

The paradox of nation branding: A lesson learned from the Mandalika Special Economic Zone

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Abstract

This article observes the paradox in the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) on Lombok Island, using a case study approach to obtain a picture of nation branding trapped in the monolithic business-based conception of neoliberalism. The government has invested in national branding to strengthen the influence of the state in enhancing reputation, tourism, trade, and investment, despite human rights violations and social conflict. Mandalika has been mobilized as a competitive resource to show Indonesia's uniqueness to the global audience at the expense of the local people. We found inconsistencies between the goals of constructing Mandalika as a global tourist destination, nation branding, and the transformation of national identity with the ongoing disputes with local communities. This research aims to explain how the construction of global tourism as nation branding can cause socio-cultural disharmony in local communities. Furthermore, it also explains the socio-cultural consequences of developing the Mandalika SEZ. This research finds that the Mandalika SEZ reflects the state actors' ambition to pursue capitalistic goals by ignoring the interests of the local communities. As a result, there are unintended consequences in the form of cultural and human rights abuse. In the long term, the conflict can cause residents to lose social, cultural, and religious values. The cultural abuse in Mandalika SEZ can directly impact internal colonialism, as indicated by the luxurious "ghettos" in the area.

Keywords

global tourism, human rights abuse, Mandalika, nation branding, Special Economic Zones

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Introduction

Mandalika is designated as a new identity for Indonesia. It has two functions: providing economic benefits and campaigning for the nation's branding, even though it produces paradoxes in development. This paradox is often influenced by how economic agents mobilize national identity for economic purposes (Dinnie, 2015). The designation of Mandalika (also known as Kuta Mandalika) as a Tourism Special Economic Zone (TSEZ)¹ and a super-priority tourist destination aims to create prosperity for the people of Lombok Island. TSEZ development is carried out to provide opportunities for local people to participate in economic activities that take place around them through international tourism activities. This tourism activity is expected to be an economy driver, an engine capable of accelerating growth on the island of Lombok, one of the pockets of poverty in Indonesia. At least, this is what was voiced by the Indonesia Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), the state-owned enterprise that built the Mandalika SEZ. Furthermore, the Mandalika SEZ was constructed to become Indonesia's national branding amid its efforts to strengthen its status as an emerging country in the global arena. As a world-class entertainment site, several international events that have taken place in Mandalika, such as the Asian Talent Cup, the World Superbike, and the MotoGP, have legitimized Mandalika as a means of developing Indonesia's positive image, especially the potential of these events in post-pandemic economic recovery.

The Mandalika SEZ is located in Kuta village, Pujut District, Central Lombok Regency, established through Government Regulation no. 52 of 2014, funded by the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the World Bank, and involving international investors such as VINCI Construction Grands Projets. Nationally, Mandalika is designated as a super-priority destination, creating one of the so-called "ten new Balis." The super-priority title is pinned on Mandalika because the development of this region promises nature tourism, water sports, traditional villages, and a racing circuit. Furthermore, developing the Mandalika SEZ is tourism oriented toward preserving the value and quality of the local community's environment (Dewan Nasional Kawaan Ekonomi Khusus, 2023).

Despite the successful implementation of various international events in sports and the promises offered by the development of this megaproject, there have been multiple controversies. For example, the United Nations criticized the human rights violations committed by the business entities behind them. Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, urged the Indonesian government to pay attention to residents' rights (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2021). The United Nations considers that the construction of the Mandalika SEZ violates human rights, such as not respecting residents' rights, aggressive land grabbing, and carrying out forced evictions. The luxury of the Mandalika is inversely proportional to the conditions of the residents. Not only physical assets, such as land, houses, and orchards, were lost but physical assets, such as culture, customs, and local wisdom were also lost, along with the loss of the village as a locus.

The development of the Mandalika SEZ has been widely reviewed from an economic approach, but the cultural impact has yet to be noticed. Ignoring cultural impacts results in a national tragedy. Poverty is a condition prone to violence (Pogge, 2013), including cultural violence, because this type of violence is often invisible: it often happens together with other forms of violence. The reality above shows that the development of the SEZ, which is packaged as a global tourism nation branding, can result in the loss of cultural rights because the government only considers the material aspects of development. The formulation of the problem to be answered is how developing a super-priority tourist destination in the Mandalika SEZ area, constructed as Indonesia's global tourism nation branding, can give birth to paradoxes through acts of human rights abuse.

