convey that women are not only the guardians of the household but also the guardians of the earth, maintaining and protecting human living space. The success of Mama Aleta Baun's struggle is not only marked by the cessation of mining activities, but also by increased public awareness of the importance of environmental conservation grounded in local wisdom. Mama Aleta has become a symbol of resistance to the exploratory development model through the community base she created. Thus, Mama Aleta Baun's struggle proves that women's courage, resilience, and local wisdom are among the great strengths in defending, caring for, and loving the earth against humans.

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