Cultural Identity in the Shackles of Modernization: The Case of Mentawai Indigenous Peoples

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Abstract: *This paper examines the shackles of cultural identity in the new flow of the times. Mentawai people as a community group have a local identity as a characteristic of an ethnic group. However, the attraction between local culture and the pace of modernization is getting stronger, where the influence of development hegemony and policies conflict with the cultural identity of the Mentawai people. So, it raises the chaos that is still ongoing until now. Through literature study and critical anthropology view, it shows that human has the potential to create creativity and self-adjustment. However, Mentawai people are limited and suppressed by social factors and conditions, and exploited by the 'authorities'. This means that the reality of being Mentawai people is not created by nature but by humans, namely humans who have the power to 'manipulate conditions' and patent meanings that suit their minds that are full of conflict, illusion, and distortion. Mentawai people are in a 'false consciousness' that modernization helps them see the world better and have consciously stuttered (cultural backwardness) from that objective condition. Culture is deliberately clashed with the pace of modernization in various elements of life. However, Mentawai people are not rigid and make adjustments from the politically charged situation that makes them marginalized, exploited, and subordinated. Cultural tactics (cultural meaning) to follow the pace of modernization are used. Modernization and globalization are considered 'interaction spaces' in which there is a contestation arena of various elements of human life.*

Keywords: *Cultural Identity; Modernization; Mentawai; Shackles.*

A.   INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia are experiencing contact with the pace of modernization and affecting it (Andalas, 2018; Aprianti et al., 2022; Larasati, 2018; Mulyono, 2017; Putri, 2018; Suryandari, 2017; Susanto, 2018). Their lives are inseparable from the increasingly complex development process of the times, which has a significant impact on the living space of Indigenous Peoples. However, the contact between Indigenous Peoples and modernity is not fully acceptable to some communities. However, over time, the lives of Indigenous Peoples have been slowly degraded by globalization and modernization (westernization). One of the 'viruses' of modernization is transmitted through development programs (Gilbert, 2022; Jemadu, 2003).

An example of the failure of development in indigenous communities is discussed in Tania M. Li's book *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice Politics* (2007) and *Land's End: Capilist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier* (2014). Both books illustrate the failure of development programs carried out on Indigenous Peoples. They are both 'spades' that reveal the paradoxical side of development as well as 'sledgehammers' that break the assumption that development is always about good things and prosperity. According to Fakih (2002) the ideology of modernization embraced by the development movement(*ism*) in Indonesia has arrived at a point that is both fragile and terrifying. Fragile because it still rests on an outdated paradigm; terrifying because it constructs a singular view of progress.

This can be seen in the Mentawai Indigenous People who, since the 1970s, have become easy targets for development programs (Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012; Reeves, 1999; Satria, 2020). This is based on the assumption that the Mentawai people are still 'left behind' in West Sumatra (Bakker, 2007; Eindhoven, 2007, 2009; Hammons, 2010; Weintré, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to be liberated from backwardness towards 'progress'. The forms of development programs that target the joints of Mentawai people's lives are the elimination of local beliefs and cultural agendas (Atsani et al., 2021; Coronese, 1986; Delfi, 2012, 2013a; Glossanto, 2023; Ika, 2013; Islami et al., 2023; Rozi & Taufik, 2020; Schefold, 1991; Sihombing, 1979; Yolanda & Willis, 2018; Yuniarto, 2021), collect/settle (Delfi, 2005; Habibah & Fauzi, 2021; Sabaggalet et al., 2021; Sabaggalet, 2023; Schefold, 1985), forest and land tenure (Darmanto, 2011; Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012; Sulthani, 2019; Syafrudin & Telaumbanua, 2021), food transition (Azhari et al., 2017; Darmanto, 2022, 2023; Delfi, 2018, 2011; Erwin, 2017; Erwin et al., 2022, 2023; Irwandi, 2021, 2022; Irwandi & Erwin, 2022; Irwandi & Saleleubaja, 2021; Mitra & Erwin, 2022; Persoon, 1992; Pradipta, 2019; Ridwan et al., 2019; Saleleubaja, 2020; Samaloisa et al., 2023), and political and economic intervention (Delfi, 2013b; Delfi & Weintré, 2014a; Erwin, 2022; Rudito, 2013; Sabaggalet, 2023; Samaloisa, 2020b; Schefold, 1998, 2001; Zakaria, 1996).