This article is structured as follows. After sketching the introduction, we perform a literature review followed by explaining the study methods. Following this, the article elaborates on the strategic meaning of the Mandalika, followed by a discussion of the disputes related to the construction of the Mandalika megaproject. The article closes with a conclusion.

Literature review

Judging from its objectives, the development of the Mandalika SEZ is the same as the development of other SEZs worldwide, namely as a motor for economic dynamics which is expected to produce a multiplier effect for the area in question and its surroundings. As one of the “ten new Balis,” Mandalika is expected to become Indonesia’s national branding at the international level (Danapramita, 2021; Frederick, 2022). In general, selecting areas to be made into SEZs has geo-economic and geo-strategic advantages and functions to accommodate industrial activities, exports, imports, and other economic activities with high economic value and international competitiveness. Where Mandalika SEZ differs is that its construction has drawn controversy due to the high level of human rights violations. The area of Mandalika SEZ is 1035.67 ha. Before becoming an SEZ, this area was agricultural land and community settlements. There are four villages: Kuta, Mertak, Sengkol, and Sukadana (Kementrian PPN / Bappenas, 2018). The Mandalika International Circuit arena was built in the middle zone of the Mandalika SEZ with a total land area of 131 ha; it was built in September 2019 and inaugurated on November 12, 2021. The villages mentioned above are underdeveloped villages with low socioeconomic status.

Economic interests are the primary purpose of building SEZs, which refers to developing economic zones in geographic locations within a country where dynamic economic activity occurs. SEZs aim to improve the performance of economically backward regions and areas with high growth potential. Therefore, the SEZ can function as a region used as a growth-promoting instrument (Ahrens and Meyer-Baudeck, 1995). The SEZ is widely used by developing countries to improve welfare by increasing industrialization and economic transformation via creating an investor-friendly climate, especially for foreign investors, so that the SEZ can become a means of reducing poverty, increasing GDP per capita, and increasing living standards. The results of research on the SEZ in developing countries have been mixed, with some regions or countries (especially in East Asia) having more success while others (especially in sub-Saharan Africa) are still trying to make the zone work. Evidence suggests that the SEZ as a unilateral economic development policy is difficult to get right, and even successful SEZs usually take a decade or more to show results. The SEZ is not a panacea, and no one-size-fits-all approach exists (Aggarwal, 2006; Frick et al., 2018; Frick and Rodríguez-Pose, 2019; Pan and Ngo, 2016; Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2022).

One reason why some SEZs are not successful is due to the fact that their planning, development, and operation are very contextual; therefore, they must be adapted to the specific conditions of a country, and, at the same time, a wise approach is needed (Frick, 2018; Zeng, 2021). Indonesia has 19 SEZs, including Mandalika. Compared to the other SEZs throughout Indonesia, Mandalika is the most expensive due to its exclusive world-class circuit. As the Mandalika SEZ has just been built, more studies on its broad economic impact have been done. Research on the Mandalika SEZ has been carried out on the theme of hawkers (Anggraini et al., 2020); demand on halal tourism (Permadi et al., 2018); legal risk analysis for labeling Mandalika as nation branding (Danapramita, 2021); the economic impact at the start of its construction (Frederick, 2022); and Mandalika as a means of strengthening maritime culture (Kurniasari, 2021). Meanwhile, studies conducted in several disadvantaged areas that present SEZs show that wages in SEZs have

remained the same, especially for local people who work in the zone. At the same time, a very high increase in land prices has benefited only a few people (Brussevich, 2020).

Simon Anholt was the 'creator' of the 'nation-branding' concept in 1996. He is the most prolific writer in this study. Anholt's work was published from 1998 to 2008 (Anholt, 2008) and played a crucial role in national branding. Nation branding is often used synonymously with 'country branding' or 'place branding' (Hao, 2021). Various state interests, such as social, political, or cultural, are entrusted to nation branding, which generally refers to a country's strategy to convey a particular image of itself outside its country's borders to achieve specific profitable goals. In other words, nation branding relates to how countries market themselves so that the global public knows them. Various studies on nation branding have been carried out, such as Noel et al. (2011) on China's nation branding, Hassan and Mahrous (2019) on the importance of nation branding as a strategy that must be carried out continuously by a country in competition with other countries in achieving excellence, and Avraham on the importance of nation branding as a strategy to escape the tourism crisis and counteract the negative stereotypes of a country (Avraham, 2018; Giannopoulos, 2011).

