

The Leba Manu Ritual

The Sadha-Laja Customary Community In Ngada-Flores, Indonesia

**Presented
at the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples
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The *Leba Manu* Ritual

- What is about?
 - The *Leba-Manu* ritual is a **red-rooster** **sacrificial ritual** to protect water/rivers and condemn/reject the evil one (geothermal projects)
- Locus of the ritual
 - **Sadha-Laja Customary Community** in Ngada-Flores, in East Indonesia



Laja Community in the Ngada Regency - Flores

The Context of the *Leba-Manu* Ritual

1) The Social-political context

- Indigenous People resist the Geothermal projects in Flores that harm – violate indigenous people's rights and destroy the environment

2) The Cultural-religious context

- Rejecting the evil one (geothermal projects), Sadha-Laja indigenous Community protect their land and river



A site of Geothermal Power Plant in Flores

A. The Socio-Political Context

- In 2017, the Indonesian Central Government designated Flores as a geothermal center island
- Identify 21 locations in Flores to be exploited for geothermal powerplant three of which - *Ulumbu*, *Mataloko*, and *Sokoria* - has been in place.



An unexpected Incident at the Geothermal Power Plant site in Matoloko

- In **1998**, an **installation of the geothermal Power Plant** in Mataloko in central Flores - situated in the people's farms and is close the villages
- Without applying an appropriate **Free, Prior, Informed and Consent (FPIC)** process
- In **2008**, an **unexpected incident** occurred:
 - Damage of the drilling well equipment;
 - spewing hot mud along with toxic gas and a sulphurous odour
 - unprecedented hot mudflows come out in many places around the geothermal plant sites



Toxic gas and sulfur unexpectedly come out from the ground along with hot mudflows.

The Impacts

- **Housing roof damage**
 - The zinc roof of people's house is corroded due to high sulfur levels in the air.
- **Health issues**
 - The air is polluted causing people have suffered from respiratory infections (ISPA), especially children, women and elderly people.
- **Crops failure**
 - Reducing crops and commodity i.e. rice, corns, avocado, coffee and cloves due a high levels of temperature and sulphurs around area of the powerplant
- **Cracked and pitted soil**
 - Cracks and potholes suddenly appeared in the yards and graves of residents



The Impacts

- **Social conflict escalated**

- A high tension and conflict among the people in the community who are pros and cons the projects.

- **Earthquake and mudflow threats**

- Situated in the ring of fire and meeting plot of two active volcanic plates, Flores is geologically at danger of Mudflow and earthquake triggered by the well-pad drilling of geothermal.

- **Contamination of river**

- Installation of pipeline for taking water from *Tiwu Bala* River for the power plant potentially damage drinking water for people and livestock and reduce water irrigating 400 ha of field rice
- The waste of the powerplant potentially contaminate the river

A woman walked alongside the pipeline installation that takes water from the Tiwu Bala River to the Geothermal Power Plant in Mataloko



People's Resistance against the Geothermal Power Plant

- Local communities/villages reject the geothermal powerplant (i.e. Poco leok, Sano Nggoang, Mataloko, Sokoria)
- Supported by Church groups (JPIC), NGOs and Media
- Archbishop of Ende in Flores and 5 other bishops in East Nusa Tenggara Region outspoken rejecting the powerplant



Resistance against the Geothermal Power Plant

- People take action in resistance:
 - organized two **peaceful protests** on March 12 and June 5 against the geothermal project.
 - **sent letters** of protest to local and national governments and international donors (KfW and ADB) who fund the projects.
 - Brought the **issue to the Human Rights Council** in Geneva and reported it to the **UN Special Rapporteur** on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
 - conducted a **customary ritual** on July 7th 2025 to condemn the geothermal project and protect the river and lands.



A peaceful mass protest at the World Environment Day, on 5 June in Flores

B. The Cultural-Religious Context

Ritual Context: the Ngada Cosmology

- The **Ngada cosmology** - Myths (*Ine Pare, Dewi Sri*, etc.) and rituals:
 - Divine being whose body is broken and scattered throughout the cosmos.
 - *Ine Pare/Dewi Sri* - become rice and other life-giving plants.
- All **elements in creation** – earth, fauna, flora, human, sphere, sky, etc. are related. They reflect and resonate each other and the Divine.
- **Interconnectedness**: names of people, animal, plants are related to one another.