Four decades of government intervention have had a considerable impact on the cultural identity of the Mentawai people. The forest is not just a place to fulfill needs, but also a place to live and has religious aspects that make Mentawai people balanced with nature. Uma (traditional house) is not only a place to live but also the root and space of Mentawai culture. Likewise, sago is not just food but holds sacredness and their adaptation to the environment. The identity of the Mentawai people who want to be uniform with the concept of 'national' has ignored their traditionality. Therefore, the shackles of modernization need to be reviewed, because the 'arrows' of development programs have pierced the heart of the Mentawai people's socio-cultural life.

However, in the author's opinion, taking the thoughts of Webb Keane (1997) as long as people understand themselves as marginal or local, or regional people, then it is the most correct, appropriate and basic reference to counteract the influence of their own weaknesses, namely modernization (Kahn, 2016; Li, 2002). This is because so far the view that traditional communities are minority communities and can be controlled if defined spatially and socially in diversity in Indonesia has been built (Kahn, 2016).

The culmination of this socio-cultural change is about alienation, where Mentawai is defined by a state of helplessness, meaninglessness, and isolation. This is also the source of alienation that is measured by the way the community produces through traditional ways. In contrast to Li (2018, 2002) The term 'marginalization' refers to the concept of a relationship that involves a social construction. As a result, the Mentawai community is experiencing a traditionalization process where it becomes an image for 'foreigners including the central government' with the term often used by the government, namely culturization (Kahn, 2016; Sutopo & Shabrina, 2022). So the problem faced by Mentawai today regarding the struggle between modernization and traditionalization is an empirical problem related to the hegemony claim which sees Mentawai not with its own glasses (ethnocentric). Mentawai must be interpreted in the ways of Mentawai people not in other ways that are considered the most correct or most appropriate (cultural relativism). Here lies the duality of the problem between modernization and traditionalization for Mentawai people because it is both constraining and enabling.

Li (2002) suggests that great intentions to prosper the people are by no means a guarantee that such prosperity will be realized. If culture is an attitude of Mentawai-ness, immanent, and interpreted as a way of balance between life consisting of structures, superstructures, and infrastructures that create constancy in survival then there is no need for development strategies. Instead, what the Mentawai people expect is a strategy where they can survive and become 'modern' while remaining traditional and not 'forced' to change. This is what is called cultural tactics, where cultural capital is utilized in an organized way to reach a line that is considered to be able to keep them away from social problems that are measured by the government. 'Letting be different' does not necessarily make them (read: Mentawai people) unhappy, because the philosophical measure of development is the extent to which the development program makes people happy.

B.   METHOD

The issue of the intersection between indigenous communities and the pace of modernization is something that anthropology studies closely. Society as a human being has a life that is governed by ancestral values and so does modernization have rules that form a change in human life. Therefore, the anthropological view can be used to analyze the phenomenon between the Mentawai Indigenous People and modernization that affects the aspect of their life (socio-culture). The perspectives used are cultural interpretive and critical anthropology.

The theoretical perspective of cultural interpretation (American cultural anthropology) seeks to explore the emic view of the community in relation to the perceptions, values and knowledge of the local community (local wisdom) (Geertz, 1973). From the emic view, then captured and understood by the researcher to be explained back simply (ethic). It is this ethical view that becomes the foundation in explaining the development phenomenon that occurs in the Mentawai community based on the reality conveyed by the Mentawai people (interpretation).

Then, the perspective of critical anthropology (Frankurt school) which has two main essences, namely related to identity and problems found in cultural institutions (Dermawan, 2013). The problem of identity, which means that humans are seen as objects (Tasnur & Sudrajat, 2020). Problems in cultural institutions often occur in the

fields of religion and the development of science, which causes a dichotomy of exclusivity and inclusiveness. Critical theory seeks to make a fundamental change in society by constructing interpretations of reality and trying to take a historical approach to the symptoms of events that occur in society (Afiff, 2022). The nature of this theory also emphasizes the researcher to think critically, be suspicious of reality and pay attention to historical aspects. Through the records (literature) contained in various research results, it is key to critically examine the records because they contain a historical value. Thus, it can be captured that the symptoms and events of development gradually have a significant impact on the social and cultural values of the Mentawai people.