As a marketing strategy, many countries implement nation branding to enhance their global reputation. Several Asian countries are considered successful in utilizing the nation-branding strategy, including China (Noel, 2011), Malaysia (Hamzah, 2021; Saad and Idris, 2017), Thailand (Desatova, 2018; Nuttavuthisit, 2007), and South Korea (Choi and Kim, 2014; Lee and Kim, 2021). Meanwhile, various reputable journals rarely mention Indonesia's efforts to carry out national branding. Even Anholt (2008) does not even mention Indonesia in his work. Thus, it can be concluded that Indonesia is a 'newcomer' in the nation-branding discourse. Mandalika, unlike other tourism SEZs operating in Indonesia, has a strategic role, especially with its title as a super-priority destination.

Several studies have examined the presence of SEZs and their role in economic growth, but more research needs to be conducted on their role as a means of nation branding for global tourism. In addition, no research has been found linking the variables of SEZ, nation branding, and their detrimental implications for the local community because SEZ has transformed into luxurious ghettos that create glaring inequality. This research seeks to fill this gap. This study's novelty is in presenting a socio-cultural-political ethical discourse by taking an empirical case on the island of Lombok.

Methods

This article examines the progression of the Mandalika SEZ megaproject, emphasizing the crucial involvement of the local Indonesian government in the planning stages. The government acts as a mediator, balancing the aspirations and potential conflicts that may arise among the state, private sector, and impacted communities. Consequently, this study utilizes qualitative and interpretive methodologies. The researcher concentrates on conducting in-depth interviews with non-governmental stakeholders. While interviews with government officials could yield valuable insights, the researcher recognizes several challenges, including accessibility issues, power dynamics, and ethical considerations, that may impede effective research execution and adherence to ethical standards. Researchers often face obstacles when interviewing government officials, such as difficulties in gaining access and officials' hesitance to provide truthful information. Furthermore, engaging in detailed interviews with high-ranking officials can be particularly challenging due to their reluctance to engage, or restricted availability. Ethical considerations are paramount, as researchers must remain vigilant about issues like confidentiality, informed consent, and potential risks to participants, especially in situations where government officials might encounter

repercussions for disclosing information to researchers. Given the sensitive nature of the Mandalika development, these factors may restrict the study's scope and limit the researcher's flexibility.

This research employs a qualitative interpretivism/reflectivism approach, which is characterized by a tradition that does not necessarily seek to elucidate events, developments, or trends, as these methodologies align with the post-positivist framework (Lamont, 2015). Our emphasis is on acquiring knowledge as understood by the subjects or informants through qualitative techniques and participant observation (Dawadi et al., 2021). Data collection was executed through two primary methods. Initially, we gathered primary data utilizing data triangulation, which included observation, in-depth interviews, and unstructured observations conducted at the research site, alongside interviews with community members. We subsequently analyzed their responses and validated them through comprehensive observations and discussions. This approach enables us to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes involved in how the state constructs nation branding in Mandalika. Triangulation serves to provide a clearer insight into the realities surrounding the nation-branding efforts associated with the Mandalika project. The qualitative primary data was collected using semi-structured guidelines, which were categorized into five domains to ensure adequate information gathering regarding the targeted groups: community leaders, business stakeholders, displaced residents, NGO activists, and local intellectuals. The interviews included informants from Kuta Village in Pujut District, Central Lombok. Additionally, researchers conducted multiple surveys and observations at the research site prior to the commencement of the Mandalika project in 2016, which was completed in 2021, culminating in the inauguration of the Mandalika Circuit by President Joko Widodo on November 12, 2021. Following the GT World Challenge Asia final held from October 21 to 23, 2022, we undertook two field observations. Furthermore, secondary data collection was performed through library research, wherein we gathered pertinent information from a variety of sources, particularly scientific journals, books, and relevant conference proceedings.

The strategic meaning of the name Mandalika

Socio-historically, the name of Mandalika was taken from a legend about a prominent Sasak² figure whose story is commemorated in the Bau Nyale Ceremony. The ceremony, which is celebrated every year, is held at Kuta Beach, Pujut District, Central Lombok Regency. This research elaborates three strategic meanings of Mandalika, namely: (a) as a strategy to increase Indonesia's national branding through sports tourism; (b) as developing the potential of SEZs as an alleviating poverty strategy through the marine economy; and (c) as a strategy to increase Indonesia's visibility at the global level as an emerging power. The combination of loci, activities, and development goals makes Mandalika highly significant in projecting the above interests. Each strategic meaning can be explained as follows.