The Leba Manu Ritual of the Sadha Laja Indigenous Community

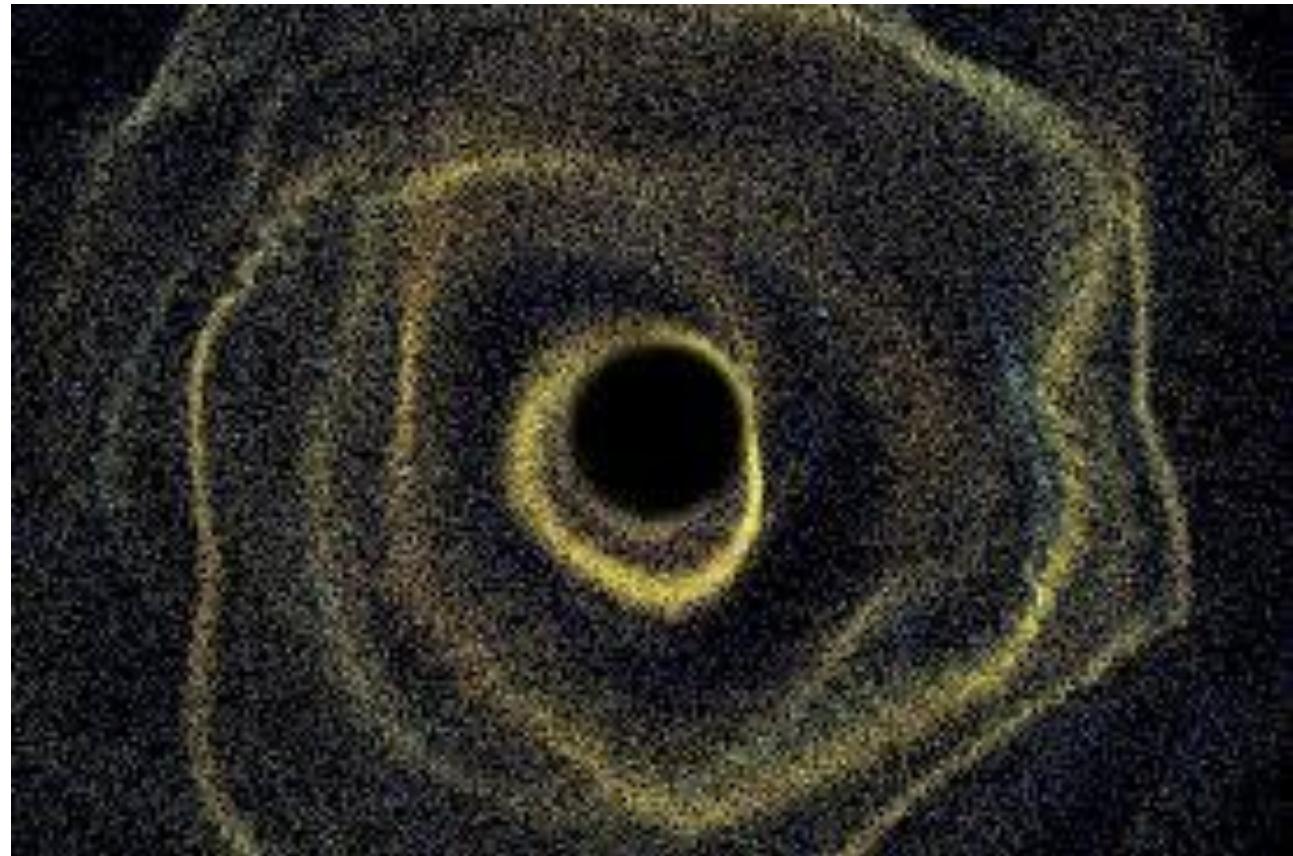
- Protecting the river and the land is protecting you, me and the whole cosmos and the Divine.
- The ancient LEBA MANU ritual is rarely performed, only when all efforts fail.
- You will see the [video of Leba Manu](#) ritual:
 - 1) Invocation by the ritual leader (*Mosalaki*);
 - 2) Sacrifice of the red Rooster;
 - 3) Elevation of the sacrificed Red Roster



The Leba Manu Ritual

Ritual Space - Time

- *Ritual Space-Time: by the river of 'Tiwu Bala'* the indigenous people performed the LEBA MANU RITUAL in July
- Larger context of traditional ritual calendar (*Reba*)
- It is a **returning to the center of primordial beginning**,
 - a place that often explained as **darkness (giu gema)**, **dark sea (mesi mite)** from which their ancestors begun **the Sea Voyage** on a boat to the land of Ngada.



Ngada cosmology: A primordial beginning of darkness and dark sea

The Leba Manu Ritual

Ritual Space - Time

- In a way, by having the ritual by the river of *Tiwu Bala*, the indigenous people of Sadha Laja are **sailing in the sea of darkness** with high waters and stormy waves of geothermal threats.
- Their ritual and prayer may not calm or eliminate the waves and stormy dark sea of geothermal threats.
- But it **summons courage and hope** that with the help of their ancestors and the God of their ancestors, they will arrive to safe harbor and bright shore.



Sailing in the sea of darkness with stormy waves of geothermal threats

The Leba Manu Ritual

Ritual Material: Red Rooster (*MANU toro*)

This primordial dark beginning:

- This feminine character is expressed in traditional analogy of **mother as black hen** and **father as white or red rooster** (*Ine kita se susu mite, ema kita se lalu bhara*).
- The **white or red masculine rooster** signifies the end or completion (*sadho*).
- Completion = a crow of a mighty rooster, neigh of a mighty horse and when the two mountains have arrived (*kako gha moe manu jago, ie moe jara ngai - sadho Inerie, leba Suru Laki*).



The Leba Manu Ritual

- Indigenous wisdom and truth have saved the planet for millennials, we must join and continue to speak to truth, to hope, to pray and to have courage.
- This in itself is a sacrifice that is necessary for a better future of our earth, our planet, our home, our cosmos.
- Pope Francis on **technocratic paradigm** (*Laudate Deum*, 27):

“A healthy ecology is the result of interaction between human beings and the environment, as occurs in the indigenous cultures and has occurred for centuries in different regions of the earth. The great present-day problem is that the technocratic paradigm has destroyed that healthy and harmonious relationship.”



A nexus of the integral ecology