This research also relies on a literature review collected from journals and books. The aim is to explore and explain the struggle between Indigenous Peoples who are the object of modernization. So whether between the two - where traditionalization and modernization influence each other; whether modernization is more dominating and rebukes local culture; or vice versa, the community maintains cultural identity despite the continuous onslaught of modernization and is increasingly pushed out. In addition, the data is also supported by the author's view during the research in Mentawai community for about 5 years.

C.   LITERATUR STUDY

One of the approaches used in the practice of development in indigenous communities is modernization, which presupposes a social change so that they are in line with the development of the world (Sartika et al., 2017). This approach prioritizes economic and technological advancement as the standard of fulfillment and the hallmark of a modern society. On that basis, modernization overrides the traditionalization found in indigenous communities. This modernization ideology is legitimized by the theory of evolution that was born after the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution (1789-1799) (Finkler, 1996; Larraín, 1994). The theory of evolution explains that society will develop from its simple form to its complex form. Comte (2009) mentions three phases that make social evolution in society: the theological phase, where society is controlled by priests and driven by religious reasoning; the metaphysical phase, where society is driven by its philosophical thinking; and finally the scientific/positivist phase, when society understands scientific laws and experiments. In other words, modernization ideology requires a linear change in society-from primitive society to modern society (evolution).

Adherents of modernization ideology arrogantly place groups driven by ancestral values (such as Indigenous Peoples) as being at the most basic stage of development. As such, Indigenous Peoples are seen and placed as 'backward' societies that need to be transformed with 'modern' ones. Unfortunately, the indicator of 'modern' always refers to the Western (Eurocentric) paradigm (Daraiseh, 2021). As a result, the development carried out is always incompatible and contradictory with the local values of Indigenous Peoples (cultural identity[1]).

Indigenous Peoples are one of the communities that have always been (and will continue to be) targeted by various development programs in Indonesia (government and non-government agencies). According to Duncan (2008)

Development programs targeting Indigenous Peoples or isolated tribes - isolated communities have been prevalent since the 1970s. Since then there have also been criticisms and various problems, but the development projects continue to this day. The dominant criticism is about the top-down development approach that harms and coerces Indigenous Peoples so that the development program is successful (Lee, 2020). But the question arises whether it can solve the problems faced by the community. The success of development programs is only measured by statistical conditions being the main indicator (Midgley, 1995). On the other hand, development programs only tend to carry out civilization missions that make it seem as if Indigenous Peoples have no civilization.

Therefore, a critical view of the reality that has occurred in Mentawai can be traced from the history of development programs that have been carried out. Development is discussed as the key to the welfare of the community, but it has a dark side that goes unnoticed. Critical anthropology has shown that the two sides of the coin produced by development programs (modernization) have positive and negative impacts. Thus, both rely on the words 'for the sake of welfare' but do not look into 'whether the community is welfare'.

D.   RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION

1.   Institutional Religion and Local Beliefs

As an indigenous community, the Mentawai people have a way of life that they call *Arat Sabulungan*. The regulation of the balance between the two realms contained in *Arat Sabulungan* gives the Mentawai people the strength to survive and adapt to change. The teachings of *Arat Sabulungan* are considered as mores to build relationships with nature, ruling spirits, fellow humans, and animals and plants that share a soul (*magere*) to create a harmonious and balanced life. If this relationship is disrupted, a ritual will be performed led by the *Sikerei* (*shaman*) so that the calamities and illnesses experienced by the Mentawai people can be 'cured'. Through traditional rituals (*punen*) that are performed in order to recreate the equilibrium between the two lives.

The practice of communal life of Mentawai people with *Arat Sabulungan* ritual (traditional belief) as a pathology of modernity resulted in their relocation (Glossanto, 2023; Parlan, 2019). The settlement pattern of uma (communal house) of Siberut Mentawai people scattered in the river valley into the unification of uma-uma in the relocation village is a form of ruler intervention based on a view that is not 'neutral' towards Mentawai people. It began in the Dutch colonial era and continued into the New Order era. The idea of combining uma in the relocation village with a program called development is not only to control the Mentawai people but also to change the living practices that become the symbol of 'backwardness'. In addition to relocation, the religious project that takes place in Mentawai also shows the outsider's construction towards Mentawai people is built on discriminatory judgment and aims at the ethnic structuring politics of the ruler.