First, Mandalika plays a significant role as a strategy to increase Indonesia's national branding through sports tourism. There is strong justification for choosing Mandalika as a space for organizing sports events since it has 'marketing power' on the one hand and legitimacy for political, economic, and social order on the other hand. The construction of the Mandalika Circuit carries many missions, mainly because of Mandalika's position as a 'semi-peripheral' region in the national geopolitical structure. Since 2014, with the Nawacita³ Program, President Joko Widodo's government has had a mission of "building Indonesia from the periphery" by developing border areas and underdeveloped villages. Meanwhile, tourism is one of the main sectors of Lombok Island, an island with a high poverty rate. Lombok Island is a part of the Province of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), and this province ranks eighth on the Indonesian national poverty scale and 27 out of 34

provinces in Indonesia. The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the poverty rate due to the small number of tourists visiting the island. The reality on the island of Lombok shows a paradox between the beauty of nature and its socioeconomic status. To raise Lombok Island out of poverty, the government is implementing policy interventions, such as providing social assistance, especially to the extremely poor, and opening new jobs (Andita, 2022).

Since the construction of the international sports venue in 2020, Mandalika is expected to generate revenue for alleviating poverty on the Island. The Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, Sandiaga Uno, claims there are eight benefits from Mandalika's presence namely: (a) triggering infrastructure development around the circuit; (b) new international tourist attractions; (c) a source of income for the state; (d) rapid economic growth for the province of NTB; (e) increasing the micro, small, and medium enterprises sector; (f) an increase in the employment rate; (g) medium for nation branding; and (h) inviting investors (Voi, 2022). The 2022 MotoGP race has had a multiplier effect on the national economy of IDR 4.5 trillion. The event has contributed positively to regional gross domestic product (GDP) by an increase of 1.46 percent compared to year-on-year annual time series data. NTB's economic growth in the first quarter of 2022 is 7.76 percent, while the national one is 5.01 percent (Febiana, 2022).

Second, Mandalika serves as an instrument to administer the government's poverty reduction programs by implementing maritime economy and sports tourism. Indonesia is developing a marine economy as a growth model due to the island's abundant maritime and fishery potential. Since 2015, Lombok Island has become a pilot project for enacting the blue economy-based development concept. The Indonesian Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries is collaborating with the Food and Agriculture Organization to make the integrated economic zone development business successful (Ambari, 2017). Following Law 32 of 2014, the development of the Mandalika SEZ in the marine economic scheme has been listed in the Indonesian marine policy (DeeWaluyo, 2018). This scheme is expected to benefit the people of Lombok by using local resources and potential sustainably.

In addition to the maritime economic scheme, Mandalika also functions as a venue for implementing sports tourism by building the Mandalika Circuit. This circuit is expected to generate revenue by fashioning sports tourism and the blue economy as a magnet that attracts tourists, especially foreign tourists, which will positively impact the economy, considering that sports tourism is a new global tourism trend. The market potential of this type of tourism could reach IDR 18.79 trillion by 2024. The area around the Mandalika has hills, beaches, and the sea, an ideal venue for various sports events, such as running, cycling, surfing, beach volleyball, trekking, and paragliding (Khafid, 2022). Currently, Mandalika is used by the community for sports activities, such as swimming at Tanjung Aan Beach, surfing at Seger Beach, trekking on Merese Hill, and cycling and jogging in the Mandalika tourism area.

Third, Mandalika is part of a strategy to increase Indonesia's visibility as an emerging power. Although there is no standard definition of an emerging power (also known as a 'middle power' or 'regional power'), it is the status accorded to a country due to a significant increase in its power and influence. The increase in Indonesia's case is due to its position or role in international relations at the regional and global levels. The new role of these countries is generally associated with factors such as demographic size, geography, economic and military capacity, and sufficient political aspirations to achieve this status. Emerging powers articulate a desire to change the distribution of power in the international system and to take a leadership role in global governance (Cooper and Flemes, 2013; Poladian and Oehler-Şincai, 2014; Schirm, 2012; Schweller, 2011; Xiaoyu, 2012). The writers cited have mentioned Australia, Brazil, India, China, Mexico,

Russia, and South Africa as emerging powers. Meanwhile, few scholars identify Indonesia as an emerging power. As Huijgh (2016: 8) puts it, "Indonesia has not been untouched."

