

TOWARDS A DECOLONIAL ECOTHEOLOGY: AN ASIAN CONTRAPUNTAL READING OF ECOJUSTICE

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Abstract

The extraction of the earth for its resources undeniably destroys the life of the planet along with all things in it. It is not just the destruction of humanity but also animals, plants, and even the rivers, rocks, and the mists themselves. Human efforts to become environmentally friendly have at times not saved life itself. “Greenflation,” for example, shows how saving the environment may also require certain class privileges. This then becomes a dilemma of ecological and/or economic justice, which is often framed through the logic of extraction and sacrifice. My Asian experience with struggles against colonialism offers an alternative approach to the dilemma. I argue that an Asian contrapuntal reading of economy and ecology offers a way for decolonising ecotheology that honours the dignity of all creation.

Keywords

ecotheology, eco-debt, contrapuntal, extractive, sacrifice

Sensing the Context

Everyone wants to live in a clean and healthy environment. Everyone wants to see a blue sky where the pollution index is very low, and water is not only drinkable but also refreshing. People want to see trees with birds flying around and chirping. People want to feel sunlight that is not burning the skin and brings warmth to the earth but not scorching heat. People want to feel a pleasantly cool day without the risk of frostbite or other health issues. Swimming or snorkelling in the ocean is also a marvellous experience when we can see the beautiful coral, which actually helps to maintain the balance of the sea temperature. This image is realistic in some places on earth, while it is utopian for others.

The disparity is caused by people’s inability to make it happen. The planetary boundaries, such as climate, water, and biodiversity, which function as life support

systems, have been damaged or broken partially.¹ It will take time for certain spaces to restore or to heal. The call for ecological renewal has been made to take care of this broken image by focusing on the importance of sustainability or ecologically² friendly activities. Nevertheless, not all people can participate in them. For Green Capitalists, focusing on technology has been revered as a good path to take to develop ecologically friendly machines.³ Where oil and gas have caused so much air pollution from automobiles, the advancement of electric cars is believed to reduce car emissions. Unfortunately, many people cannot own an electric car, because they do not have enough money to buy one.⁴ This is an example of a clash between the concerns of ecological justice and economic justice. Is one justice more important than the other? Is that the only way to approach this dilemma?

This paper intends to address the dilemma not by surrendering to either issue, but by bringing them all to the surface. This will be my ecotheological work in finding an alternative approach that considers both ecological and economic justice. To make the approach visible, I argue that the Edward Said's contrapuntal notion, which conveys multiple voices that sound contradicting to each other yet constructive, is crucial to address the multiple aspects of ecotheology.⁵ Contrapuntality becomes a postcolonial analysis that offers a means to decolonise any ecotheology that misses both concerns: ecology and economy. In the end, drawing further on my migration experience as an Asian, I argue that ecotheological discourse should move away from a colonial dualistic mentality rooted in a sacrificial mentality.

The Case of Greenflation in Electric Vehicles

On January 21, 2024, a vice-presidential candidate debate took place in Jakarta between the third candidate, Mahfud MD, and the second, Gibran Rakabuming

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- 1 Damian Carrington, "Earth 'Well Outside Safe Operating Space for Humanity,' Scientists Find," *The Guardian*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/sep/13/earth-well-outside-safe-operating-space-for-humanity-scientists-find#:~:text=Earth%27s%20life%20support%20systems%20have,destruction%20of%20the%20natural%20world>.
 - 2 I tend to opt for the word "ecological" instead of "environmental" because the word "environment" seems to carry an anthropocentric notion, because it is just about things that environ or surround us.
 - 3 N. J. Fox, "Green Capitalism, Climate Change and the Technological Fix: A More-Than-Human Assessment," *The Sociological Review*, 71, no. 5 (2023): 1116, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261221121232>.
 - 4 Adam Morton, "EVs Are Still Too Expensive for Most Australians—So Why Are Some Carmakers and the Coalition Standing in the Way?" *The Guardian*, March 6, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/commentisfree/2024/mar/06/evs-electric-vehicles-affordable-prices-australia-liberal-coalition>.
 - 5 The idea of "contrapuntal" (counterpoint) comes from Edward Said's interest in Western classical music. While Said, as a postcolonial thinker, uses some things from Western production, Said also sees the "contrapuntal" in the Enlightenment age as opposition to the rigid structure of hierarchical music. In that case, the *contrapuntal* has two dimensions: "[colonial] regulation" and "polyphonic." Kathryn Lachman, *Borrowed Forms: The Music and Ethics of Transnational Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2014), 64.

