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The logo for the International Institute of Social Studies, featuring the word "Erasmus" in a stylized, cursive script.

# **Gender, Class, and Agrarian-Environmental Contestation in Lapangan Tembak, North Sumatra**

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—for C. Rinakit in the sky with diamonds

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*“Much like a forest ecosystem, intellectual life requires open encounters and collaboration. Individual performance in this sphere depends on fragile collective entanglements.”*

(Riotor&Tasset,2018, in reviewing Tsing,2015)

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## List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ARC	Agrarian Resource Centre
BHL	Buruh Harian Lepas
FFB	Fresh Fruit Bunches
FPE	Feminist Political Ecology
Gerwani	Gerakan Wanita Indonesia
GLNP	Gunung Leuser National Park
HK	Hari Kerja
IFI	International Financial Institution
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KETAPEL	Kelompok Tani Pejuang Langkat
KEHATI	Yayasan Keanekaragaman Hayati Indonesia
KLHK	Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan
Komnas HAM	Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia
KSDAE	Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam Ekosistem
KUD RATA	Koperasi Unit Desa Rahmat Tani
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PIR	Pola Inti Rakyat
PKK	Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga
PKS	Pabrik Kelapa Sawit
PT. ALAM	PT Anugerah Langkat Makmur
PTP	Perseroan Terbatas Perkebunan (Negara)
SM	Suaka Margasatwa
SRT	Social Reproduction Theory
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization



## **Abstract**

This research paper seeks to investigate the intersections of gender and class in agrarian-environmental political contestation. In exploring a slice of this socio-ecological complexity, it particularly addresses how class and gender mediate and shape (and are shaped by) political reactions “from below” in the contestation dynamics, how and why they are undertaken. It uses a framework of feminist political ecology, a loosely configured qualitative research trajectory of gender/feminist studies, agrarian political economy, and political ecology. The study is carried out by examining the case of Lapangan Tembak, Besitang, North Sumatra. Based on a border delineation during the Dutch colonial era, Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP) claims that Lapangan Tembak is under its unit of management. However, the claim is contested as different groups of local community use the land for oil palm plantations, farms, and settlements. In response to the eviction attempts and conservation partnership program done by the GLNP to discipline its borders, local community members engage in various political reactions “from below”. Much of the pre-existing literature often analyses separately the relationships between (1) agrarian and environmental dimensions and (2) gender and class. Hence, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding by addressing those two sets of interconnections. In doing so, it uses primary empirical materials based on ethnographic-oriented fieldwork done by two research assistants and combines them with secondary data and literature.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

The global socio-ecological crises are fundamentally linked to the mutation of capitalism that continuously exploits the environment, living labours, and social reproductive relations (Haraway,2015;Fraser,2016). However, the solution proposed by dominant international development and financial institutions is more capitalism and market-based relations (Maxton-Lee,2018). The encroachment of capitalism in our lifeworlds is accompanied by a dualist modern understanding of nature that separate “humans” from the “environment”, resulting in the development of national parks with conservation fortress model and monoculture plantations that dispossess and fragment local people (Smith,1984;Brockington&Duffy,2011). Mainstream literatures on agrarian-environmental contestations often reduce the socio-ecological contradictions and complexities, relying on ahistorical, apolitical, and technocratic approaches that treat local people as “forest encroachers” and “objects of development”. On the other hand, social movement activists frequently hold their critics on the social differentiation within the “local community” in an attempt to deal with the obvious “greater enemy”, such as big capitalists or the state apparatus (Bernstein,2010). My research paper seeks to address this gap by presenting (1) gender and class dynamics and (2) agrarian and environmental dimensions in the local people’s political reactions “from below”. It contributes to understanding the struggles in the contested trajectory of agrarian-environmental change, a main concern of agrarian, food, and environmental studies (AFES) in their critical examination of “development”.

## **Keywords**

gender, class, agrarian-environmental contestation, political reactions “from below”, conservation, capitalism, Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP), oil palm, plantation, Indonesia

# Chapter 1 — Introduction

This study aims to explore a slice of socio-ecological complexity in agrarian-environmental political contestation. It particularly asks how class and gender mediate and shape (and are shaped by) political reactions “from below” in the contestation dynamics, how and why they are undertaken, by studying the case of Lapangan Tembak. The interlinkages between (1) the agrarian and the environmental and (2) gender and class are often discussed separately in much of the preexisting literature. Thus, this study seeks to fill this gap by presenting the combinations of both sets of intersecting dimensions.

## Contentious Politics of the Firing Range

At the end of June 2011, Sandra overheard her husband, Kamal, receiving a phone call from a neighbouring sub-village chief, informing about the heavy equipment deployed by Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP) authorities to clear the farms, plantations, and settlements in *Lapangan Tembak*—literally translated as “the firing range”—an area of Sekoci resort, a sub-unit under GLNP management. Sandra and her family live in PIR ADB, a village of oil palm nucleus-estate smallholders (*Pola Inti Rakyat*, or PIR) scheme in Besitang subdistrict, Langkat regency, in the Indonesian province of North Sumatra. Her village and many other settlements in the area are directly bordering the national park, surrounded by corporate plantations and extractive frontiers of forest products. Sandra’s husband controls (*menguasai*) some land in Plantation 52, an oil palm plantation established in 1990 at Lapangan Tembak. Like many others in the area, the tenurial status of this plantation is contested. Upon hearing the news of the eviction, Kamal immediately notified other planters and they went directly to the location to guard the land, in which Sandra and some other women joined their husbands.

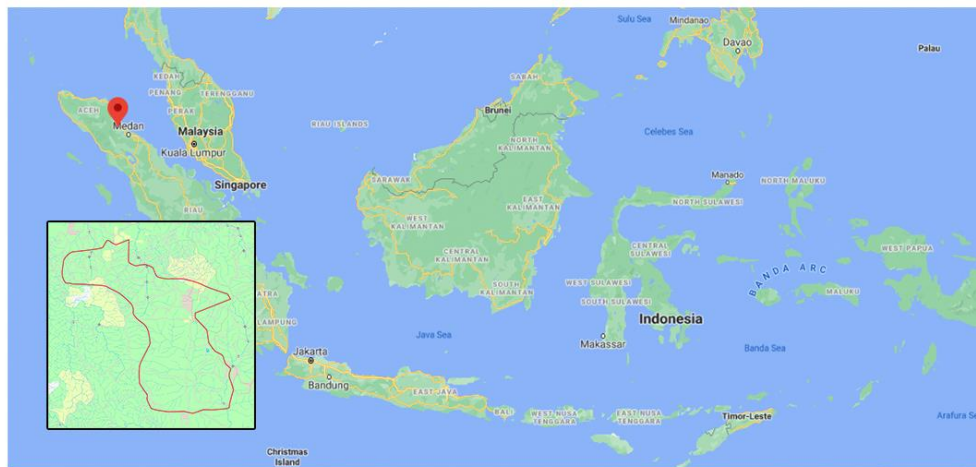
When they arrived, they saw that the GLNP authorities were clearing most of the plants. Other villagers who use the lands in Lapangan Tembak and whose plants were already evicted were also there. Together they stormed and encircled the heavy equipment, demanding the authorities to stop the ongoing operation, with some women stripped their clothes off to protest. As the words spread, the crowd grew. The mass stayed overnight in the GLNP Sekoci resort office for 3 days. They went back home after the equipment was fully evacuated, after the authorities were worried that the heated mass would burn them (Interview, 3 September 2020). As reported on their official website, on those 3 days (24-26 June 2011) GLNP had assigned more than 1,200 personnel of combined forces of the national army, national police, forestry service, regional government, non-governmental organisations (*ormas*) and Tangkahan elephants in a “massive operation” to “secure” the national park from what they termed as “forest encroachers”. Due to the mass mobilisation, the Langkat police chief commanded to call off the operation (Trihangga, 2013; Arofah et al., 2020).