Indonesia's increasing role in the global arena indicates changes in Indonesian identity. Many global economic cooperation forums have demonstrated the country's role as an emerging power, and it needs international exposure to increase visibility and legitimize its global role. Indonesia is listed as the only country member of three major global economic cooperation forums, namely APEC, ASEAN, and the G20. Mandalika is considered a symbol of emerging power, as explicitly shown by the design of a trophy by national creative economy actors in the form of a 'torch,' which symbolizes the rise of the Indonesian economy (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2022), and exceptionally its resilience during the pandemic time and recovery. In addition, the *Speed* statue⁴ symbolizes that Indonesia is catching up with other countries in terms of development progress.

Blaming, claiming, and disputes

During this study, the authors interviewed traditional and community leaders, NGO activists, and local intellectuals to obtain information. Through interviews, it can be seen that the project's development created disputes between the developers and the residents. Narratives obtained from the informants indicate human rights abuses in various forms; the opinions of the interviewees/informants were confirmed by statements spread in the mass media, with UN human rights expert Olivier De Schutter voicing deep concern about the Mandalika tourism development mega-project. Apart from the UN, some international NGOs such as Amnesty International and VedvarendeEnergi, the Indonesian National Committee for Human Rights (Komnas HAM), and several national and local NGOs have raised the same issues. Local NGOs become mediators and conduct advocacy for village communities who are victims of land clearing and expulsion by the ITDC, backed up by security forces. Their concerns revolved around allegations of violations by the security apparatus against local and indigenous Sasak people. It is claimed that the process of developing the Mandalika led to impoverishment, revocation, and violation of the rights of indigenous peoples (CNN Indonesia, 2021; DW, 2021). Research on violations of the rights of local communities was carried out by the Indonesian Infrastructure Monitoring Coalition (KPPH)⁵ during the period December 2022 to January 2023 on 105 indigenous people affected by the Mandalika project. The results show that as many as 99 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the information regarding the Mandalika project, and 82 percent stated that they did not give their approval for the Mandalika project, indeed that even the local people had never been informed about the Mandalika SEZ development plan. The absence of meaningful engagement with the community has led to a severe distrust of ITDC and AIIB (the Mandalika project funding bank). Based on the KPPH report, Komnas HAM has issued a recommendation to PT ITDC, the Provincial Government of the West Archipelago, and the President. However, this recommendation has not been adequately addressed (Primantoro, 2023).

The development process for the Mandalika SEZ has been carried out by the ITDC, a state-owned enterprise specializing in developing and managing integrated tourism complexes in Indonesia. Land grabbing has been the most-raised issue. Through an official document, under the pretext of welfare for the people, laws and regulations were drawn up, namely Law Number 2 of 2012 concerning Land Acquisition for Development in the Public Interest (LN. 2012-22, TLN. 5280) (Database Peraturan, 2012). This law aims to provide land for the implementation of development to improve the welfare and prosperity of the nation, state, and society while still guaranteeing legal interests. In many cases, however, the law is aimed at freeing land belonging to residents, often by exercising force.

The ownership of land and fields represents a human rights abuse due to the denial of local people's property. Interviews with two informants from NGOs who became mediators between the ITDC and the community stated that land acquisition had secretly started since the New Order regime era and did not involve the local government (Informant 1, an NGO activist; and Informant 2). According to these informants, there are two groups related to land issues. First is those who have received compensation for purchasing the land. They have become 'new rich people' who use the compensation money for various consumptive and productive purposes. The second group is landowners who have not received compensation, or the compensation received has not met the demanded amount. Some of them have become homeless because they have been forced to leave their homes. This group refused to move from their residence and experienced expulsion (Informant 1). This condition has led to an increase in the poverty rate around the Mandalika SEZ location. A total of 120 heads of families in Ujung Lauk and Bunut hamlets have had to leave their homes because that area is the circuit enclave. Of that number, 42 heads of Bunut hamlet families were trapped in the circuit area. They were ordered to leave the area and headed for Sengkol, Mertak, and Hijrah hamlets. The ITDC provided Kampung Hijrah hamlets as a temporary relocation area. The rest moved to various places outside the hamlet (Informant 3, a business stakeholder who owns rental houses).