The influence of outside dominant religious insistence on Arat Sabulungan tradition is considered as a culture of 'coercion' (Delfi, 2012, 2013a; Schefold, 2001; Sihombing, 1979). In 1954 a meeting of three religions, namely Protestant Christianity, Islam and Arat Sabulungan, was held. In that meeting, there were two (2) important points obtained, namely:

1. The *Arat Sabulungan* religion must be forcibly abolished with the help of the police.
2. Within 3 months, the natives were given the freedom to choose Protestant Christianity or Islam. If this was not done, the *Arat Sabulungan* cult equipment would be burned and those who practiced it would be punished/prisoned.

This meeting was held in each sub-district, namely Muara Siberut, Muara Sikabaluan, Sioban and Sikakap (Delfi, 2005). The point of the meeting was that Arat Sabulungan was officially revoked and the Mentawai people were required to choose one of the religions at that time, namely: Christianity, Protestantism or Islam². With the abolition of *Arat Sabulungan*, Mentawai culture is under threat (Delfi, 2005, 2012, 2013a). Because Arat Sabulungan is the essence of true culture, this change occurs because the policy issued by the government means overhauling the mentality of all cultures in the Mentawai Islands (Coronese, 1986; Delfi, 2005; Yulia & Kaksim, 2017; Yulia & Naldi, 2018).

Indigenous groups or adherents of traditional religions such as: Sikerei, should not be treated discriminatorily, as they are considered "non-religious", while all forms of public services often make religion the "key". This means that without mentioning an "official religion", people will find it difficult to obtain civil rights, such as services to obtain ID cards (Kartu Tanda Penduduk), marriage records, and so on. The above legal discrimination is attempted to be eliminated through Law No. 23/2006 on Population Administration. Actually, there is no such thing as recognized and unrecognized religions or official and unofficial religions in Indonesia. This misunderstanding occurred because of the 1974 Decree of the Minister of Home Affairs regarding the filling of the religion column in the KTP (Identity Card) which only lists five (5) religions. However, the decree was canceled during the time of President Abdurrahman Wahid (2001-2002), because it was considered contrary to Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution on freedom of religion (Eindhoven, 2007; Sihombing, 1979).

However, the point is that discriminatory efforts, coercion, fear of *Arat Sabulungan* adherents in Siberut are still felt today. So that in the part of the village that is close to the coast, it is rare to see even almost no rituals, *sikerei* and *uma* who still practice *Arat Sabulungan*. *Arat Sabulungan* and its practices can be seen in the upstream part of the Siberut hinterland although it has also been integrated with official religions in Indonesia. So there is an assumption that the *kapuaranan sasareu* or outsider religion is Christianity, Protestantism and Islam, while the *kapuaranan mentawai* or Mentawai religion is *Arat Sabulungan* (Delfi, 2012).

2.   Forests and Land Tenure

The life of Mentawai people in South Siberut is very dependent on the forest and land that can be utilized easily. Since the ancestors (teteu siburuk) until now the new generation of Mentawai plant many plants in their fields and gardens. the forest area is quite large, the Mentawai people utilize Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) such as agarwood, rattan and manau plants. The forest or in the language of the Mentawai people called leleu is the heart of life for the Mentawai people. This is illustrated by the long and large shape of the uma, all materials such as wood are

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taken from the forest. Their tools, medicine, food and shelter depend on the forest which they trust through Taikaleleu (the ruler of the forest). Besides being a living space for the Mentawai people, the forest is a habitat for fauna and flora. However, due to the high use of forest materials and the utilization of animals and plants by the Mentawai people, the availability of forest materials is threatened, so efforts are made to conserve the forest. Because the Mentawai forest has endemic plants and primates that are protected.

In addition, the potential for timber is also a glimpse for timber companies. During the New Order (*Orba*) Indonesia, the rise of capitalism and the demand for timber exports had an impact on the Mentawai people. This new face of capitalism was emphasized through interventions into important elements of Mentawai life.