This contentious episode is not atypical. Since the Dutch colonial era, the tenurial trajectory of the eastern coast of North Sumatra has been coloured with agrarian environmental conflicts, crises, and confrontations (Stoler, 1995). The trajectory exemplifies the particular ways capitalist commoditisation, marketisation, and ideology interplay, transform, and shape landscapes and livelihoods into what contemporary scholars call the “plantationocene”—a conjunctural epoch of ecological simplifications, a disciplinary practice and imperial control of the “surprising and unpredictable” dimensions of plants, animals, “native” populations, and all kinds of living labour (Boyd et al., 2001; Nevins & Peluso, 2018; Haraway et al., 2019). Plantationocene exposes the modern, colonial, contradictory logics that organise lifeworlds relations through multiple plantations, botanical gardens, and ecological reserves

under the bourgeois and patriarchal “management of nature”, and how they are contested (Merchant,1980;Smith,1984;Mies,1986). In North Sumatra, it manifests in the simultaneous promotion of environmental conservation attempts and expansion of plantations for export-oriented cash crops.

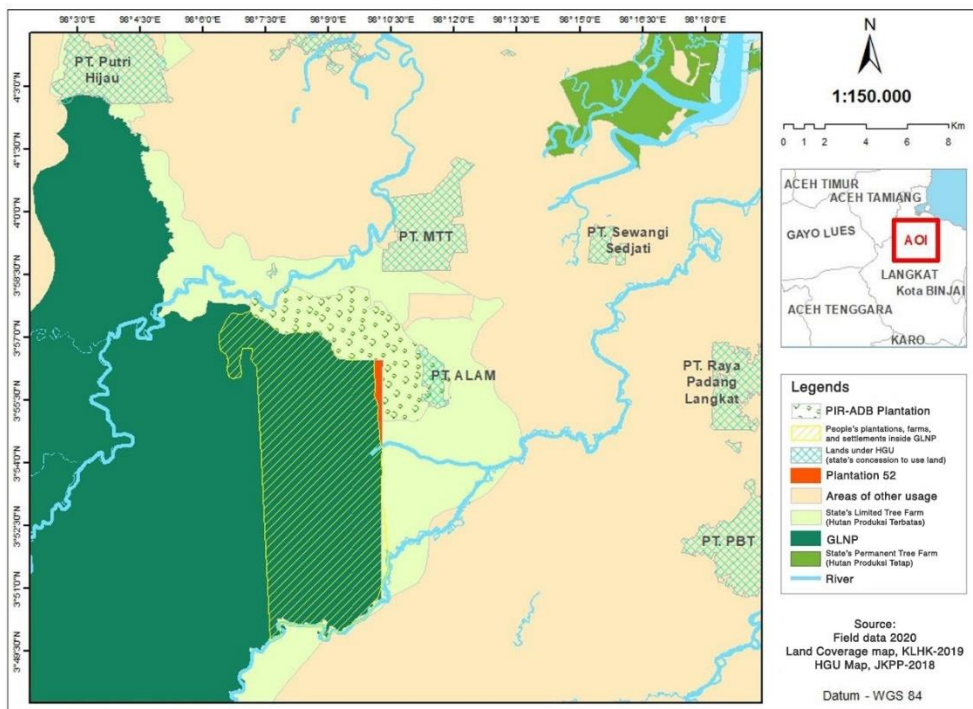
## Spaces of Contestation

**Map 1.1**  
Geographical location of Lapangan Tembak and PIR ADB village borders in Besitang, North Sumatra



Source: Google map,2020

**Map 1.2**  
Tenurial map of Lapangan Tembak and its surrounding



Source: Naibaho,2020:2

Based on GLNP's co-investigation with "local youth figures", the contestation and over-exploitation of Besitang were rooted in the logging practices in the 1970s due to the rising demands from the wood processing industry, which in turn encouraged the surrounding communities to occupy and plant on the cleared bare lands. The Ministry of Finance' officially announced the establishment of more export-oriented plantations in March 1979. Since then, the Langkat regency had planned the development of PIR ADB but the official decision was released in 1981. Not long after, the Ministry of Agriculture inaugurated GLNP on 6 March 1980, based on the borders of Sekundur wildlife reserve delineated by the Dutch colonial government in 1938. As a consequence, the land allocated for PIR ADB were initially inside the borders of GLNP. The New Order government then decided to release and change the national park land status to allow the development. The project construction was started in 1982, for which it took credit from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). These tenurial overlaps have haunted Besitang ever since (Wiratno,2012:69-83;Arofat et al.,2020:8-9).

During a phase of the Aceh conflict in 1994-2004, many refugees crossed the provincial borders and developed their livelihoods in Besitang—which later inspired many other "newcomers" to live and work in the forest area. All was made possible through maladministration and corrupt involvements of GLNP staffs, military members, police officers, network of "ghostly" land mafia and speculators, and legislative members (Wiratno,2012:69-83). As a result, during a regular border reconstruction in Besitang, they found various overlaps of the national park with oil palm plantations of several private companies (553.5 ha), PIR ADB (300 ha) and other local villagers (103 ha), as well as human settlements (TBI,2015:37-41). After GLNP was included in the World Tropical Rainforest Heritage list by the UNESCO in 2004, the border control has been intensified. GLNP has undertaken "various persuasive and repressive efforts to reclaim the tenurial control of the encroached national park areas" (Suryadi et al. in Wiratno,2012:97).

Conservation partnership programs and cultural events with the local communities were held. But even they admit that the conservation management still relies mostly on repressive measures, in which the forest police dominate the GLNP staff composition (Wiratno,2012:278). In fact, GLNP's regular eviction of local communities' settlements and plantations amidst the limited access to arable lands<sup>1</sup> can be categorised as what global land grab scholars call "green grabbing", a contemporary form of enclosure where climate change politics become a justification of enforced dispossession that (threatens to) expel and diminish villagers' access to resources (Fairhead et al.,2012;Franco&Borras,2019:196). Consequently, it has triggered and shaped political reactions "from below". Rooted in heterodox theories of social movement, contentious politics, and collective actions in rural context, contemporary theorisation of political reactions "from below" inquires "(h)ow do those most affected actually perceive and react to these large-scale land deals and why" (Borras&Franco,2013:1724), as they are embedded in the broader context of agrarian transformation processes and their social, political economy and ecological dynamics (Bachriadi,2012:2;Edelman&Borras,2016:2-6).

After the 2011 partial eviction, local communities in Lapangan Tembak started to consolidate and undertake various manoeuvres to preserve their access to the contested land, especially when they heard that there would be similar GLNP operation in the near future. They learned from the neighbouring Aceh refugee communities' strategy to make alliances with lawyers, local customary *kedatukan* elites, NGOs, influential figures, and the Indonesian

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<sup>1</sup> Local communities living and working on the land of Sekoci resort is interlinked with land concentration on the hands of big corporate plantations, involving violent "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey,2004). One of the biggest, most infamous corporates is PT. ALAM, PIR ADB's current nucleus company.

National Commission of Human Rights (Komnas HAM), while inviting friends and relatives to occupy the land. Some became members of an independent community organisation called the Peasant Group of Langkat Warriors (KETAPEL) and others have participated in the GLNP's Conservation Partnership scheme. In 2012, 300 members of KETAPEL (some from Plantation 52) invited their landless labourer relatives and acquaintances from the surrounding areas to occupy the upper and lower sides of Lapangan Tembak, around the roads of PIR ADB. A total of 400 landless family heads were registered as new KETAPEL members and each was allocated 2 ha of arable land. Together with the old members, they established a *kampung* (sub-village) called Kuta Buluh and attempted to “struggle for private land ownership” of the spaces they occupied (Arofat et al.,2020:17-19). Until today, the GLNP has repeatedly tried both to evict Kuta Buluh from Lapangan Tembak and to integrate them into the Conservation Partnership. Repeatedly, the villagers have refused and protested, rebuilt their homes, replanted their farms, and maintained their livelihoods with the forest—with all the frictions that happened.