Raka, son of the current President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo. Gibran asked Mahfud about “greenflation.”⁶ What interested me was not the debate but this unfamiliar term. “Greenflation” was coined by Isabel Schnabel from the European Central Bank’s (ECB) Executive Board. Along with two other related terms that she coined, “climateflation” and “fossilflation,” she explained how “the transition to renewable energy can generate inflationary pressures.”⁷ In other words, the timing and scale of building infrastructures that can implement sustainability or clean energy surely require a significant amount of money. Not only that, but the transition also means that currently used resources “become scarcer and supply chains more precarious.”⁸ This then increases ongoing costs as well. For example, if we “migrate” from fossil fuels to electric vehicles (EVs), there will be a priority switch from fuel distribution to nickel or lithium as the raw materials for the batteries. Companies will try to build EV manufacturing facilities and decrease the distribution of fossil fuels. Along with that, while the charging cost can be cheaper than buying the fossil fuels, the cost of buying a new EV itself, at present, is still considerably expensive, at least for the upfront price.⁹ Yet, above all, I call this a privileged people’s problem. Furthermore, this is only talk about gas cars versus EVs. Many other things need deeper analysis. This conversation leads to at least two matters: ecology and economy, which I will discuss next.

Extractive Zone as Sacrifice Zone

Former Coordinating Minister of Maritime and Investment Affairs of Indonesia,¹⁰ Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, claimed in his online article, bearing the same title, that “Without Indonesia’s Nickel, EVs Have No Future in America.”¹¹ Nevertheless, this “nickel-rush” has caused a lot of deforestation, displacement of local and Indigenous people, and pollution of rivers and the sea, for example, by the massive nickel

6 Resty Woro Yuniar, “Indonesia Election 2024: Gibran Resorts to ‘Gotcha Questions,’ Jargon in VP Debate in Bid to Trip Up Rivals,” *South China Morning Post*, January 22, 2024, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3249354/indonesia-election-2024-gibran-resorts-gotcha-questions-jargon-vp-debate-bid-trip-rivals>.

7 “Rethinking Inflation in Times of Environmental Instability,” The London School of Economics and Political Science, accessed June 24, 2024, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/granthaminstitute/news/rethinking-inflation-in-times-of-environmental-instability/#:~:text=Isabel%20Schnabel%20from%20the%20European.energy%20can%20generate%20inflationary%20pressures>.

8 James Guild, “Greenflation and the Role of Prices in Clean Energy Transitions,” *The Diplomat*, January 30, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/01/greenflation-and-the-role-of-prices-in-clean-energy-transitions/>.

9 Morton, “EVs Are Still Too Expensive.”

10 The position was dissolved on October 20, 2024, in the current President Prabowo’s era.

11 Luhut Binsar Pandjaitan, “Without Indonesia’s Nickel, EVs Have No Future in America,” *Foreign Policy*, May 1, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/01/indonesia-nickel-green-energy-ev-fta-congress/#:~:text=Without%20Indonesian%20nickel%2C%20the%20United,half%20the%20world%27s%20nickel%20products>.

mining in Halmahera, an island in Indonesia.¹² Not only that, but an investigation by Matthew Campbell and Annie Lee from *Bloomberg* also explored the devastating effects of nickel extraction on the safety of the workers and the health of the surrounding residents as well.¹³ This is the colonial logic of extraction. The land in Halmahera becomes an extractive zone. In Macarena Gomez-Barris' words, the term "extractive zone" refers to "the colonial paradigm, worldview, and technologies that mark out regions of 'high biodiversity' in order to reduce life to capitalist resource conversion."¹⁴ The extraction of the earth is for the sake of something that can benefit the human capitalistic world. Only this time, the extractive zones are identified in the dream of a green future. This somehow legitimates the extraction. In this case, the extractive zones become the (imposed) sacrifice zones.

