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Politics of Mining: Ecological and Economic Dynamics in *Maluku Utara*

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ABSTRACT: The mining issue in North Maluku Province has become a primary focus, resulting in serious impacts on the economic and investment climate. Challenges related to mining activities include environmental damage, pollution, land conflicts, illegal operations, and licensing issues. The conflict of interest among mining companies, the government, and local communities is worsening over time due to unmet community needs and a shift from protests to resistance. Factors influencing the escalation of conflict include centralization in decision-making regarding mining resources by the government, reducing the participation of local communities in policy processes. Additionally, the lack of concern from mining companies for the welfare of local communities, particularly regarding compensation and social impacts, is also a cause of escalating conflict. This research utilized a descriptive qualitative method. The research findings indicate that community opposition to mining concession policies is caused by neglect of the rights of local communities in terms of compensation, discriminatory treatment in workforce recruitment, and environmental damage post-mining. This underscores the need for holistic and sustainable solutions to resolve mining conflicts in the region, considering the interests of all involved parties.

KEYWORDS: Ecology, Economics, Maluku Utara, Politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of mining in Maluku Utara Province has become a central focus, resulting in significant impacts on the economic climate and investment landscape. Challenges associated with mining activities encompass environmental degradation, pollution, land conflicts, illegal operations, and regulatory issues. Over time, conflicts of interest among mining corporations, governmental bodies, and local communities have escalated due to unmet community needs and a shift from protests to active resistance.

Factors influencing the escalation of these conflicts include centralized decision-making regarding mining resource management by the government, diminishing the participation of local communities in policy processes. Additionally, the lack of concern from mining corporations for the welfare of local communities, particularly regarding compensation and social impacts, exacerbates tensions.

This research utilizes a descriptive qualitative approach to shed light on the complexities of these conflicts. The findings of this study highlight the opposition of local communities to mining concession policies due to neglect of their rights regarding compensation, discriminatory practices in workforce recruitment, and the environmental degradation following mining activities. These findings underscore the imperative for holistic and sustainable solutions to address mining conflicts in the region, considering the interests of all stakeholders involved.

The complex nexus of political, ecological, and economic factors surrounding mining activities in Maluku Utara Province underscores the urgent need for comprehensive research and action. As mining-related conflicts persist and intensify, it is imperative to delve deeper into the root causes, impacts, and potential solutions. By examining the interplay between governmental policies, corporate practices, and community interests, this study aims to offer nuanced insights into the intricacies of mining conflicts and facilitate the development of equitable and sustainable approaches to resource management. Through collaborative efforts and informed decision-making, we can strive towards a harmonious balance between economic development and environmental conservation in Maluku Utara and beyond.

Through this research, aimed to contribute to the understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of mining conflicts in Maluku Utara Province and provide insights for policymakers, stakeholders, and communities to develop effective strategies for conflict resolution and sustainable resource management.

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II. THEORICAL FOUNDATION

Political ecology

It refers to the relationship between political policies and the natural environment. It includes the ways in which political decisions and government actions affect ecosystems and natural resources. Ecological politics seeks to understand and resolve conflicts between environmental interests and other political, economic, and social interests. It also involves creating policies that consider the environmental impacts of human actions, as well as efforts to develop sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions to complex environmental challenges.

Ecological politics also involves analysis of the dynamics of power and the distribution of natural resources in society. This includes consideration of how policies and political decisions can influence access, control and use of natural resources by various groups in society, including vulnerable and marginalized groups. In addition, ecological politics also highlights the role of political actors, such as governments, companies, and civil society in shaping environmental policies and influencing environmental practices at the local, national, and global levels.

Economic Dynamics

Economic Dynamics refers to changes and movements in the economic activity of a country or region. It includes various factors that influence economic growth, such as production, consumption, investment, trade, and government policies. This concept also refers to the complex interactions between various economic variables that can produce fluctuations, growth, or decline in the economy of a country or region. In simpler terms, it can be defined as changes or dynamics in the economic activity of a place.

Furthermore, it also includes the study of how economic policy, technology, demographic changes, and other factors interact to shape patterns of change in the economy. This includes an analysis of how these factors affect the rate of economic growth, inflation, unemployment, and overall economic stability. By understanding economic dynamics, policy makers can identify opportunities and challenges in managing the economy and plan effective strategies to achieve the desired economic goals.