## Justification and Relevance

Mainstream literatures on conservation tend to be “apolitical” and technocratic, modelling the national park as a “conservation fortress”; a pristine “nature” that should be separated and free of human social relations. Ecological destruction is attributed to the increasing pressure of human population, the overlapping administration, and corrupt bureaucracy in land-related government agencies (Vaccaro et al.,2013). The fluid, ambiguous legal environment is often associated with the lack of “good governance” within third-world countries’ governments, enabling an excessive exploitation by the agro-industry (North,1995;Babayev,2015). They often turn a blind eye to the historical and asymmetrical power relations underpinning environmental degradation and agrarian conflicts.

On the other hand, many “peasant studies” literature and movement narratives that inspire Political Ecology frequently resort to an “ideologically attractive tales of morality” to understand the complex realities and contradictions of agrarian change (Bernstein,2010). “Local agrarian community”, “peasants” and “rural poor” are often portrayed as a group of homogenous people with monolithic path and united interests, seen as “victims” of agribusiness and dominant conservation discourses. When social differentiation (based on class, gender, generation, ethnicity, caste, etc.) is acknowledged, it is often treated as differences between static categories with no historical and relational dynamics (Shah,1984:2-3). Issues of labour, land, environment, and gender (among others) are interconnected, but they become compartmentalised, competing agendas where one tends to prioritise some and compromise others. Some of these dilemmas are thought of as a partial manifestation of intersectionality, particularly of “class” and “identity” (Hall et al.,2015:472-73). As a part of their tactics, many social movement activists hold their critics on this differentiation and tension in an attempt to deal first with the obvious “greater enemy”, such as big capitalists or the state apparatus, overlooking the mundane and intimate ways hegemonic processes and disciplinary power permeate (Foucault,1997:32; Li,2014:3-5).

Some academics suggest that there hasn't been sufficient gendered analysis of political reactions “from below”, namely “gendered agency, responses and resistance” in the particular generation of studies dedicated to contemporary land grabs (Hall et al.,2015:482), since much pre-existing literature focuses more on the gendered impacts, marginalisation, and pattern of vulnerabilities caused by large-scale land deals and their capitalist ensembles (Behrman et al.,2012;Julia&White,2012;Levien,2017;White et al.,2014;Park&White,2017). It is in this context that existing scholarship in Feminist Political Ecology (FPE) can be useful; it has told narrations of women's engagement in resistance against land/green-grabbing, as

well as gendered analyses of agrarian-environmental struggles (Rocheleau et al.,1996;Har-court&Nelson,2015;Gerber,2011). In the case of oil palm plantation expansion in Indonesia, Morgan (2017) has discussed the participation of rural women in protests. Gender is not only about “women”, but women’s experience can be a departure point to examine the broader gender dynamics, and the re/production and existence of “women subjects” have been historically significant in the making, maintaining, and contesting of Indonesian oil palm plantation labour regime (Aljazeera,2020). It is tempting to imagine that women with common problem would automatically engage in a cross-class sisterhood in a common cause of agrarian environmental struggle (Shiva,1989;Agarwal,2019). But as this study and many others indicate, often this is simply not the case, as gender is mediated by class (among others). Hence, with all the limitations this study entails, I aim to examine the intersections of class and gender which can be an important kaleidoscope to see a slice of complex socio-ecological dynamics in the agrarian-environmental contestation in Lapangan Tembak, particularly in its four interrelated spaces: PIR ADB, Plantation 52, GLNP Conservation Partnership program, and Kuta Buluh.

## **Research Questions**

### **Main Questions**

How do class and gender intersect and shape the political reactions ‘from below’ in the contestation of Lapangan Tembak?

### **Sub-questions**

- (1) How do class relations shape the political reactions “from below” in this case?
- (2) How do gender relations mediate women’s experience and involvement in the contestation?
- (3) How do the intersections between gender and class play out in the movement dynamics?

## Chapter 2 — Methodology

### A Trajectory of Feminist Political Ecology

Overall, this research paper is situated in a learning trajectory of Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), a “loosely configured” framework of feminist scholarship, agrarian political economy, and political ecology. As with Political Ecology, FPE examines multiple scales and relays of power relations, material and discursive. In addition, it is committed to study and make visible gendered processes through feminist epistemology, methods and values, where “dominant masculinist conceptions and practices of knowledge and authority are recognised and challenged” (Elmhirst,2015:519). As a set of power relations, gender socially constructs meanings and relations about men and women (Razavi&Miller,1995). Gender politics are embedded in sustainable development, environmental deterioration, and conservation, neoliberalisation of socionature, growth-fetish accumulation—all involve different forms of enclosure. They interact with processes that create class, caste, race, culture, and ethnicity to shape socio-ecological change and struggles (Harcourt&Nelson,2015;Rocheleau et al.,1996).

As a framework in a messy crossroads, there are various strands and themes in FPE, making it a rich approach of multiple ontologies. FPE scholarships range from those rooted in Marxist tradition to poststructuralist questions of gendered subjectivities to ethics of care to a combination of different critical theoretical traditions (Elmhirst,2015:521). Many intersectionality scholars note that this ontological pluralism has led to various debates about ontological contradictions and awkwardness (Mollet&Faira,2013;Bilge,2010). Embracing these debates, this paper situates its ontological positioning within a heterodox “non-deterministic” reconstruction of historical materialist FPE. In pondering agrarian-environmental problems, it is grounded in a materialist conception of history to explore interrelated dimensions of gendered resource access and control, gendered labour processes, gendered social relations of production and reproduction (Razavi,2009). Its epistemology is dialectical methods of abstraction and empirical observation, in which social relations of re/production become the “ontological cornerstone” (Overbeek,2000:168). It asserts that “(t)he production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of (humans)” (Marx&Engels,1970[1846]:47).

As a heterodox reconstruction, it develops as it is continuously challenged, enriched and remoulded through critical conversations, debates, (auto)critics, relational approach and political engagement with historical phenomena and other schools of critical thoughts (Elmhirst, 2015;Jessop,2008;Levien et al.,2018). Tracing genealogies of certain hegemonic discourse and subject-making, for instance, is important to understand how particular mode of re/production operates—and *vice versa*. Examining *both* material conditions and symbolic representations is crucial to understand body politics in agrarian-environmental struggles (Harcourt, 2009). It is along this line that conversations and transboundary framework in this paper are constructed.

### Analysing Political Reactions ‘From Below’

In a simple definition, politics can be construed as who gets what, when, and how, and what they do with it. It’s about “the control, allocation, production, and use of resources and the values and ideas underlying those activities” (Kerkvliet,2009:227). As feminists repeatedly



suggest, it is not confined only to government officials and state politicians—as interpreted by conventional understandings of politics, but is pervasive in our everyday lives, embodied in our inter/personal experiences and embedded with the economic, cultural, social, etc. Kerkvliet (2009) notes at least three types of politics relevant in studying agrarian societies: (1) official politics, (2) advocacy politics and (3) everyday politics. In official politics, authorities and organisations are the principle actors in the decision-making processes of resource allocation and distribution, for instance governments, private corporations, farmer cooperatives, etc. Meanwhile, advocacy politics comprise “direct and concerted efforts” to encourage, criticise, and/or oppose authorities about the allocation and distribution of resources. It can involve advocating alternative visions and policies about them. The actors can be individuals, groups, or organisations and they can operate in publicly open and/or clandestine ways. Finally, everyday politics are carried in relatively “quiet, mundane, and subtle” ways that are “rarely organised or direct”, hence often overlooked despite the significance. It can include “support, compliance, modifications and evasions, and resistance”. As with analytical types in general, the boundaries are fluid and overlapping. These definitions and types can be a good foundation for analysing political reactions “from below”; the uneven processes that shape the responses of different social groups, the issues that divide and bind them, and the political dynamics coming out from the different reactions.