The term "sacrifice zone" was used during the Cold War to *arbitrarily* designate a place that could be used for the development of nuclear weapons.¹⁵ Unfortunately, the sacrifice zones are often placed in low-income communities. In the US context, it is also the place where people of colour live. They are the "fenceline communities," which strikes me as the border between the privileged and the death zone.¹⁶ Or, in another harsh-truth term, the "throw-away communities."¹⁷ They receive very little to no protection but suffer the most from ecological violence. This practice is also known as environmental racism, where the environment is conditioned for a specific race of people.¹⁸

Back in Indonesia, a similar problem takes place in a different form. The extractive/sacrifice zone happened for palm oil production through deforesting a

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- 12 Hans Nicholas Jong, "Indonesian Nickel Project Harms Environment and Human Rights, Report Says," *Mongabay*, February 26, 2024, <https://news.mongabay.com/2024/02/indonesian-nickel-project-harms-environment-and-human-rights-report-says/>.
 - 13 Matthew Campbell and Annie Lee, "The Deadly Mining Complex Powering the EV Revolution," *Bloomberg*, June 17, 2024, <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2024-indonesia-sulawesi-nickel-fire/>.
 - 14 Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Duke University Press, 2017), xvi. Due to space limitations and the focus of this article, this book is not discussed here.
 - 15 Alexandria Herr, "What Is a Sacrifice Zone? The Environmental Racism of Oil Drilling in L.A.," *PBSSoCal*, October 20, 2021, <https://www.pbssocal.org/news-community/what-is-a-sacrifice-zone-the-environmental-racism-of-oil-drilling-in-l-a>.
 - 16 See Steve Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (MIT Press, 2010).
 - 17 As reviewed by Robert D. Bullard, "Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119, no. 6 (2011): A266, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3114843/>.
 - 18 The phrase was coined by Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. At a press conference, he said, "It is, in effect, environmental racism . . . Given the disproportionate effect of these wastes on racial and ethnic communities, this has become not only an environmental issue, but a racial justice issue as well." "Ben Chavis Charges 'Environmental Racism,'" *The Charlotte Post*, April 23, 1987, UNC Libraries, <https://exhibits.lib.unc.edu/items/show/7443>.

huge area of land for planting palm trees. Ecological violence happens to the land, with the “land” including the people who live there. For example, it happens in North Sumatra and in Central Kalimantan (Borneo), where the Indigenous people there (a certain Dayak tribe) have been involved in a deadly conflict with another ethnic group who came as transmigrant workers in a palm oil company there.¹⁹

This shows how the ecological issue is not always an issue of the marginalised people. In fact, for the sake of privileged people, the ecological issue is magnified or framed as a global problem. When it becomes “global,” the poor are then forced to do their share to resolve it, even though they are highly impacted by the problem. But this raises a moral question: Should they really be responsible for fixing a problem they did not primarily create?

The Triangle Impacts of Economic Debt

To respond to this question of responsibility, I need to delve into the case of economic pressures that many countries have in trying to “develop” or expand their society by getting loans from the World Bank. What is unfair about how the World Bank operates, however, is the fact that a loan always comes with interest. So often, the interest repayments in the end become much greater than the ability of the borrower countries to repay them. This creates debts for the borrowing countries, especially those who are from the Global South, to repay the Global North. In order to cancel the debts, the demands are transformed into different kinds of resources, such as nature. This is the “debt for nature swaps” idea that takes place. While the borrowing countries may have no or low cash, they have ample biodiversity.²⁰ That is not enough. While ecology becomes the new currency (ecological debt), cheap labouring bodies are still a valuable option (social debt). Moreover, extracting human bodies means using the future children as potential workers (embodied debt).²¹ This triangle shows how ecology is once again deeply related to economy,

19 See more examples collected by Barbara Rossing: “Lost Land: Visualizing Deforestation and Eschatology in the Apocalypse of John and the Column of Trajan in Rome,” in *People and Land: Decolonizing Theologies*, edited by Jione Havea (Lexington Books, 2020), 160–61. See also John Walker, “In Borneo, the Truth Is Often Missing in Action,” *Asia Pacific Solidarity Network (APSN)*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 9, 2001, <https://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net/index.php/news/2001-03-09/borneo-truth-often-missing-action.html>. This ecological violence also has more-than-human impacts. The clearance of thousands of hectares of rainforest that is home to orangutans and sun bears was carried out by PT Equator Sumber Rezeki (ESR), which is located near the border of Indonesia and Malaysia, within Indonesian territory. See Hans Nicholas Jong, “Indigenous Dayak Sound Alarm As Palm Oil Firm Razes Orangutan Habitat in Borneo,” *Mongabay*, December 2, 2025, <https://news.mongabay.com/2025/12/indigenous-dayak-sound-alarm-as-palm-oil-firm-razes-orangutan-habitat-in-borneo/>. In this case, ecological violence involves a fenceline habitat.