Loss of livelihood is an unavoidable issue in relocation. As a state authority body, the ITDC is powerful and even claims to have the authority to regulate activities related to residents' livelihoods as fishers and plantation workers. Because the ITDC has taken over the land, these people do not have the right to do their work and have shifted their livelihoods to the tourism sector. As a result, they have difficulty getting income because they do not have skills in tourism (interview with Informant 2, a community leader in Bunut hamlet). Communities carrying out activities at construction sites (in their language: enclave land) must face security forces and experience threats (Informant 3). The KPPII's research also found that the Mandalika project removed natural resources that had provided people with a livelihood, such as farming; collecting seaweed, shellfish, fish, and shrimps; raising chickens; and raising cattle. The ITDC has removed agricultural land and given no access to the beach or sea. Because of this, there has been a significant social change in the Sasak people, who now depend on unskilled work to meet their daily needs (Primantoro, 2023). In general, the social changes that occurred after Mandalika's construction negatively impacted local communities. A study by Apriani (2023) found a significant difference after the Mandalika project: a decrease in community income but an increase in expenditure.

Another issue is massive environmental damage. The amount of environmental damage has made the Mandalika development project increasingly unprofitable for locals. The NGO Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia (WALHI, or Indonesian Forum for the Environment) said that the Mandalika project did not correctly carry out the AMDAL (environmental impact analysis), resulting in the circuit project causing dozens of hamlets in Kuta village to be flooded and the loss of sources of clean water. Floods have been caused by reduced water storage and absorption from swamps, most of the mangroves are buried, and the trees on the hills have been cut down (Informant 5, a displaced resident and a member of a local environmental NGO). The Mataram Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency (BMKG) also warned in 2019 that this area is disaster prone, having the potential for earthquakes and tsunamis. According to Informant 4 (a local intellectual), many residents are skeptical about this project because it only benefits a few people, notably the rich who are not residents. A high poverty rate does not require the development of a tourism megaproject because the development of health facilities and educational facilities is more beneficial than a racing circuit (Informant 5).

Furthermore, people feel insecure and uncomfortable in their own homes. Since the circuit's inauguration, three international events have taken place in Mandalika. The insecurity arises

because movement restrictions are accompanied by intimidation during the race. The first event was the implementation of MotoGP in March 2022, causing residents to be unable to move without wearing a bracelet as a unique marker and going through a security checkpoint. The limited number of bracelets caused residents to be confined to their homes or unable to return home because of the tight security in the racing area. The security forces also arrested residents who criticized the government and security forces and made them pay a fine of 2 million rupiahs (about US\$300, most probably illegal) for their release. The second event was during the implementation of the World Superbike in November 2022. Restrictions on movement were carried out by local officials giving stickers to pass through checkpoints. The third event was the World Superbike 2023, which involved stricter security measures than before by deploying more than 2300 officers, including 500 members of the tactical SWAT squad, to monitor the situation (Jong, 2023). This fact was also confirmed by Informant 6 (a displaced resident reallocated to a new settlement called Hijrah Village⁶), who stated that local people have become alienated from their land and feel constantly watched.

In addition to environmental damage, the indigenous people in the enclave area who are materially poor are becoming more spiritually disadvantaged due to the loss of opportunities to carry out traditional rituals. This signals the occurrence of cultural abuse due to the loss of cultural and religious sites. However, as a form of loss of society, this cultural abuse is not widely disclosed by the mass media. Pujut hamlets, where Mandalika is located, can no longer be called a 'village' because various global activities occur here. On the other hand, local activities must succumb and be marginalized because local activities are considered "an eyesore to the beach." This manifests the absence of cultural sovereignty (Informant 5). Informant 5 gave an example in that local people cannot freely enter and leave the Mandalika SEZ because Pujut hamlet has become an exclusive area. One of the traditional rituals that are in danger of disappearing from the hamlet is *nemoeq moto seong*, which is a special ritual to ask the Almighty to pray for the protection and maintenance of livestock. The absence of local logos displayed in Mandalika, such as traditional musical instruments, traditional fabric motifs, and symbols typical of Lombok Island, indicates the alienation of the Mandalika SEZ area from the local community (Informant 6, displaced resident reallocated to new settlement called Hijrah village). Such exclusion of local stakeholders is a form of cultural violence.

There has been a shift in the meaning of nation branding. By adopting the 'corporate branding' model carried out by corporations in enhancing reputation through products, nation branding in its development produces a new identity and image of a country, which in turn then yields a political identity, which is the original purpose of nation branding. Nation branding, in the perspective of neoliberalism, is a multidimensional construction that prioritizes elements of the country of origin (Peterson and Jolibert, 1995) and elements of location or destination (Morgan et al., 2011).