But before that, it is useful to acknowledge that the contested meaning of land and the role of the state are key factors in agrarian political dynamics (Borras&Franco,2013:1726-28). Land becomes important since it is immovable asset and control of land means access to other agrarian-environmental resources, such as water bodies, subsoil nutrients, carbon reserves, etc. As an implication of enclosure, land control is in/directly linked with broader dynamics of accumulation and differentiation. Barred from accessing the land, agricultural labourers will be compelled to sell their labour power despite low wages. In many cases of green grabbing, big capitalists around the national park are enjoying the benefits of the relative surplus population of cheap, precarious, and dispossessed labours (Marx,1992[1867];Li,2010;Cavanagh&Benjaminsen,2015). Besides, different social groups attach different and overlapping meanings to land, contoured by gender, ideology, ethnicity, etc., which further complicate the political contestation over land. Coupled with layers of institutional policies and often inconsistencies of different state government’s programs, political struggles around land are highly varied and contentious. Differentiated local communities affected by large-scale land deals engage in different institutional spaces. Unlike what governments officially advertise, states are usually incoherent and polyvalent entities filled with conflicts of interest, multiple factions, and competing agendas. In global capitalism, they are pulled and push in two contradictory projects: to support capital accumulation and to maintain a (historically determined) minimum level of political legitimacy (Fox,1993).

To unpack the variegated political reactions “from below” resulting from these contentions, Borras and Franco (2013:1730-40) overview four broad arenas of struggle: (1) struggles against expulsion, (2) struggles for, and within, terms of incorporation, (3) struggle against land concentration and/or for redistribution and/or recognition, and (4) struggles across overlapping/intersecting geographic and institutional spaces. Later on, Hall et al. (2015) broadly identify three types of reactions: (1) resistance, (2) acquiescence, and (3) incorporation. Groups of local communities, endowed with differentiated and unequal power relations in their “awkward encounters” with global capitalism, states and other “universals” (such as development, human rights, climate change, etc.) can be split or united through these terrains of struggles. Tsing (2005:4) interprets this as “friction”; “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across differences”.

Meanwhile, heterodox social movements scholarship has combined theoretical insights from agrarian studies to explain tendencies in an agrarian movement trajectory<sup>2</sup>. There are generally three classic mainstream camps to analyse the problem of collective action and agency in rural contexts. The Marxian *class conflict* lens analyses that capitalism has caused depeasantisation and rural social differentiation. As a result, “peasants” are dissolved into classes: clear exploiters, the contradictory middle-peasants, and classes of the clearly exploited. The smallholders and landless agricultural labourers are thought to be the most “revolutionary agents” because they are the most exploited and have the least to lose (Lenin,1899). But as many cases show, “class-in-itself” doesn’t automatically translate to “class-for-itself”. Class interests do not necessarily lead to class politics and the later theorisations of hegemony explore why. From another spectrum based on a Chayanovian approach to the peasantries, *moral economy* theorists argue that peasants tend to engage in “everyday forms of resistance”. They would mostly join overt “revolutionary” movements when their most basic subsistence is threatened (Scott,1976;Kerkvliet,2009). Lastly, from a neoclassical economic framework, *rational choice* scholars have theorised the “rational peasants”, rational subjects able to calculate incentives and risks for their individual self-interests. They are not necessarily risk-averse, like the moral economists would predict, but will logically assess their participation or absence in any social movement (Popkin,1979).

In practice, there can be various complex combinations and dynamics among these tendencies, which shape and are shaped by the political opportunity structure. Political opportunity structure partly defines to what extent social movement can articulate and achieve the demands (Skocpol,1994;Tarrow,1996). It is the socio-ecological contexts where people explain and position themselves, how their desire and feelings are moulded, as well as specific situations and conjunctures that can trigger the emergence of certain movement (Li,2014). Finally, the rise and fall, the effectiveness and failures of a movement can be analysed through how each participants maintain the flow of the “exchange of interests” in resource allocation and mobilisation, as well as in responding repression, coercion, and cooptation by powerful parties i.e. between the activists and the organised masses, different class and gendered interests inside and among different groups, conflicting interests on land, the sympathetic government apparatus and their political agenda, and so on (Bachriadi,2012).

## Theorising Social Reproduction in Agrarian Contexts

In addressing the interlinkages of class and gender in agrarian political dynamics, debates and literatures on social reproduction are helpful<sup>3</sup>. The onset of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) is often associated with the works of Western Marxist feminist in the 1960s-70s to criticise the masculinist Left and make visible the ways domestic reproductive labour—historically associated with the experiential baggage and naturalised notions of women’s bodies—enable the reproduction of waged-labour power and capitalist accumulation (Morini,2007:40). However, earlier theorisation of social reproduction can be traced back to the end of 1940s, when Black feminists examined the multiple oppression and exploitation experienced by working-class black women in the plantation economy (Jones,1949). In many postcolonial countries, livelihoods based on common environmental resources and agricultural production are prevalent. But social reproduction in these contexts are relatively under-theorised, including by Marxist scholars of agrarian political economy whose lens is viable to

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<sup>2</sup> The last two paragraphs of this subchapter are an expanded version of an answer for Global Political Ecology final exam (Austriningrum,2020a:6-9).

<sup>3</sup> This subchapter is expanded from a final essay for Political Economy of Agriculture and Environment (Austriningrum, 2019).

analyse the interconnection of production and reproduction in rural settings (Cousins et al.,2018).

Social reproduction theorists continuously strive to understand “...how categories of oppression (such as gender, race, and ableism) are coproduced in simultaneity with the production of surplus value” (Bhattacharya,2017). Thus, in this study gender oppression and class exploitation in multiple scales are analysed as intersecting processes that reciprocally shape each other. Learning from postcolonial and queer critics, a focus on the concepts of social reproduction can help to avoid reducing and essentialising women, marriage, domesticities, kinship, and household as universal categories, as well as the illusory “finality of gender distinction” (Harris&Young,1981:110-12). In a similar manner, this paper examines “class” in its specific historical relationship, through its social relations in a mode of production (Lenin,1899). It is not a “thing” that can be paused for us to analyse, but a dynamic and always-in-motion process, embodied in real people and real contexts (Thompson,1963). Though a sketch of class structure based on property and labour relations can be a tool of analysis, let’s bear in mind that “relations of production always present a historical complexity which simple schematic definitions inevitably avoid” (Banaji,1972:33).

It is important to note that there is an ongoing debate regarding the vast contour of “social reproduction”. In producing and reproducing the whole system, capitalism involves not only relations between capitalists and wage labourers in the making, reproducing, and disciplining of working-class subjects, but also

...the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally. It involves various kinds of socially necessary work—mental, physical, and emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined means for maintaining and reproducing population. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, how the maintenance and socialization of children is accomplished, how care of the elderly and infirm is provided, and how sexuality is socially constructed (Laslett&Brenner,1989:382)

But how to draw the boundary in the flows and network of reproductive and productive labour that formally produce surplus? How to examine and relate the analytical distinction among “overall social reproduction”, “reproduction of labour” and “specific forms of biological reproduction”?<sup>4</sup> (Harris&Young,1981:113;O’Laughlin,2009:191).

Some theorists start from Marx’s account that labour power is a “unique” commodity since it is produced (mostly) in “non-capitalistic” ways. They rethink the ways capital makes use of and commodifies non-capitalist, non-commoditised, non-waged, extra-market relations for its continued expansion, while at the same time devalues, conceals, separate, feminises and otherise these social reproductive relations (Federici,2012;Wichterich,2015). Capitalism depends on the social reproductive labour as a precondition to make accumulation possible. But profit cannot be realised if social reproduction work is fully recognised and fairly compensated<sup>5</sup>. In effect, this contradictory relationship harbours an inherent crisis tendency. The global terrain of social reproduction in the current international division of labour becomes disproportionately gendered, classed, racialised and spatialised, where women of

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<sup>4</sup> An expanded understanding of social reproduction of capitalism was also proposed by Althusser in 1970s, which was later developed and challenged by Foucault (1977-78) through the concepts of governmentality and biopolitics.