20 Ariel Salleh, “Ecological Debt: Embodied Debt,” in *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology*, edited by Ariel Salleh (Pluto Press, 2009), 1.

21 Salleh, “Ecological Debt,” 4–5.

and how underprivileged communities suffer more damage from this economic debt.

After the Industrial Revolution, the Global South has become the new site for extraction. The case of nickel mining and palm oil, for example, shows Indigenous people as underprivileged or “fenceline” (if not “throw-away”) communities who are the ones who suffer directly, because their ecological habitat has been violated. Their intimate relationship with nature has been destroyed by transforming their land into an extractive zone. They no longer have the resources they need to survive.²² On a global scale, the questions of who is included and how justice is done involve the Global South, which has suffered from nature swaps with little to no recognition of Indigenous people. In this case, we could say that the impacts of the economic debt have created a worse ecological-economic debt for the world.

Global Eco-Debt: Who Made It Global?

Who is actually indebted to whom? Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda has a wonderful analysis of three kinds of ecological debt, which I think is also economic debt, thus, an eco-debt. She mentions intragenerational, intergenerational, and interspecies (or even intercreation) debts. The first one shows how the debt is actually owed by the Global North to marginalised citizens. The second one demonstrates the debt that this generation has in relation to future generations. The last one is a debt that human beings owe to other parts of creation (I argue, including the inanimate beings) because of the damage that we do.²³ With these concepts, we may have a different view on who is responsible and involved in this eco-debt.

We might have come to a dilemma between those who want to aim for environmental protection and those who believe in “greening” capitalism by technological innovation. These economists want to maintain the improvement of energy efficiency through the help of technological advancement. Nevertheless, the nickel case—as well as the violence occurring due to palm oil production—at least has shown us that the core of it is more about economic growth, instead of life-growth. It is mostly about the growing accumulation of wealth at the cost or the sacrifice of the people who have the raw materials.²⁴ Even with the advancement

22 A video circulating on social media shows three Indigenous people emerging from a forest at a nickel mining excavation site. Liska Rahayu, “Viral Suku Togutil Halmahera Timur Muncul di Daerah Penambangan, Diduga Terdesak Karena Kelaparan,” *Tribun-Medan*, May 27, 2024, <https://medan.tribunnews.com/2024/05/27/viral-suku-togutil-halmahera-timur-muncul-di-daerah-penambangan-diduga-terdesak-karena-kelaparan>.

23 Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, “Climate Change as Climate Debt: Forging a Just Future,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 36, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2016): 29.

24 Rossing offers an important analysis in her chapter when she discusses the presence of Rome in her reading of Revelation 18:11–13. The “natural disasters,” she argues, “were the consequences of the Roman extractive economy” in exploiting the earth for their cargo list, which even included slaves

of technology to find renewable or more sustainable energy, the innovation is also directly proportional to the creation of new needs for new resources.²⁵ What resources will be extracted next for emerging technologies?

Capitalism is never self-sufficient. Its nature is always to ask for more, because it is based on the presumption of unlimited growth.²⁶ This unlimited mentality becomes a moral crisis since it tries to extract as much as one can. Afterall, God's creation is fruitful and bountiful. Nevertheless, exploiting the creation—the nature, and the people—means participating in the perpetuation of structural violence which harms certain groups of people “as a result of unequal distribution of power and privilege.”²⁷ This is the power of disparities, which has no permanent or fixed figure to blame. Instead, the power of this structural violence is a *process* that is formed in the structure of society.²⁸ It lies within a facade of pursuing ecological justice, where the marginalised are utilised for the claim of life enhancement of the rich and powerful.