The designation and use of forest areas by private and government parties in the Mentawai Islands Regency include the designated KSA (Natural Reserve Area) or KPA (Nature Conservation Area) of ± 183,397 Ha including the Siberut National Park (TNS) area on Siberut Island. The designation was based on the Decree of the Minister of Forestry Number K.304/Menhut-II/2011 dated June 9, 2011 concerning Changes in Forest Area Designation to Non-Forest Area covering an area of 96,904 hectares, changes between forest area functions covering an area of 147,213 hectares, designation of non-forest area to forest area covering an area of 9,906 hectares. In West Sumatra Province, the Production Forest (HP) on Siberut Island is managed in the form of IUPHHK-HA by PT Salaki Summa Sejahtera (PT SSS) covering an area of ± 48,420 ha according to the Minister of Forestry Decree No. 413/Menhut-II/2004 dated October 19, 2004, reserved an area of ± 79,795 ha on Siberut Island (former IUPHHK-HA of Andalas Madani Cooperative) for IUPHHK-Ecosystem Restoration to PT Global Green through the Minister of Forestry letter No. S.769/Menhut-VI/2009 dated September 28, 2009. Logging companies began popping up all over the Mentawai Islands. This was the beginning of the destruction of the forest and local cultural traditions (Darmanto & Setyowati, 2012; Erwin et al., 2019; Merari et al., 2021; Mitchell & Tilson, 1986; Persoon & Schefold, 1985; Zakaria, 1996).

In 2017, the Investment Coordinating Board issued an IUPHHK-HTI principle permit based on the Principle Approval Letter (RATTUSIP) issued in 2017 for PT Biomass Andalan Energi (BAE) to cut down 20,030 ha of forest in Central and North Siberut and convert it into a Kaliandra plantation. The Governor of West Sumatra at that time, Irwan Prayitno, also supported and issued an environmental permit for 19,876.59 ha. Then many people rejected the HTI. But until now PT BAE is running and has cleared land. But it did not last long, in 2019 PT BAE stopped operating until now. This was triggered by high operational costs and lack of raw material production potential. The influx of companies operating in the forest and exploiting the forest has resulted in not only forest destruction but the sustainability of the Mentawai people's socio-cultural life. Likewise, conserving the forest has hindered the Mentawai Indigenous People's access to the forest that is the backbone of their lives. The forest is not only their living space but also a customary domain that is claimed based on a historical narrative called customary land.

The survival of Indigenous Peoples is inseparable from their customary territories. Recognition of Indigenous Peoples needs to be followed up with recognition of customary territories, including the forest areas that are the source of their lives. The establishment of the PPUMA local regulation is a legal guarantee for

the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the Mentawai Islands. However, the recognition of customary forests from the central government has not yet been issued, providing a gap for timber companies to grab their land, natural resources and culture. Therefore, a decree was issued by Mentawai Regent Yudas Sabaggalet as an implementation of the Mentawai Islands Regional Regulation No. 11/2017 on the Recognition and Protection of Uma as a Union of Indigenous Peoples.

3. Resettlement and Food Transition

The Mentawai people experienced all forms of colonization that occurred in Indonesia, from the Dutch colonial to the Japanese occupation until it finally fell to the independent Government of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945. However, the recognition of the Mentawai Islands as part of Indonesia began in the 1950s, where Mentawai was led by a Wedana Coordinator who was directly responsible to the Governor of West Sumatra KDH level I (Delfi, 2005). It was only in the 1970s that the Mentawai region changed its status to become the Mentawai Islands Special Project Authority (OPKM) or the Mentawai Islands Development Authority (nine years later) with the aim of increasing development in the Mentawai Islands.

The Mentawai community development plan through the intervention of Otorita Pengembangan Kepulauan Mentawai (OPKM) and the Department of Social Affairs (Depsos) has created a 'new' settlement for the Mentawai people. PKMT (Resettlement of Terasing Communities) is considered by the government as a form of isolation of the development and welfare of the people (Darmanto, 2022; Irwandi & Erwin, 2022; Pradipta, 2019; Ridwan et al., 2019). Their houses are built according to a uniform design in zoned areas next to rivers or beaches. They were forced to leave *uma*[3]. This has given rise to terms that refer to the concept of settlement. The term emerged with the concept of *barasi*[4] (village) is actually the foundation that the Dutch inherited in the development of the Mentawai settlement program. The purpose of this *barasi* is to combine separate uma-uma so that they can be coordinated and centralized.

Later, the resettlement program in Mentawai was called resettlement for the national development program. The construction of these houses refers more to a house that is completely different from the *uma* of the Mentawai people. A house that has one bedroom and a terrace, as well as a kitchen space. The program also provided seedlings and agricultural tools initiated by the Department of Social Affairs in the West Sumatra region at the time.