<sup>5</sup>We can see a parallel in patriarchal-capitalist treatments of the environment.

colour in the Global South are increasingly precarised and burdened both in the workplace and at home (Fraser,2016:112).

Others argue that it is necessary to transgress the “dualism” between “accumulation” and “social reproduction”. We should analyse their dialectical relation, mutual constitution, and tension (Vogel,1983;Katz,2001). In critical agrarian studies, these intertwined circuits of capital-labour reproduction are problematised in the “agrarian questions of labour” (Bernstein,2010:110). “Fragmented classes of labour” in rural households in the Global South are increasingly depending on capitalist commodity relations for their basic survival, including “...on the (direct and indirect) sale of their labour power, but who face mounting, complex and contradictory pressures on their social reproduction” (Cousins et al.,2018:1061). The rising role of credit/indebtedness fosters market discipline further (Gerber,2014). Processes of commoditisation lead to class formation and differentiation that influence rural households’ social reproduction strategies, in which the agrarian structure that governs access, control and use of land and environmental resources is integral. Under capitalism, the Chayanovian subjects of “middle-class peasantries” are increasingly eroded, transformed into “petty agricultural commodity producers”. In response to the intensified pressures on social reproduction, many combine diverse livelihood strategies: possessing some kinds of means of production and using their own labour (Bernstein,2010). This trend of rural livelihood pluriactivity is also accompanied by a tendency to reinforce class stratification, hence the need to re-centre class in agrarian analyses (O’Laughlin,1996).

Mostly entangled with gendered (and generational) contestations, these class dynamics shape the local and broader contentious politics. But just as it provides the conditional background for capitalism, social reproduction has also been a potential locus of subversions, “a process of self-transformation”, and a backbone of political resistance (Bhattacharya,2015; Davis,1998[1970]).

## Methods

This study adopts qualitative methodology and methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants’ lived experiences around specific phenomena, to converse with the “cultural, everyday, and situated aspects of human thinking, learning, knowing, acting, and ways of understanding ourselves as persons” (Kvale&Brinkman,2009:12). Due to Covid19, the primary field data was collected during a 1-month period by two research assistants, Junarcia Molisna Naibaho (Lisna) and Nur Janti (Janti). With the consent of relevant parties, I also use some data collected by Lisna in her previous project on the same site (Naibaho,2020;Arofat et al.,2020). Before the fieldwork, the research assistants and I held a series of online discussions, including on the fieldwork terms and interview questions (Appendix 1). We agreed to combine ethnographic-oriented participant observations, semi-structured qualitative interviewing, and informal conversations. The interview guides were drafted for particular groups with open-ended questions to provide data that can be compared (King et al.,2019).

Lisna and Janti stayed in the field for a month (8 August - 7 September 2020). Upon arrival, they informed the relevant officials and translated to them ISS introductory documents explaining my student status, research topic, and Covid19-related fieldwork protocols. As informed by ethnographic methods, they immersed themselves in the lifeworlds of the participants by staying in their houses, buying groceries, cooking and eating with them, helping them with daily work, playing with their kids, hanging out and chilling together, hence allowing them a partial but “thick description” of the villagers’ realities (Ellis et al.,2011). After familiarising themselves with the community, they made appointments with some

interviewees and applied a snowball method to get more informants. In total, they interviewed 39 informants (25 women and 14 men; age 29-65).

They recorded the conversations (audio, photo, and video) and archived them on our common online drive. They wrote field notes and daily logs to document their encounters, observations, embodied reactions, thoughts, emotions, and reflection. Going through these files has been helpful for me to understand and connect with the dynamics in the field, no matter how limited and awkward. In return, I would note down my response, shared what I was going through or working on. We would talk via an online messenger group whenever we faced challenges and absurdities, making sure that we would be regularly informed of each other's process (My reflection of relational positionality is attached as Appendix 2).

## Chapter 3 — Class and Gender Complexity

### The Colonial Origin of Capitalist Plantations and Conservation

A close relationship between capitalism and conservation is not new (Brockington&Duffy,2011:2). The simultaneous establishment of PIR ADB as a scheme of industrial plantation and GLNP as a “natural” conservation that underpins the contestation in Lapan-gan Tembak can be traced back to the Dutch colonial era. At that time, Besitang was a *kedatukan* region under the Langkat Sultanate. As the Dutch signed political contracts with predominantly male indigenous leaders and elites across the archipelago, they acknowledged the Langkat sultanate as a self-autonomous administration operating under the colonial government in 1907. It was after the victory of the liberal camp and free market advocates in the Netherlands, which manifested in the erasure of the forced cultivation system (command economy) and the launch of 1870 Agrarian Law (market economy) (Suroyo,1987;Sto-ler,1995;Schrader,1997). They conferred that commodity producing society should be free from corrupt state governments, political patrons, or “traditional” cultures. The “self-regulating market” was assumed to organise in the most just and peaceful way the lives of free, modern, and rational individuals, thriving through competitions. Property rights, law, and other institutional arrangements should be reconfigured; modernised, formalised, and privat-ised to enable efficient transaction (Polanyi,1994;Wood,2002).

Hence, the 1870 Agrarian Law provided new legal and institutional milieus to estab-lish a waged, “free” labour regime, cash economy and specialised commodity production, enabled through a dual status of land: private or colonial state property. It set up the estab-lishment of state-owned plantations and issued land concessions for private Dutch and for-foreign firms to develop export-oriented agribusinesses and plantation estates. One of the major implications of this development was a centralisation of power in the sultan in giving large land leases to plantation companies. Most plantation concessions were authorised on forests and common lands used by the local communities to do shifting cultivation, both designated by the Agrarian Law as “waste land” for it was not under “permanent cultivation” (Sto-ler,1995:35). It was what Marx (1992[1887]:874-5) called the “blood and fire” of “primitive accumulation”; the “enclosure of the commons” that became the preconditions of capitalist commoditisation and marketisation; a central contradiction of the free market litany, in which extra-economic coercion or non-market means are used to establish the means of production for capital accumulation (Harvey,2004).

At the same time, the Dutch East-Indie government also ordered the Malay sultans to establish a “natural conservation” and “wildlife reserve” (*Suaka Margasatwa*, or SM) area. The Langkat Sultanate proceeded to establish the reserve in 1920-38. In 1927, *kedatukan* Besitang proposed Sekundur, and in 1938 the sultan approved, establishing an area of 213,985 ha as SM Sekundur (as mentioned in the introduction, the perimeters of GLNP in Besitang are set to follow the 1938 SM borders). In contrary to the “apolitical” understanding of conservation, conservation area is a “political forest”. Taking away forests from local people was the colonial state’s “technology of governmentality” in state-making, in terms of territorialisation, legal framing, institutionalisation of forest management, and control of counterinsurgency (Peluso&Vandergeest,2001). The concurrent formation of industrial plan-tation and wildlife conservation was also based on a “scientific” and “instrumental” manage-ment of forestry to ensure that profit accumulation and environmental functions went hand

in hand. Gender and ethno-racial politics were embedded in this “management of nature”, as white male forest scientists from universities in Western Europe were posted across the archipelago to work with the heads of forest agencies and plantation estate managers—all white males from the upper class. Middle-class white males were hired as field supervisors and lower-class native males from surrounding villages were recruited as cheap labourers, along with the landless, dispossessed rural migrants imported from Java, Penang and China (Mies,1986;Siscawati&Mahaningtyas,2012). Conservation fortress has also benefited capitalism’s growth and reproduction, as control of access to lands around the plantations was favourable for the re/production of cheap and disciplined labourers (Stoler,1995:35;Brockington&Duffy,2011:4).