A Colonial Heritage

The eco-debt issue prompts further reflection on whether a colonial paradigm operates behind it. For example, I see the act of deforestation for extracting nickel for the sake of a green future as being caused by a colonial mindset. Seeing certain countries or, to be precise, certain Indigenous lands, as permissible places to be sacrificed for the sake of a “capitalistic greater good” definitely undermines the voices of Indigenous people, along with the voices of the earth. Their sacred spaces were somehow “naturalised” as “empty land” without any regard for the Indigenous people who have been living there as the custodians of the land.²⁹ The sacred spaces are seen as sacrificed spaces where people in power can establish their dominance and tell the world that this mining or planting is needed as a resource for the world, either for ecological or economic purposes, which is again proven to be untrue and untrustworthy. This leads me to contemplate that ecological justice cannot be separated from economic justice. In fact, both forms of justice should also involve

(human souls) as raw materials. Rossing, “Lost Land,” 168–69.

25 Werner Raza, “Social Costs and Resource Creation: Essential Elements of a Political Economy Approach to Resource Fairness,” in *Fairness and Justice in Natural Resource Politics*, edited by Melanie Pichler et al. (Routledge, 2017), 64.

26 Clayton Crockett, “Non-Theology and Political Ecology: Postsecularism, Repetition, and Insurrection,” in *Common Goods: Economy, Ecology, and Political Theology*, edited by Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre et al. (Fordham University Press, 2015), 77.

27 Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 72.

28 Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 73.

29 *Terra Nullius*, or the doctrine of an empty land, as argued by John Locke, is often used by many colonisers to legitimise their colonial acts of taking away Indigenous lands.

ecotheological justice.

An Ecotheology of Justice: A Contrapuntal Reading

In his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'* and the follow-up apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum*, for example, Pope Francis demonstrates the theological importance of seeing the ecological problem as a theological issue. Not only that, Pope Francis addresses scientific data and the socio-economic aspects of ecology, such as the rise in average global temperature, throwaway culture, the technocratic paradigm, the principle of economy, and the interconnectedness of all.³⁰ We may look for a deeper interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 in search of ways not to exploit and dominate the earth, but to serve and preserve the earth.³¹ Yet, even that call may not be holistic enough since the damage has already been done, and the places where recovery and renewal take place are rather imbalanced. The Global North may have better resources, both in itself and by exploiting the Global South, while the latter is forced to experience multilayered oppression and multiple eco-debts. This is where I think Edward Said's contrapuntal idea is fruitful for theological discussion, which should hold many aspects altogether.

Said uses the word "contrapuntal" based on his understanding of Western classical music. While the musical term itself may not be able to capture Said's postcolonial view of texts, I argue that it serves as an important tool for envisioning the possibility of looking at ecological and economic justice altogether without thinking one is more important than the other. While ecological issues may need deep consideration for non-privileged communities, it does not mean that they cannot contribute to a deep ecological thinking. Likewise, while economic issue may overlook ecological concerns, we can actually reshape the economy for the sake of ecology. In fact, the polyphony of contrapuntality rejects any dominating or totalising power of voices. It does not aim for a univocal idea, but it recognises the simultaneous voices of the text.³² What is interesting about Said's contrapuntal theory, based on Naomi Klein's analysis, is how Said connects it with ecology.³³ Said's work also discusses Alfred Crosby's ecological imperialism in identifying how European colonialism often transforms local habitats wherever it goes. This

30 Pope Francis, "*Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*," *The Holy See*, May 24, 2015, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html. Pope Francis, "*Laudate Deum: To All People of Good Will on the Climate Crisis*," *The Holy See*, October 4, 2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html.

31 Anne Pattel-Gray and Norman Habel, eds., *De-Colonising the Biblical Narrative, Vol. 1: The First Nations De-Colonising of Genesis I–II* (ATF Press, 2022), 27.

32 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage Books, 1994), 51.

33 John Bellamy Foster, "Third Nature: Edward Said on Ecology and Imperialism," *MRonline*, July 18, 2017, https://mronline.org/2017/07/18/third-nature/#_ftn2.

terraforma refers to the way Europeans projected images of their homelands onto colonised spaces, while transforming the colony according to those images into a new familiar environment, which was susceptible to new diseases and ecological problems. That is why, for Said, the restoration of the land and the ecology is a form of resistance against imperialism/colonialism.³⁴ Ecological resistance is anti-colonialism. This method of locating these two different voices is contrapuntal indeed. It does not remove the colonial agenda, but it also introduces or even retrieves hidden voices. It takes “account of both processes, that of imperialism and that of resistance to it.”³⁵ Furthermore, the way I have compared ecological debt/justice with economic debt/justice, as well as identified alternative voices for each issue, is a contrapuntal method, too. It “[emphasizes and highlights] the disjunctions, not to overlook or play them down.”³⁶ By doing this, we can also see how the experiences of the Western and non-Western world, or of the Global North and South, belong together “because they are connected by imperialism.”³⁷ This then sheds light on the difficulty of uncovering the responsibility of the “global eco-debt.” Relating this to what the late Pope Francis said in the letters, I argue that ecotheology can only be done contrapuntally by seriously addressing this eco-debt. Understanding that theology is always practical, championing ecological and economic justice is also championing (eco)theological justice.