Maluku Utara at a glance

North Maluku is a province in Indonesia which is located in the eastern part of Indonesia, precisely in the Maluku Islands. The province consists of several large and small islands, with the main islands including Halmahera, Ternate, Tidore, and Morotai Island. North Maluku has extraordinary natural beauty, with beautiful beaches, mountains and amazing underwater riches.

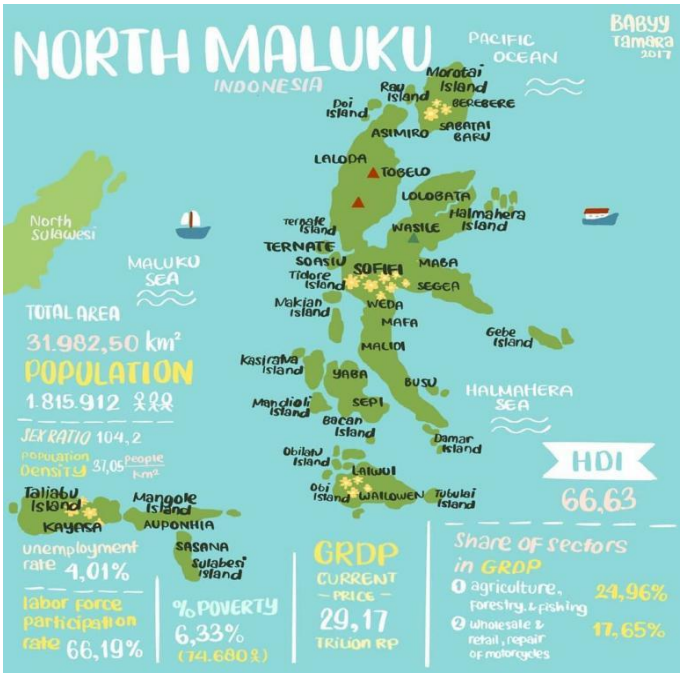

Figure 1. Geographical side of Maluku Utara
Sources: https://images.app.goo.gl/Zd5VUTnbycQhbod37

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North Maluku's economy is dominated by the agricultural, fishing and mining sectors. The main agricultural products include rice, coconuts, cloves, and nutmeg, while the fisheries sector produces various types of fish and other marine products. Mining is also an important sector in the North Maluku economy, especially with the mining of nickel ore and other mineral resources (Hasyim et al., 2024; Lattu, 2023).

Despite having great potential, North Maluku also faces several challenges, including limited access to basic infrastructure and services, as well as social conflicts related to natural resources and their management (Djen & Qodir, 2023). However, efforts continue to be made to overcome these challenges and advance the province towards sustainable and inclusive development.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used descriptive qualitative method. By using the Qualitative Descriptive Method, this research will provide an in-depth understanding of conflict in mining industrial areas, as well as provide a comprehensive picture of its impact on the environment and local communities. This method allows researchers to describe phenomena with the detail and complexity needed to understand the broader context of the conflict that occurred.

Researchers will use various data collection techniques, such as direct observation in the field, document analysis, and literature studies. The data collected will cover various dimensions of conflict, including economic, social, political and environmental aspects.

IV. RESEARCH RESULTS

Directions of Ecological Politics

The environment has several distinctive characteristics that ideally can serve as reference points for politics as instruments of regulating shared interests. There are three basic characteristics of the environment that can be identified by Lay (2007). Firstly, the nature of the environment as a unified system that transcends the boundaries of administrative governance and politics. It crosses national borders, disregarding conceptualizations of sovereignty as the basis for interpreting states. The nature of the environment is also never loyal and cannot be fenced in by any administrative boundaries. Even authoritarian regimes do not have enough power to confine smoke, for example, from migrating to neighboring areas. Secondly, the environment inherently contains the most subjective interests of humans as beings, regardless of political space and free from the confines of time. Thirdly, the punitive power of the environment that arises as a result of human neglect of the environment has a highly distinctive characteristic that is non-discriminatory.

Various disasters that arise one after another as a logical consequence of our negligence in treating the environment properly will strike anyone regardless of social class, wealth, origin, ethnicity, religion, and various other human differentiating categories.

From the three characteristics of the environment, Lay (2007, p. 158-9) reports that there are at least two factors of neglect of ecological politics as an important issue in mining economics. Firstly, the environment has never been a reference point for Indonesian politics. Experience shows that fifteen years of hard work by Emil Salim as Minister of the Environment during the New Order era ended only with an "agreement" that the environment was in trouble. Unfortunately, when the "agreement" was reached, the environmental situation was already so severe that efforts to rearrange it became futile.