Workers and staffs, from Javanese plantation labourers to European assistants, were increasingly recruited with their families through the “family formation” approach. More intimate labour control was penetrated into the workers’ private lives and the plantations gained access to disciplined additional labourers, mostly women and children who were unpaid in assisting their husbands and fathers both in the plantation and at home. Hence, the colonial era unleashed a repertoire of accumulation by dispossession, followed by a tendency of concentration, differentiation, gender-based subordination, and ecological degradation that becomes the context of contemporary contestations. It has been reinforced by different regimes of patriarchal-capitalist development, especially since the early neoliberalisation during the New Order (1966-98) (Gellert,2015). Even under Soekarno’s post-Independence socialist-oriented administration, the discourse of forest management was still dominated by male Indonesian foresters from *priyayi* elite groups with middle-to-upper class education but directed to the spirits of “national development” and “people’s needs” (Siscawati&Rachman,2004). Until the late 1950s, the Dutch ownership of their assets in Indonesia, including plantations, was guaranteed by the Round Table Agreement of 1949. As a result, the colonial plantations were not touched and included in the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law (UUPA) formulation and land redistribution program (Rachman,2012).

## **Class Dynamics of the Contestation**

### **PIR ADB Village**

The contestation in Plantation 52, Conservation Partnership program and Kuta Buluh is firstly related to the plantation life dynamics in PIR ADB. The extended implications beyond the formal perimeters of a contract farming scheme have been discussed by many critical agrarian scholars since the nineteenth century, in which translocal pressures of commodification, marketisation and competition cumulatively create a tendency of surplus concentration, social differentiation and fragmented classes of labour inclined towards individualised pursuits of means of reproduction (Bernstein,2009;Julia&White,2012;Li,2017).

PIR ADB was inaugurated in the heyday of oil palm commodity boom during the New Order in the 1980s. Appropriating a part of Chayanovian proposition that small family farms are more productive and efficient than their large-scale counterparts, PIR has been a strategic item in International Financial Institutions (IFIs)’ and New Order’s package of rural development, especially to erode “agrarian radicalism”. It was coupled with the Green Revolution and transmigration program, mirroring its colonial predecessor to distribute poor rural families (mainly from Java) to the other sparsely inhabited big islands. In the PIR contract, the nucleus plantation acted as an exemplary estate for the smallholders (McCarthy,2010:828). The contract requires the company to coordinate with the local authorities to give the farmers technical knowledge of modern agribusiness and innovation, as well as

loaned inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, build the processing mills/factories (PKS) and public facilities (such as housing, schools, roads, marketplaces, cemeteries, and places of worship), buy the smallholders' fresh fruit bunches (FFB), and handle the marketing. Meanwhile, the smallholders are bound to sell their FFB only to the company and follow the standard operational procedure regulated by the company.

Between the 1-3 years period of soil preparation and the first harvest, the smallholders are usually prioritised to be hired as wage labourers for the nucleus plantation. Their first income from the first harvest will be cut for the input costs. They also have to pay back the loan instalment (usually for 15-20 years) for their land plots and house construction to the bank appointed by the company, of which the completion will gain them formal private land title, registered under the name of the (almost always male) family head. The smallholders are organised in a cooperative (*Koperasi Unit Desa*, or KUD) (White,1997:121-2;Badrun,2010)<sup>6</sup>. In the beginning of the project, the State Plantation Company (PTP) Sawit Hulu was assigned as PIR ADB's nucleus company. From 1,500 ha land in total, 1,250 ha was allocated for the smallholders' or *plasma* plantation and 125 ha for their independent farms of food crops. On the rest 125 ha, the company constructed housings and public facilities. The human settlements were spread and divided into three sub-villages. 500 household heads were to be recruited as PIR participants and each would be equally allocated 1 *perseil* (2.5 ha) of oil palm *plasma* plot, a house with a home gardening plot of 0.06 ha, and a 0.25-ha land to farm for their household consumption and income sources before the oil palm trees could be harvested.

**Figure 3.1**

An entrance to PIR ADB plantation with GLNP just across the portal



*Source:* Nur Janti/Fieldwork, 2020

PIR participants were recruited in several ways. The project managers invited some of PTP II's retired staffs considered to have understood the oil palm business, and local communities who planted on the bare lands of the former 1970s tree farms. They also

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<sup>6</sup> The PIR contract explanation is taken from a final essay for Politics of Agrarian Transformation (Austriningrum, 2020b:2-3).

<sup>7</sup> derived from the Dutch "*perceel*", meaning "a plot of land".



allowed people in Besitang, Babalan and (to a lesser extent) other subdistricts in North Sumatra to apply through the Langkat government. The prospective applicants were then chosen through a selection process. Some selected participants admitted they got information and help from their relatives who worked in the regional governments (Arofat et al.,2020:8-9). With a long history of transmigration since the colonial time, the PIR participants' ethnicities are mixed and diverse, but three most notable descendants are Batak (Toba) and Karo (usually Christian), and Javanese (usually Muslim). Based on 2010 census, the village has 2,882 inhabitants (TBI,2015:37).

### ***The Smallholders Cooperative***

PIR ADB smallholders organise themselves in a cooperative named KUD Rahmat Tani (KUD RATA). The organisational structure of KUD RATA comprises of a daily committee, a supervisory agency, farmer groups and staffs. The members of the first two core organs are elected every five years. From the 500 originally registered names, most were men. But some women later owned *persils* from direct purchase and inheritance from deceased parents and husbands. Currently, 498 names are registered as KUD RATA members with 321 men (64.46 percent) and 177 women (35.54 percent)—2 *persils* were converted into a PKS in 2009. They are divided into 20 farmer groups and each group appointed a group leader. There are currently 2 women among those 20 leaders. Each leader of the farmer groups would attend the KUD meetings, delivering their groups' aspirations, votes, and concerns. They have to supervise the production and maintenance processes of the plantation. Every month, they queue to take the production sales money, then distribute it to the members. The staffs would handle the administrative and technical operation of the KUD, and based on the members' agreement, the staffs should be the KUD members or those biologically related to them.

For the plantation field operation, there are two *afdeling* assistants who supervise and advise the plantation work. They coordinate forepeople (*mandor*) responsible for the maintenance and harvesting of the plantation. Each recruits, forms, and supervises a group of 25-30 casual daily wage labourers (BHL). As it has been done since the colonial era, the maintenance work is mostly dominated by women and harvesting by men. In the post-harvest ends, there are clerks to note and supervise the weighing and delivering of the harvested FFB, including the collected falling fruits (*brondolan*) (Interview,27 August 2020;Arofat et al.2020:9-10). Although there is no written contract, the core members, field consultants, forepeople, staffs, and clerks are entitled to a monthly wage, insurance, and allowances. They inhibit what Wright (1978) calls “contradictory class locations” of supervisory and managerial workers. Meanwhile, the BHLs receive wage based on working days or kilograms of harvested FFB. There is no working contract and hardly any insurance or benefit. A Malay BHL said, “On Eid holiday, we didn't get any money allowance, only a bottle of syrup for each labourer” (Interview,3 September 2020).