Ecojustice: An Asian Ecotheological Reflection about Sacrifice

As an Indonesian Christian, I was raised with the belief that sacrifice is a noble cause, because I was taught that Jesus came down to earth to sacrifice himself so that all human beings could have a better life. This language of sacrifice was deeply visceral and close to my heart and can perhaps be seen in the way many Asians have been willing to accept conditions of forced labour in the world of capitalism.³⁸ Later, indeed, I found that this sacrificial language is problematic, because Jesus can actually be seen as a victim of the structural evil as well. He did not come from a privileged background, and he was killed because he voiced dissonant views to the privileged. The idea of his sacrifice is often advanced by those who hold power to control and create reality. Often, that reality gradually normalises the idea that a sacrifice is needed for a greater purpose.

Take a look at Indonesia, which once again moved in the direction of sacrificial logic with the 2024 policy from President Jokowi, offering mining rights to religious

34 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 225.

35 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 66–67.

36 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 146.

37 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 279.

38 The author is aware of the risk of essentialism. Therefore, the term “Asian” is used here as a solidarity term of the Global South.

organisations, two of which decided to take the offer. Defending the president, Bahlil Lahadalia, who was at the time the Investment Minister, “claimed that letting religious groups run mining concessions is part of implementing the 1945 Constitution, which states that Indonesia should make best use out of its natural wealth to prosper the people.”³⁹ From the side of those religious organisations who accepted the offer, one argued that the mining right is important “to distribute the natural resources management more fairly.”⁴⁰ Besides allowing the mining to be practiced according to religious values, they further argued that the benefit of owning the permit is to fund social and religious activities.⁴¹ This unfortunately does not stop at the mining permit. The current president, Prabowo, supported by Lahadalia (who is now the Energy and Mineral Resources Minister), stressed the importance of positioning the eastern part of Papua as a national hub for bioenergy production. Lahadalia mentions the resource of ethanol, while Prabowo added the palm oil-based biodiesel. Their reasons for doing this are to boost national economic resilience.⁴² The production might indeed help boost the economy. Nevertheless, as I have argued and demonstrated earlier, there is still a devastating price for extraction.⁴³

While Indonesia is discussed here, we can see how, from the micro level, fenceline habitats like Papua have been sacrificed for the sake of a bigger nationalist capitalistic agenda of Indonesia. The same thing happens when we see Indonesia as part of global systems of power. There is always a sacrificial zone for the sake of global prosperity. Then why can fenceline habitats like Papua be sacrificed?

39 Jayanty Nada Shofa, “Gov’t Sees Nothing Wrong with Letting Religious Groups Manage Mines,” *Jakarta Globe*, July 29, 2024, <https://jakartaglobe.id/business/govt-sees-nothing-wrong-with-letting-religious-groups-manage-mines>.

40 Sri Pujiанти, “Religious Organizations Explain Their Stances on the Mining Concession,” *Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia*, translated by Rizky Kurnia Chaesario, December 13, 2024, <https://en.mkri.id/news/details/2024-12-13/Religious-Organizations-Explain-Their-Stances-on-the-Mining-Concession>.

41 Ahmad Rizky M. Umar, “Religious Coal Rush: Why Do Indonesian Muslim Leaders Accept Coal Mining Concessions?” *The University of Melbourne*, Indonesia at Melbourne, August 7, 2024, <https://indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/religious-coal-rush-why-do-indonesian-muslim-leaders-accept-coal-mining-concessions/>.

42 Calvin Moniaga Sipahutar, “Indonesia Eyes Papua as National Bioenergy Hub to Cut Fuel Imports,” *Jakarta Globe*, December 17, 2025, <https://jakartaglobe.id/business/indonesia-eyes-papua-as-national-bioenergy-hub-to-cut-fuel-imports>.