The reality in Indonesia indicates that the environment has not only never been a basis for cooperation but has also become the first basis for the emergence and spread of disputes and conflicts. Stories from various regions in Indonesia, especially the story of the boundary conflicts of six villages in North Maluku, are examples.

Secondly, the environment has never been an incentive structure for the functioning of politics used for the achievement of collective benefits. Instead, what happens is the maximization of benefits for individual actors and corporations, which must be exchanged for collective losses at the macro level.

Instead of fulfilling the constitutional mandate to improve the welfare of the people, the state (read: government) uses its authority over natural resources as stated in Article 33 paragraph 3 of the 1945 Constitution, empowering the state to grant authority to companies/corporations or individuals to exploit mineral resources within the Indonesian legal jurisdiction under a mining legal authority. In its implementation, Law Number 11 of 1967 concerning Basic Mining Regulations, and Law Number 1 of 1967 concerning Foreign Investment that regulates mining work contracts. For example, in North Maluku, the work contract

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of PT Nusa Halmahera Mineral (NHM) as the holder of the work contract based on Presidential Decree No. B.143/Pres/3/1997 dated March 17, 1997 is an example of such implementation.

Under the pretext of boosting regional revenue as one effort to improve the welfare of the people, the exploitation of natural resources is facilitated by simplifying various permits. For this matter, various regulations related to the environment are circumvented, while on the other hand, supervision of environmental management is relaxed, and even tends to be neglected.

On the other hand, the contribution of mining corporations/companies to the country is quite significant, helping to boost the national economic growth rate. The economic growth of North Maluku is considered not only very high but also very spectacular, surpassing the economic growth rates of other regions in Indonesia and the national economic growth, even exceeding the global economic growth rate with a record of +27%. The contribution to this "spectacular" economic growth rate is sourced from the nickel mining industry sector.

Data from the Ternate Customs and Excise Office indicates that the export of ferronickel by PT IWIP in Central Halmahera in the first quarter of 2022 reached Rp. 31.1 trillion with a nickel tonnage of 781,274.075 tons. The second position is held by PT Harita Group on Obi Island, Halmahera Timur, with first-quarter exports valued at Rp7.296 trillion with a tonnage of 134,627,836.00 tons. In the previous year, the value of nickel exports reached Rp2.228 trillion with a tonnage of 85,765,469.00 tons.

In addition to the two aforementioned companies, there are several other companies (the author did not obtain the names of the companies) that exported ferronickel and nickel pig iron in 2022 totaling 64,894 tons valued at Rp2.066 trillion. The total export value of these companies reached Rp40 trillion in the first quarter of 2022. Information regarding the amount of funds transferred to the central government, according to statements from companies operating in Utara Maluku, amounted to Rp600--700 billion.

Ideally, a high economic growth rate should correlate with a decrease in the poverty rate in mining-producing areas. However, the facts on the ground indicate the opposite. Data from the Central Statistics Agency of North Maluku shows that there are two districts where the two largest companies in North Maluku operate, which are the largest contributors to the population classified as the poorest in Maluku Utara. These two mining companies are PT IWIP operating in the Halmahera Tengah Regency and PT Aneka Tambang operating in the Halmahera Timur Regency.

The data from the Maluku Utara Statistical Office in 2021 shows that the families classified as poor in these two areas far exceed the data of poor communities in other districts/cities in North Maluku. The poverty data in Timur Halmahera reached 15% of the total population of around 91,707 people in 2020. The poverty rate experienced a decrease in the following year, namely 2021, but it remained the highest in Maluku Utara. The number of poor people in Timur Halmahera in March 2021 was 14,580 people or 15.04%. This means that the number of poor residents decreased by 390 people compared to the previous year, which was 14,970 people or 15.04%. One factor suspected to have influenced the decrease in poverty rates in East Halmahera in the March 2021 period is the increasing prices of plantation commodities such as copra and others. After East Halmahera, the second poorest district is Halmahera Tengah. The Halmahera Tengah Statistical Office recorded 7,650 poor people in 2021 out of a population of 63,190 people, or 13.52%, slightly decreased from March 2020 which was 7,700 people or about 13.56%. The economic report of North Maluku released by Bank Indonesia Maluku Utara Representative Office in February 2022 shows that the mining and quarrying as well as manufacturing industries recorded high growth and became drivers of Maluku Utara's economic growth. The above not only provides a picture and global chain of events but also reflects events that have actually affected more than half of the areas that are the subject of mining activities in this region. The suffering resulting from environmental impacts has created new problems in society. The first and most affected group is the poor. More ironically, those who were supposed to benefit from industrialization policies are the ones most affected. This situation is experienced by residents in areas rich in mining resources, especially those in mining areas. This situation becomes even more worrying when taxes and revenue-sharing funds from these industries are not used to assist the poor but rather "allocated" to improve the facilities of political elites or public policymakers.