### **Land Concentration and Class Differentiation**

There are several important conjunctures leading to the land concentration and social differentiation in PIR ADB—later extended beyond its perimeters. First, the PIR participants have been differentiated since the start. Farmers joined the PIR with differential stockpiles of capital (money, technical skills, education level, social capital, etc.) and different backgrounds of gender, ethnicity, age/generation, and religion. Hence, some farmers had relatively large

reserves of capital and savings. They can hire labourers, apply more chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and/or invest in other income-generating activities. They would be able to secure the private land title by paying the bank loan faster and use the land certificate as a collateral to new loans that will finance their productive intensification. Meanwhile, those who could not obtain enough harvest and income for their simple reproduction would be squeezed further by the debt, price fall, or unprecedented *force majeure*, such as sickness and conflicts over inheritance. After a while, they would sell their plots and transfer the instalment to the purchaser. There are also people who simply want to move to other regions (Arofat et al.,2020:14). The exchange of oil palm plots through these transactions involved farmers from different villages, communities, even islands, creating a translocal, “geographically diffused” structure of land ownership and surplus reinvestment, thus leading to an “absentee landlord-wage labour mode of production” (McCarthy,2010:845;Bissonette,2013:3-6). The landless people often ended up becoming wage labourers for their more successful neighbours or the nucleus company’s plantation<sup>8</sup>.

At the moment only 40 percent of the *persils* is owned by participants living in PIR ADB. They are the original PIR participants and the participants’ children who inherited the land and/or purchased land plots from their neighbours. Some newcomers who bought the plots also live there. But people do not own the *persils* equally. In the KUD regulation, only one name can be registered for one *persil*. Nevertheless, some families manage to own more than 1 *persil* by registering the names of their spouses, children, or relatives, though the control is mostly centralised in the male household heads. For example, two former chairmen of KUD RATA committee control 8 and 11 *persils*. The other 60 percent of *persil* owners lives outside Besitang, mostly in Medan and Binjai. But some live outside Sumatra, in the cities of Kalimantan and Java. There is a person controlling most of the PIR plantation land (27 *persils*), registering the plots in the name of his family members. It is Hajj Anif, an infamous animal hunter, land mafia and the owner of PT. ALAM, a private oil palm company that have gradually become PIR ADB’s nucleus company since the oil palm replanting in 2013. Hence, PIR ADB plots were concentrated in the hands of a few people who employ more labourers to expand their oil palm production. These rich farmers were able to exert more influence in the KUD. Many labourer informants refer to them as “elites” who often capture the cooperative for their interests, sometimes through corruption. In 1989, some of these rich farmers decided to open a new oil palm plantation they called “Plantation 52” in Lapangan Tembak, an area which was later designated by GLNP to be a part of the national park.

Different capital owned by different villagers results in diverse practices in the plantation and farm management. Some use their own and their family’s labour in the maintenance and hire their neighbours during the harvesting. Some richer growers fully hire labourers through wage or sharecropping system. Since the PIR plots are limited and the children need more income, many also farm outside the PIR. The second and third generation of PIR ADB participants who have less capital or own no *persil* also become casual daily wage labourers (BHL) in their neighbours’ and PT. ALAM plantations. But the working days (*Hari Kerja*, or HK) offered by KUD RATA, planters, and private companies are limited and lowly paid, especially with the surplus of labour and modernisation of production technology aimed to cut labour cost. Hence, many people, especially labourers, must undertake a pluriactive strategy. It is a “sensitive issue” according to the informants, but many BHLs take turn to farm on “borrowed lands” in Lapangan Tembak without paying rent and/or through a sharecropping system with the land control holders. Beside plantations and farms, many villagers tend cattle of their own and/or their neighbours and collect grass from the GLNP

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<sup>8</sup> This paragraph is derived from a final essay for Politics of Agrarian Transformation (Austrin-grum,2020b:8).

area. Many men fish in nearby rivers, work as security staffs and construction workers. Many women, mostly being assigned with social reproductive work at home, sell homemade hand-crafts from oil palm leaves, food, phone credits, gas, and petrol with or without a stall. Some also work as housemaids and gardeners for their neighbours or in nearby cities.

Below is a table to partially summarise the diverse dynamics that generate a differentiated agrarian class position in PIR ADB and Lapangan Tembak, based on a qualitative approach to map the households’<sup>9</sup> social relations on land holding and control, labour, and institutional position in the PIR/KUD scheme. With all its limitations, a qualitatively defined classification can highlight the structural aspect of rural class differentiation, while at the same time acknowledge the fluidity of class dynamics. Rural households can move along the continuum, or the structure can be transformed altogether through class struggle or state intervention (Zhang,2015:342).

**Table 3.1**  
Agrarian class positions in PIR ADB and Lapangan Tembak

No.	Class Position	Land			Labour			KUD Position
		<i>Corporate Plantation(s)</i>	PIR	<i>Contested land</i>				
1	Big Agribusiness Capitalist (H. Anif)	large	largest	-	Hire labour	-	-	Nucleus company owner
2	Rich farmers	-	large	Control Plantation 52 (large) Control and lease farm land	Hire labour	May use their own labour (mostly managerial and supervisory)	-	KUD core members
3	Middle-class farmers	-	medium	Control Plantation 52 (small to medium)	May hire labour	Use their own labour	-	KUD managerial and supervisory staffs
4	Poor farmers	-	small	-	-	Use their own labour	Sell labour	KUD members
5	Landless labourers I	-	none	Borrow/occupy land	-	Use their own labour	Sell labour	-
6	Landless labourers II	-	none	-	-	-	Sell labour	-

*Source:* Author’s own table

The class relations are surely more complex than this table could capture, especially with the pluriactive livelihoods, conservation partnership program, and as “...they intersect and combine with other social differences and divisions, of which gender is the most widespread” (Bernstein,2010:115).

## Gender Dimensions

Gender is an important factor in the contestation dynamics since it disproportionately structures access to resources, division of labour, roles, and norms for men and women. It is mostly shaped by coloniality that entangles with ethnicity-based kinship relations, religion, labour regime, and the state’s ideology (Lugones,2007). In relations to land ownership, inheritance, and control, men are prioritised. Oil palm plantation land control and management

<sup>9</sup> Using the household as a unit of analysis is both useful and limited. It is a historically specific significant unit of resource access, allocation, and division of labour in this case. But as feminist critics put forth, we should pay attention to the variation in composition, activities, and relationship of each household, including its diverse, often contradictory, political interests (O’Laughlin,1999).

are centralised to the male household head, though the wife's and children's names are registered as *persil* owners. Women used to have control in the subsistence food crop plots. But they were eventually converted into oil palm plantations considered to be more profitable, hence transferring the land control to men.

The gender norms prescribe and train women to carry roles and responsibilities in the domestic and social reproduction spheres. It is partially constructed by New Order's "*Ibuism*"<sup>10</sup> politics, an ideology to limit and control women's access to politics, for political women would be associated with the much demonised Gerwani<sup>11</sup> (Suryakusuma,2011). An ideal "woman" was constructed to be a sincere mother, obedient and uncomplaining wife serving her husband, family, community, company, and the state. Women were depoliticised and segregated. Their critical perspectives and movements were repressed. In many agrarian policies and development programs, women's voice, experience, and interests were often disregarded. Nearing the end of the New Order, discourses of women empowerment emerged but women participation was allowed as long as it was in line with the logics of developmentalism (Blackburn,2004). Until today, many empowerment agendas done by NGOs or state bodies tend to train women to get "alternative incomes", reflecting a patriarchal-capitalist ideology that refuses to acknowledge and compensate the already-mounting domestic tasks, subsistence farming, and other social reproduction work mostly put on the shoulders of women (Federici,2012).

A Batak woman from a middle-class family<sup>12</sup> says that her husband doesn't allow her to do any wage work so she can concentrate on taking care of the household and their three children. Meanwhile, interviewed women from lower class families tend to carry multiple burdens since they also have to work in the plantation as BHL and do several other odd casual jobs to fulfil the households' budget. A Batak woman labourer said,

If we only depend on my husband's income, well... I have to think of something. ... I have to be smart in managing every expense. But if I have to go somewhere, I am not content leaving my kids at home, though their father is there. Sometimes my husband would oversleep and not keep an eye on them, while the children are fighting and whatnot. Anything can happen so I'm worried and feeling like going home soon (Interview,11 August 2020).