These resettlement houses are houses built by the government so they must follow government rules. This program is part of the PKMT (Re-establishment of Alienated Communities) mission that began in Siberut in 1972 (Delfi & Weintré, 2014a). The purpose of this *telemen* was to educate the Mentawai 'alienated community' with government regulations. After that, in 1979 the village government law No. 5 of 1979 was issued. Thus, villages were formed with official names. There are 50 villages in Siberut and they are in the administrative area of Padang Pariaman (Delfi, 2005, 2013b). Then, after the issuance of Law No. 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Autonomy, the Mentawai Islands became its own district in West Sumatra.

This law authorizes the Mentawai Islands Regency Government to form its own government system using the term Village or Nagari. This is because they are included in the West Sumatra region which is dominated by Minangkabau so that many districts name their village areas with Nagari. However, in Mentawai there is a polemic that the village in the Sabirut dialect is *laggai* or *pulaggajat* (Delfi, 2005, 2013b; Delfi & Weintré, 2014b). *Laggai* government is a form of government based on *Arat Sabulungan* in Mentawai that refers to ethnic identity, religion, race and origin that is bound by culture to do self regulation (Samaloisa, 2020a). However, the term *laggai* is not suitable for naming villages because in some dialects it has a negative meaning, such as in the Sabirut dialect meaning genitals. So to harmonize, the village system is used. So that the villages resulting from the PKMT and OPKM were called villages and hamlets.

The changes caused by this settlement program have had a negative impact on the Mentawai people's food. Sago is the main food for Mentawai people besides banana (*maggok*) and taro (*gettek*). However, after they were resettled rice was introduced to the Mentawai people. But long before that, according to Delfi (2005) The introduction of rice to the Mentawai people occurred during the Japanese occupation. Mentawai people were forced to grow rice and consume it. After Indonesian independence the local government issued a decree that every young man who wanted to get married had to plant rice on a plot of land. This was implemented for the main purpose of the government targeting rice cultivation in coastal villages in order to improve development level indicators and proof of local administration performance (Persoon, 1992:190). In 1984, Indonesia was a country with an agricultural population of more than 55% that became self-sufficient in rice due to deliberate government intervention.

Rice is a widely used national food source and is used in traditional ceremonies by people on the islands of Java, Bali and Sumatra. Rice is also symbolized as a symbol of fertility, prosperity, offerings/rituals and wealth as well as being a prerequisite of 'civilization'. Therefore people who do not eat rice are considered low, poor and uncivilized (Soemarwoto, 1985: 208; Weintré, 2006). The main idea of sago to rice transition in Mentawai has been spoken by one of the German missionaries in the 1920s Börger that he believed rice should be planted instead of sago and taro because it is considered more nutritious and considered as a symbol of criticality, progress and development (Persoon, 1992). In addition, the bottom line is that sago is considered 'jungle life', 'primitive' and 'an obstacle to progress' as well as 'the food of the lazy'.

The transition of sago to rice became a complex issue that came at the expense of natural swamp vegetation and sago fields. In addition, food production here touches on ecology, religion, land use, natural resource exploitation and the division and use of labor. Rice production in Mentawai often fails because it does not take into account the socio-political and economic context of the Mentawai people (Darmanto, 2022; Delfi, 2011; Persoon, 1992). For Mentawai people, food *(sago)* is not only to fulfill carbohydrate needs but also expresses power relations and social identity, including the relationship between humans and nature and between humans themselves. It is this preference that causes rice development to fail because it does not understand that food is a sociocultural phenomenon in Mentawai (Erwin et al., 2022; Irwandi, 2021, 2022).

The natural environment of the Mentawai people is a freshwater swamp where large quantities of (Flach, 1983). Sago grows along river banks and swampy lowlands. Meanwhile, rice has barriers to development in Mentawai including irregular rainfall, many pests, farming culture that is not understood, and conflicts with the sociocultural of Mentawai people (Azhari et al., 2017; Ridwan et al., 2019). So this rice cultivation is very high risk for Mentawai people.

The effect of cultivating rice in Siberut according to Persoon (1992) This has led to labor limitations. Arable land is not the problem, but labor absorption is low. As a result, rice cultivation is limited, so there will be another interest in growing other cash crops. The problem is that the Mentawai Islands, which are covered with tropical rainforests containing a number of endemic plant and animal species, will lose their natural value due to logging and production of cash crops such as cloves, copra, cocoa, nutmeg and coffee. This is the current effect of the sago to rice transition in Mentawai.