There are three capitals that determine long-term community welfare: human capital, social capital, and natural capital. Usman (2014) stated that one of the assets commonly placed as an important part of development processes is natural capital (natural resources). Natural capital includes resource functions (forests, fisheries, and mining) and sink functions (air and water, especially as pollution receptors). Because it functions as a source of long-term welfare, efforts to protect these cumulative

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capital functions are needed to maintain environmental sustainability. Neglecting them will lead to environmental imbalance, impacting the quality of public health and disrupting other social activities. Health problems and disruptions to social activities are the main sources of conflict.

In ecological conflicts, such as land use, environmental quality, and natural resource management, environmental factors play a crucial role. Environmental conflicts come in various forms, from competition based on interests in natural resources to conflicts based on values concerning human-nature relationships.

Especially in conflicts within the mining sector, Azuri, et al., (2021) mentioned several driving factors and triggers for conflicts, including (1) project characteristics and perceptions—such as company type and size, extraction methods, and commodity types—(2) shifting power dynamics in communities with the arrival of potentially power-threatening companies; (3) land rights and social and environmental impacts of mining; (4) lack of participation or representation of local communities; (5) poor corporate social responsibility practices; (6) uneven distribution of benefits among communities; (7) distrust and breakdown of relationships between parties; and (8) mobilization of opposition to mining activities. In the context of weak governance, natural resource exploitation also contributes to vulnerability, conflict, and violence (Azuri et al., 2021, p. 38).

In mapping social conflicts related to environmental degradation, Usman (2014) further explains that there are at least two things to consider: determinant factors influencing environmental degradation and social movements responding to environmental degradation in the form of actions to influence various parties to change decisions. Determinant factors influencing environmental degradation can be explained through two types of explanations: ecological explanations and economic-political explanations.

Environmental degradation is considered a bad condition when there is an imbalance between supply depots, waste repositories, and living spaces. Supply depots have evolved to the point where waste repositories disrupt the existence of living spaces. These three elements can be explained as follows.

First, the environment is a source (resources) that provides various living needs, ranging from air, water, food, raw materials (materials) for clothing, transportation, and various goods for production needs. The environment has enabled humans to sustain their lives and livelihoods, hence it is called a supply depot. These resources are partly renewable (renewable) such as forests and partly non-renewable (non-renewable) such as mining materials. If these resources are exploited faster than nature's ability to replenish them, even if they are renewable resources (such as clean water), these natural resources have actually been sacrificed.

Second, the process of utilizing these resources has left waste or debris, and the waste or debris left by human activities is more abundant and varied than that left by other creatures. In this context, the environment has functioned as a waste or debris dumping ground commonly referred to as a waste repository. Some of this waste or debris can be destroyed (absorbed or recycled) and even beneficial for human life, but some cannot be destroyed, thus polluting the environment. It does not pose an ecological problem if this waste or debris is still within the threshold of the environmental function's carrying capacity as a waste repository. If excessive, environmental degradation occurs, potentially leading to ecological disasters.

Environmental degradation caused by nickel mining activities, for example, can be traced back to various data sources, both nationally and in Maluku Utara. The environmental damage caused by the nickel industry can be traced from the vast forest areas taken over by nickel mining, leading to increased deforestation, as well as the threat of water pollution, both in rivers, lakes, and coastal areas crucial for the livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities. Nickel mining is one of the local commodities that massively encroach upon forest land in Indonesia, along with coal and gold.

Information from the Indonesian Forum for the Environment (WALHI) to Elon Musk and all investors of Tesla Inc., Austin Texas USA, mentions that at least 693,246.72 hectares of forest land in Indonesia have been allocated to nickel mining corporations.