Meanwhile, nation branding in neoliberalism has also changed public diplomacy's function (which is usually related to national security) to 'marketing the country' (Rasmussen and Merckelsen, 2012). In neoliberalism and globalization, nation branding becomes a tool for constructing and managing national identity, as shown by Kaneva and Popescu (2014) in analyzing the 'Roma problems' in post-Cold War Europe.

Nation branding continues to experience distortions in its implementation. Neoliberal nation branding shifts political identity to identity with economic value. Mandalika has been transformed from a cultural identity into an economic one, which requires it to compete with other national identities to create prosperity. Ironically, making Mandalika the new vehicle of nation branding deepens poverty and the uprooting of people's culture. Nation branding is socially and culturally engineered to introduce Mandalika as an identity by imitating the Bali model. As such, Bali and Mandalika are

expected to create a new image of Indonesian national identity through tourism. Thus, the nation branding attached to Mandalika is Indonesia's political economy strategy to convey a new image to international audiences to achieve specific goals that are economically profitable. Bringing in as many tourists as possible to Mandalika is the source of the country's foreign exchange. However, there is a missing process in the forming of a new Indonesian identity, namely the neglect of indigenous peoples in a way that eliminates history, customs, and people's culture.

This reality leads to Galtung's (1990) cultural violence. 'Cultural violence' is any aspect of culture (ideology, religion, language, art, science) that can be used to legitimize violence in a direct or structural form. Meanwhile, symbolic violence accompanying cultural violence is built in a culture that does not kill or injure, like direct violence (violence embedded in structures). Cultural violence can result in long-term cultural damage and the rapid growth of a culture of violence used to justify all forms of structural violence. Galtung (1990) continued that cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, correct or not wrong. Two conditions cause cultural violence to be unconsciously accepted by society: the use of violence and the legitimacy of that use, the psychological mechanism of which is carried out through internalization. Scientific studies have never discussed cultural and spiritual abuse related to locus loss, providing huge room for developing this discourse.

Conclusion

The inequality in research objects is not only counterproductive for creating Indonesia's global image in terms of national branding, but Mandalika SEZ will be a negative example of the harmonization of national life. This research is expected to contribute to providing lessons learned for decision makers so as not to make the same mistake in the future. The Mandalika SEZ is only one example of the loss of culture and a symptom of the death of society, which is paradoxically counterproductive to the existence of the humanity of a nation.

The cultural abuse in the Mandalika SEZ directly impacted internal colonialism, as indicated by luxurious "ghettos" in the area. This fact relates to the possibility of internal colonialism arising from the developments during the development process of the Mandalika SEZ and the presence of a new locus that forcibly eliminated the old locus. Meanwhile, the presence of a new locus as a new artificial socio-cultural construction has created a striking disparity with the surrounding area. This paradox is what researchers call internal colonialism, characterized by the massive presence of "foreign elements" in an area. One of the implications of the sudden entry of such "foreign elements" into underdeveloped areas is social stuttering due to asymmetrical power relations.

The perpetrators of cultural violence are generally foreign powers who wish to dominate a locus or territory, as was done by settler colonialists or ethnic groups different from indigenous settlers. Usually, also, cultural abuse or cultural violence occurs in areas that are experiencing conflict. It is interesting to learn that what happened in Mandalika differs from facts elsewhere. The paradox that arises is that the actor of cultural violence in Mandalika is a state-owned enterprise and occurs in a non-conflict area. This abuse is an ignored element of the interests of building nation branding through sports tourism activities. The development of the Mandalika tourism SEZ, framed as the goals of liberation, empowerment, and strengthening of national identity, turned out to have left a dark side. The Mandalika Circuit, promoted as nation branding, has failed because it was not designed as sustainable development. The loss of local cultural identity means the failure of nation branding.

Indonesia is currently continuing to fight for Mandalika as an international tourism destination. Mandalika functions as a soft power of the state, which shows the relationship of interdependence

between the nation and the state, which is unavoidable in the globalization/neoliberal era. The government has taken care of the branding strategy. However, the people have not been involved in working together to achieve the desired results from the nation branding, resulting in local people's resistance to the development of Mandalika. Despite its potential, nation branding has become a neoliberal practice. Nation branding through Mandalika has neglected community participation, so people fail to understand Mandalika's development goals. In this regard, a new diplomacy strategy that is more inclusive and participatory in nation branding Indonesia through Mandalika is needed.