4. Delusions of Modernization for Mentawai Cultural Identity

During the New Order (Soeharto's government-*orba*) Indonesia intervened against the Mentawai people through development programs. The government began to interfere and prohibit their traditional belief system (Sabaggalet, 2023; Yudas et al., 2023; Yulia & Naldi, 2018). *Arat Sabulungan*, which has been practiced for centuries and has been the backbone of social, cultural and magical (supernatural) relationships, was shifted and replaced with new beliefs (monotheism). In terms of harmony and order of life, those living in the *uma* were forced to move and gather in a herd (group). In fact, *uma* is not just a place to live, but a space for Mentawai people to carry out cultural agendas and social relations. However, it was against the policy of the central government at that time which prohibited animism-based religious practices and had to follow the official religion in accordance with the constitution. However, Mentawai people still carry out their belief practices as part of their life (culture). As a result, those who chanted the songs (*urai*) of the ancestors were beaten by the police and their cultural ritual tools were burned and tattooing became a taboo (Yulia & Kaksim, 2017). On the other side of the ecological aspect, the forest environment that is the source of life is cleared arbitrarily (illegal logging and concessions) (Delfi et al., 2022). Those who protected the forest were jailed. Eventually, Mentawai people became refugees in their own homes (expelled from their homeland).

They are influenced by the pressure of modernization brought by development programs, so they are insecure about their identity. It is as if the development program is in line with the wishes of the Mentawai people and does not conflict with the culture that they have been 'glorifying'. The issue of development and the issue of empowerment, as well as modernization and cultural identity, are not properly viewed by policy makers who spawn them in the form of development projects. Thus, it is too deep to intervene the life of Mentawai people for the delusion of 'progress', for 'civilization', and for 'alleviating poverty'. In reality, until now the statistics show that the 2022 poverty rate in Mentawai is still high at 13.97% and based on Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2020-2024 is categorized as a 'disadvantaged' area. What exactly is the purpose of development and what impact does it have on the lives of the Mentawai people?.

Through the development program carried out in Mentawai, it has influenced many elements of the Mentawai people's lives. The development program and the hegemony of the government have disturbed the cultural identity of the Mentawai people. The cultural identity of the Mentawai people is 'biased' from who they are because of the 'glass' of modernization. They are restrained through development programs that make them abandon their ancestral values, local food and local identities. Because it is seen that all this time what makes them not have civilization and progress is their habits. So it needs to be changed through the perspective of progress.

Cultural identity becomes a delusion for the Mentawai people due to modernization. It is fading and heading towards destruction. Modernization continues to evolve and has various faces to continue to rebuke Indigenous People. It seems different, but the goal is the same: to make them escape from indigenous society to (supposedly) modern society. The stimulus cannot be counteracted because those who are influenced by modernization are the new generation (Mentawai youth) who have escaped from cultural restraints. Thus, the cultural identity still held by the older generation (elders) is just a matter of time lost with them. Therefore, the way civilization (modernization) frames culture (traditionalization) is so 'cruel'. Modernization forces cultural adherents to change and choose to follow modern ways for the sake of survival. Meanwhile, culture does not have a strong shield that can be given to its adherents. In the end, culture 'succumbs' to civilization.

E. **CONCLUSIONS**

To be human is to be cultured. Culture has a dynamic nature and so do humans as its tools. The existence of Indigenous Peoples in the era of modernization is actually experiencing a struggle, where one side maintains its identity which is the key to their lives. On the other hand, modernization with a very fast current, cannot sort out which river it goes through. Thus, culture is dragged away and loses the identity of its people. Modernization and cultural identity create a duality, where, although the development program carried out on the Mentawai people for a long time still leaves the debris of cultural elements that are still being carried out. However, that is what makes the community in limbo. Culture is very important to maintain, but very interesting to change. Hence, the tug of war between culture and modernization leaves its own scars.

Culture has begun (and will continue) to erode and shift towards how Mentawai people maintain their lives in accordance with the times. Modernization is increasingly pressing, into the veins of Mentawai people who inevitably have to follow it. In the end, modernization through the government's development program will cripple the Mentawai culture. Culture will lose and submit to modernization in this ring of struggle. The Mentawai people are beginning to abandon the culture they have embraced all these years. They are in the middle of the forest, eroded and experiencing a decline (devolution) of values now surviving in the name of survival. Although they are aware of the impact of the government's development program, there is no reason for them to refuse or fight. They are shackled and forced to accept and become the main target of modernization.

F.   **ACKNOWLEDMENT**

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