Similar conditions also occur in North Maluku. The author has not obtained comprehensive data, but some qualitative data from WALHI, at least, represent the objective conditions of nickel mining activities in North Maluku. On Obi Island, with an area of only +2500 km2, for instance, there are 5 (five) Mining Business Licenses (IUP) covering a concession area of 10,769.53 hectares. Mining activities that disregard environmental aspects in some mining areas on this island (such as in Kawasi Village and several villages nearby) have led to water pollution, for example, in the Todoku River. The community has lost a source of clean water for drinking, bathing, washing, and others. A similar situation also occurs in Halmahera Tengah. In the last fifteen

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years, Halmahera Tengah has lost 16,000 (sixteen thousand) hectares of forest cover due to nickel mining activities. This has led to environmental degradation, resulting in a decline in fishermen's income due to seawater pollution (https//www.walhi.or.id).

Third, every living being (including humans) needs a place to survive and develop life as well as to engage in various activities related to economic, social, and cultural needs. In this context, the environment functions as a living space to fulfill life needs. When the number of people wishing to live in a place is too high or concentrated, the environmental burden becomes heavier. Problems arise and develop into social conflicts when the environment is no longer able to optimally serve as a living space, when there is an imbalance in the environment's function as a supply depot and as a waste repository. In other words, there is no more biotic balance because each function seems to be competing for its own interests. The seeds of social conflict emerge and take shape when the waste repository function exceeds tolerance limits, then it will not only press the living space function but also degrade the supply depot function. Such conditions are common in industrial areas. Therefore, it is easy to understand why social conflicts related to environmental issues in these areas continue to persist and have not found many satisfying alternative solutions.

Political Economic Conflict

The perspective of ecological political explanation in explaining the determinant factors creating social conflicts related to environmental degradation differs from the perspective of economic political explanation. The new perspective in understanding environmental issues is greatly influenced by neo-Marxian thinking about underdevelopment, as a form of critique of Malthusian and cultural ecology approaches (Muharram, et al. 2022: 150). In the perspective of political ecology, for example, Srinivasan and Kasturirangan (2016) emphasize that environmental issues are not caused by internal problems within the environment itself, but more due to external influences, namely political and economic pressures. Environmental management certainly has political dimensions and implications. This can be seen from the roles of actors such as governments and corporations who have the power and capital to determine the patterns and directions of natural resource utilization. On the other hand, communities are the weakest party and become victims of the impacts caused. Environmental management becomes a contestation arena of political interests from the roles, influences, and interests of the actors involved. The above views share similar assumptions in the perspective of economic politics. Environmental degradation is understood as a negative condition due to the economic activities of capital owners. The explanation of economic politics imagines that the social structure growing and developing in industrial areas has placed capital owners or business actors in central and dominant positions in influencing decision-making processes concerning the needs of the public. Meanwhile, communities not involved in industrial activities are marginalized and neglected in these decision-making processes. This community position worsens when governments and political elites, under the guise of public welfare, favor the interests of capital owners.

These two groups, the government and the capitalist owners, if analogized with Marx's view (Duverger, 1998, p. 192, Johnson, 1994, p. 147-148), Giddens-Held, 1987, p. 6), are bourgeois groups armed with power, authority, and capital. These groups have the strength to "suck up" and take advantage of "surplus value" (borrowing Marx's terminology cited by Duverger). In other words, the bourgeois class seeks to exploit the proletariat class (read: communities victimized by environmental degradation) through economic activities. This exploitation will gradually raise the collective consciousness of the proletariat class to unite and oppose the bourgeois class.

Government policies allowing corporations to exploit natural resources have environmental impacts. Martanto (2007) attempts to use the Homer-Dixon environmental security approach to explain the relationship between environmental changes and violent conflicts. The important question posed is whether environmental scarcity can lead to violent conflict.

Martanto (2007, p. 180) refers to research by the Toronto Group and Encop (The Swiss-based Project on Environmental Conflict focusing on renewable natural resources. This research was conducted in India, Bangladesh, Mexico, Pakistan, Rwanda, Senegal-Mauritania, and South Africa. These two studies produced a theoretical framework of environmental security.

Martanto sees the causal relationship between environmental scarcity variables and violent conflicts as highly complex. Some cases studied by the Toronto Group show that the causal relationship between these two variables must pass through certain social conditions. Environmental scarcity does not automatically produce or trigger violent conflict. It must interact with other social factors that have the power to trigger conflict. There are intervening variables bridging the causal relationship between environmental damage and violent conflict. Martanti calls these variables social effects, such as migration, economic productivity inhibition due to resource capture. There are three things that cause environmental scarcity, namely supply, demand,

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and structure.