The researchers faced several challenges during their fieldwork. Initially, while we successfully engaged with targeted groups as key informants, including community leaders, business stakeholders, displaced residents, NGO activists, and local intellectuals, we encountered significant time limitations when attempting to interact with local government officials. These officials, often preoccupied with their bureaucratic duties, were reluctant to allocate time for interviews and required extensive official documentation prior to the interview process. In addition, they offered official data that is devoid of essential aspects necessary for elucidating the actual situation. During the second visit, the researchers also experienced time constraints that hindered our ability to meet with additional residents affected by the project development, particularly those who declined to relocate to the new settlement offered by the ITDC due to their being under the supervision of state security authorities including snipers. Further investigation is necessary on related issues concerning the economic, social, and political impacts, particularly in the context of the Mandalika SEZ after over a decade of operation.

The limited diversity among respondents in this study constrained the analysis of nation branding's capacity to address the complexities of development issues associated with neoliberalism. This poses a significant challenge for future research on nation branding in other contexts, which is crucial for further exploration, particularly regarding specific elements of neoliberal development deviations. A nation-branding approach that emphasizes neoliberalism weakens the Indonesian government's standing on the global stage. In Mandalika, tourism development, which was intended to serve as an attraction, has instead fostered a negative perception due to the aggressive land acquisitions and ongoing forced evictions faced by the local Sasak indigenous community in connection with the construction of the MotoGP circuit. This study effectively demonstrated that the nation-branding strategy employed reflects values that contribute to human rights violations.

The lack of diversity among informants leads to an imbalance in the data utilized for nation-branding analysis. Consequently, it is essential to incorporate a wider range of informants to develop a more critical viewpoint on nation branding that the Indonesian government can implement while upholding human rights. Additional research could be undertaken by extending the time frame to gain a more thorough understanding of the Mandalika SEZ development. A longitudinal study design would be beneficial in capturing long-term trends and progress, allowing researchers to validate their findings over different time periods. Involving a larger and more diverse group of participants could enhance the generalizability of the results and offer a more detailed perspective. Moreover, future research could utilize mixed-methods approaches to overcome the limitations posed by a small number of informants. Collaborating with organizations, institutions, or local communities could facilitate access to a wider range of data and participants. Future investigations might also include comparative analyses across different regions to identify distinctive cases.

The researcher does not seek to challenge the establishment of the Mandalika SEZ, as it offers advantages for Indonesia, such as enhancing the nation's profile on the global stage and bolstering the local economy through the SEZ framework. Nevertheless, the local communities do not

experience enduring benefits, given that events at the Mandalika Circuit are held only biannually. Furthermore, this international event is not conducted on a consistent basis. The implementation of development guided by neoliberal principles tends to yield adverse effects, including the displacement of residents, land appropriation, environmental degradation, disruption of livelihoods, hindrance of educational access for children, and the erosion of local cultural development. It is imperative for the state to ensure that development efforts are centered on achieving social justice and enhancing the welfare of the populace, rather than catering to the interests of capitalist economic entities.

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Notes

1. The Tourism Special Economic Zone (TSEZ) is a new variant introduced by the government. The TSEZ was formed according to Law No.39/2009. According to this Law, a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is a special and limited area within the jurisdiction of the Republic of Indonesia. This area was established to accommodate industrial activities, export-import, and other economic activities that have high economic value and are internationally competitive. Meanwhile, the Mandalika SEZ was established through a 2014 Government Regulation to become a tourism area in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB).
2. Sasak is the name of the ethnic group inhabiting Lombok Island.
3. Nawacita are nine development priorities in the five years of President Joko Widodo's administration.
4. *Speed* is a statue of President Joko Widodo driving a motorbike at high speed. It is located in front of the entrance to the Mandalika Circuit.
5. KPPII is an Indonesian and international NGO engaged in human rights enforcement and environmental protection. NGO members of KPPII are: Mataram Legal Aid Institute (LBH), West Nusa Tenggara Institute for Legal Studies and Aid (LSBH), West Nusa Tenggara Agrarian Reform Movement (AGRA) Alliance, Mandalika Circle Community Solidarity Alliance (ASLI Mandalika), Just Finance International, WALHI Nusa Tenggara West, WALHI South Sulawesi, SATYA BUMI, Indonesia for Global Justice, Institute for National and Democracy Studies (INDIES), and WALHI West Java.
6. Hijrah Village has been designated by ITDC as a settlement for individuals displaced from Bunut Hamlet. The new inhabitants of Hijrah Village currently lack identity cards, necessitating the process of obtaining these documents to establish their recognition as residents of Central Lombok Regency.

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