43 There has been a long and ongoing issue about the relationship between the Papuans and the Indonesian government. For a specific issue about threats to ecology in Papua, see Hans Nicholas Jong, “Military-Backed Plantation Project in Indonesian Papua Triggers Rights Concerns,” *Mongabay*, April 30, 2025, <https://news.mongabay.com/2025/04/military-backed-plantation-project-in-indonesian-papua-triggers-rights-concerns/>. For recent protests against the palm oil project in Papua, see Dian Rahma Fika, “Papua Lawmaker Rejects Prabowo’s Palm Oil Plan, Military Projects,” *Tempo*, January 15, 2026, <https://en.tempo.co/read/2080577/papua-lawmaker-rejects-prabowos-palm-oil-plan-military-projects>.

This is where we need to uncover the colonial heritage that seeps beneath the surface. Szilvia Csevár and Yasmine Rugarli provide helpful research showing how palm oil is used as grease for the wheels of colonialism. The ongoing extractive industry continues to reproduce harmful colonial binaries (civilised vs. primitive).⁴⁴ To expand this logic, we see how the government tries to act as the civilising colonial master to the colonised extractive zone, in this case, Papua.⁴⁵ This has been the history, similar to what the Dutch government did to Indonesia or other European nations to their colonies. This colonial mentality then becomes embedded in the mindset of perhaps not only those with power, but also among other people who do not care about the situation.

With this dualistic view, we see how contrapuntality, by trying to defy the either-or mentality, aims to escape colonial-capitalist power. That is the reason I argue that we need to do both ecojustice(s) and not choose one over the other. That also means that contrapuntality can serve as a decolonial tool, primarily here for ecojustice. Not only that, but I also argue that this includes ecotheological justice—not just because theology in practice relates to ecology and economy, but also because the contrapuntal reading of Jesus does not reduce him to a person who must be sacrificed so that the world can be saved. Imaginatively (but not as fantasy), Jesus was made into a sacrificial and extractive body because colonial and imperial power seeks to maintain its authority over others. The claim is that Jesus' sacrifice was needed for the sake of the greater good (cf. John 11:48–50). This means, contrapuntally, that through his sacrifice, Jesus actually unveils the evil power of sacrificing the “throw-away” body. It also means that, in living as Christians, we are taught not to see others as sacrificial zones or sacrificable bodies. Instead, ecotheologically, we must fight against any effort that tries to sacrifice one thing for the false benefit of a bigger good, especially when it comes to the idea of national and global prosperity or a green future.

Coming from Jakarta and now living in Adelaide, I cannot stop reflecting on the striking differences between the two cities in terms of air pollution. I am glad that in Adelaide, I can wake up with an Air Quality Index (AQI) of around 10 to 50 every day. Yet, in Jakarta, it could reach around 150 or more, which is considered unhealthy.⁴⁶ I remember how Indonesians have a lower chance of getting a visa to enter Australia because Indonesia is on the list of high-risk tuberculosis countries. The problem is that many of the raw materials mined that cause respiratory diseases

44 Szilvia Csevár and Yasmine Rugarli, “Greasing the Wheels of Colonialism: Palm Oil Industry in West Papua,” *Global Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (April 2025): 2.

45 Csevár and Rugarli, “Greasing the Wheels,” 6.

46 Noted on June 30, 2024, 3:00 AM (UTC). All locations and the AQI index are based on <https://weather.com>.

are often extracted from “Southern Hemisphere” countries, with Australia as an exception, while the benefits of the economy are given to the Northern and Western countries. Therefore, extraction not only sacrifices underprivileged countries but also victimises them for the sake of the future of the “privileged.” If people still think that green capitalism is for the sake of a better or more sustainable world, then they must be critical of any possibility of sacrificing certain people, land, or nations. Sustainability must hold together economic needs and ecological concern without sacrificing one for the other. Therefore, constructing a deep ecotheology should also be about contrapuntal reflections on multiple interrelated issues, which focus on global ecojustice and reject any sacrificial tenet. The underprivileged spaces are not sacrifice zones where lives can be extracted like a resource for the sake of the prosperity of the privileged. Rather, as revealed in the life of Jesus, ecotheology should celebrate the whole *eco* (*oikos*)—households and habitats alike. Only then might we compose a harmonious music of ecotheology.