In addition to social effects, in the theory of environmental scarcity, another concept is introduced, namely environmental scarcity. This scarcity occurs when natural events and other physical factors interact with demand, supply, and structural factors. This interaction leads to decreased environmental productivity due to disasters and excessive exploitation (supply-induced), increased demand for resources due to increased consumption and population (demand-induced), and resource injustice (structural-induced).

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In the realm of private power, conflicts often arise due to intensified business competition. Conflicts can also be triggered by the state's mistakes in adopting policies that do not favor the weaker factions. For example, conflicts between mining community groups and multinational/private corporations can arise when the latter fail to accommodate the rights of local residents in mining areas. The strength of private power spaces is reinforced by their affiliation with authorities, which increasingly solidifies corporations as superordinates and positions mining community residents as subordinates.

In such conditions, the government always seeks to create an atmosphere conducive to social order to maintain the sustainability of its political and economic interests. Additionally, this is a strategic moment for political elites affiliated with corporate entities. For political elites, the presence of industries and cooperation with capital owners are crucial, especially when government and political party elites perform their electoral functions. This represents a "mutualistic symbiosis" because both parties consider it a golden opportunity to further strengthen their respective existences, even though it may be ethically and regulatively neglectful. The strategies used seem to be in the name of public interest, hypnotizing the populace to voluntarily submit, albeit in suffering.

These two explanations have different approaches to understanding and addressing ecological and economic conflicts in the mining industry in Indonesia. For ecological explanations, efforts to improve community welfare through economic development are still necessary. However, the issue lies in how to ensure that these efforts do not harm the environment. Ecological explanations emphasize the importance of a harmonious relationship between humans and nature. Therefore, social conflicts should not necessarily be interpreted negatively but should be viewed as part of efforts to rectify various human actions to avoid

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environmental damage. In other words, conflicts should be seen as the basis for building consensus. Social conflicts do not always lead to disintegration; they can also generate new consensus, as suggested by Coser (Saifuddin, 1992), indicating that conflicts are not always dysfunctional in their occurrence.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there exists a fundamental difference in the logic of environmental and political work. A simple exploration through vocabulary or terminology reveals the stark contrast; terms like "collective gain," "sustainable," and "cooperation" are key in environmental logic, while politics speaks in terms of "victory," "groups," and "contestation" or "conflict."

These disparities highlight the fact that politics and the environment, particularly in the context of Indonesia, are often contradictory entities. This realization should serve as the foundation for earnest consideration of what is termed sustainable development or environmentally friendly development. Finding a way to reconcile contradictory logics becomes the primary task of politics as an instrument for regulating common interests.

The differing logics between ecology and politics are further exacerbated by the wide variation in actors' imaginations regarding the environment. Some actors view the environment as a matter of differing imaginations that have led to the separation of many other issues, such as city cleanliness, sewage, waste, clean water, sanitation, and more, as part of the environmental issue. The environment only becomes an issue when destructive effects have massively impacted individuals or groups.

The exposition above illustrates the paradoxes resulting from human interaction with the environment. Ideally, the ecological political function as an institution is to manage the paradoxes arising from the interaction between the environment and humans, both as individuals and in terms of various system categories, ranging from humans as political, economic, and cultural beings.

In summary, there is a paradox between short-term needs that must be reconciled with long-term needs. The need for micro-individual actor efficiency must be weighed against the macro-system's collective gain value. The need to reach maximum profit and the necessity to minimize risk. The need for certainty that must be reconciled with uncertainty. All of these are products of human interaction with various environmental attributes.

Herein lies the function of ecological politics in seeking solutions to reconcile existing paradoxes. On one hand, it serves as an institutional instrument to reconcile paradoxes, but on the other hand, ecological politics must have the ability to punish. Unfortunately, this is not possessed by politics in Indonesia as a system. Indonesian politics fails to punish the powerful. The river water pollution from mining activities by multinational corporations in North Maluku is a tragic tale of political impotence in constructing a compliance system based on punishment mechanisms.

Even more tragic, justifications often adorn government media, arguing that exploitation activities by multinational corporations do not indicate environmental degradation. These are the ecological and economic paradoxes within Indonesian politics.

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