Though their husbands sometimes help with the domestic work, the wives are still the main person-in-charge in the household's social reproduction. They also think that the expansion of plantation causes pollution and drought to the surrounding water resources. It disadvantages them as they are the ones responsible for collecting water (Interview,18 August 2020). Consequently, food and water provision become increasingly mediated by the cash economy, penetrated deeper into capitalist market and commodity relations.

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<sup>10</sup> In Indonesian, "*ibu*" means "mother" and "Mrs."

<sup>11</sup> The Indonesian Women Movement (Gerwani) successfully consolidated a grassroots women basis since the 1950s and established many local branches across the archipelago. They organised critical education against neo-imperialism and patriarchy, and practical skill workshops for women and children. They built kindergartens and free childcare centres in the poor settlements, plantations, farms, markets, and women's informal workplace, and actively campaigned against sexual violence, women trafficking, polygamy, and underage marriage. They worked with the women's wings of leftist peasants and plantation labourers' organisations for women's rights in agrarian sectors. Gerwani members became one of their main targets of torture, killing, slander, and demonisation in the 1965-66 anti-communist pogrom (Wieringa,2002).

<sup>12</sup> Her husband works as a security staff at PT. ALAM and has 4 oil palm plantation plots of 2.76 ha in total.

In the plantation, male harvesting labourers mobilise their wives' and children's labour. But both the KUD and Plantation 52 employers officially pay only the male harvesters, even though most are helped by their wives to collect the *brondolan*. It is common that collecting *brondolan* is not even considered a "real work", as the women are thought of as "only helping their husbands" (Julia&White,2012). As the KUD chairman says, "We don't hire labourers to collect *brondolan*, only harvesters. Whether the wives (and children) come along or not, we will count based on the kilograms submitted, and it will be one person's wage" (Interview,27 August 2020). Plantation maintenance labour considered as "women's work" is also underestimated. It is perceived as a "low-skill" job and employers are benefited by the abundant number of labourers waiting to be recruited. However, the job is actually arduous and risky. For spraying, each maintenance labourer must bring her own sprayer (*kep*) and go through uneven, slippery landscapes as spraying work is mostly done during monsoon. Fertilising is as labourious as they have to carry heavy sacks and apply the fertilisers across the allotted plots. Many report that the hard work and exposure to pesticide and chemical fertilisers has harmed their health.

A Batak woman labourer complained to her fellow workers, "Every time I lift heavy burdens, my right body will ache, and I will suffocate. I felt it when I sprayed". Her friends told her to hide these problems from the foremen. If any worker is sick while working in the field, they have to account it as "working accident", and the KUD and employers might have to cover the medication. To avoid that risk, they won't hire unhealthy workers anymore. She replied, "I know. That's why I just told them that I don't have the *kep*" (Interview,23 August 2020). Similar story of "everyday form of resistance" was told by another Batak labourer who was 9-month pregnant during the interview. She said that women labourers always hide their pregnancy to avoid job suspension and stay recruited. This is because the KUD, PT. ALAM, and other plantation employers don't cover their BHLs' pregnancy treatments or expensive medical costs. After giving birth, the women had to wait for their new-born children to become 6 months to 1.5-year-old before working again.

In her field notes, Janti critically suggests that women's work and reproductive capacities have been generally undervalued and exploited. The employers do not cover the costs of women's reproductive health whereas the system is directly dependent on women and family. It is most likely that if the women gave birth, raise a child, and live there, the child will follow her parents' path to work as a labourer there, as shown by many life stories she's heard of. Like the colonial era and New Order, the gender norms and sexual division of labour are still key features to maintain a reserve of cheap and disciplined labourers.

## Chapter 4 — Mapping Political Reactions ‘From Below’

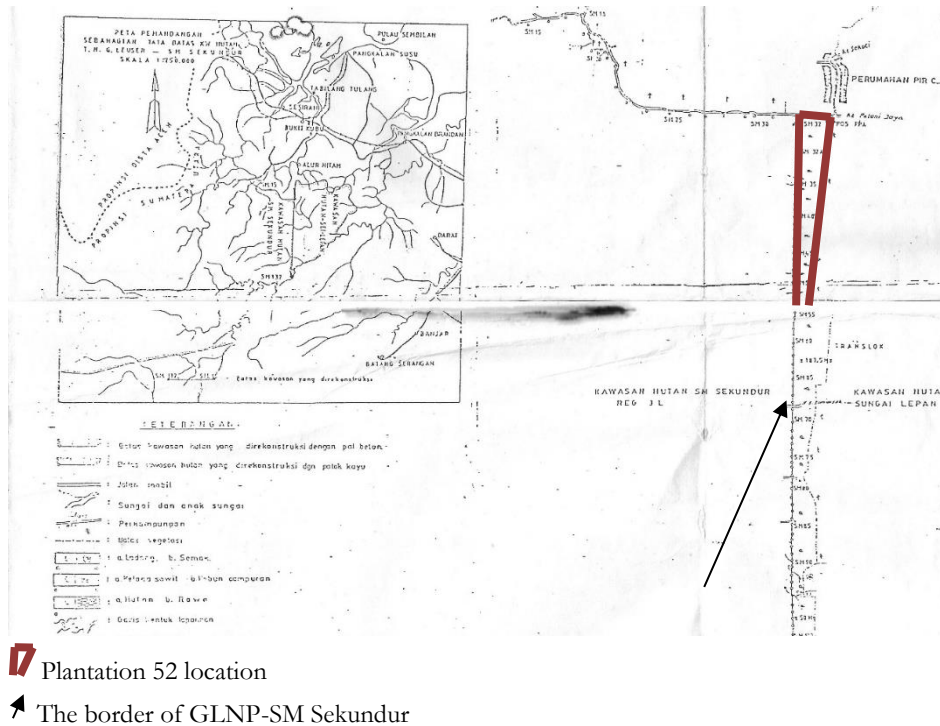
With an understanding of the contexts that ground and surround the contestation in Lapangan Tembak, this chapter proceeds to present, compare, and contrast the variegated political reactions “from below” in the land contestation.

### Plantation 52

Plantation 52 was firstly established in 1989 by a group of 52 male PIR ADB rich farmers who decided to open a 111-ha new oil palm plantation in Lapangan Tembak. The plan was initiated by a former operational manager and treasurer of KUD RATA. Later they invited other former KUD core members who had enough capital to start planting the costly boom commodity. “The existing PIR *persils* are limited and would not be sufficient for our family”, was a commonly stated reason among those involved in the opening of Plantation 52. The land targeted used to be under the tree farm (*Hutan Produksi*) status, just outside a border of GLNP at that time. Upon hearing that the government “was about to change” this status, they engage in official politics by starting correspondence with the Forestry Department of North Sumatra, the National Body of Land (BPN) in Langkat and the Regent. After several appeals, they were supported by the village chief and Langkat Taxation Agency with a letter stating that they use and control the land, therefore have to pay regular taxes. Notwithstanding, no land ownership certificate has been released and the planters keep trying, holding on the hope that someday they will acquire legal land titles. Meanwhile, like what happens in the PIR plantation, land transactions in the form of plant compensation have occurred over time here, making “Plantation 52” more of a location name, rather than the number of planters. Eventually, the land control was concentrated to few male rich farmers. Most live in Besitang and (used to) have influential position in the KUD. Some are the children of these influential people and few live outside Besitang, delegating the management to their fellow planters (Naibaho, 2020:4-5).

However, in 2001, in the process of GLNP appointment as a UNESCO world heritage rainforest, the national park’s border reconstruction concluded and claimed that Plantation 52 was in fact inside the borders of SM Sekundur, hence has to be cleared for conservation purposes. Since then, the national park authorities have categorised the planters in Plantation 52 as “forest encroachers”, asked them to leave the land and arrested some growers who got caught tending their trees. Responding to these threats, the planters didn’t comply and exercised everyday politics by keeping their plantation. They organised themselves for an overt resistance and successfully stopped two eviction attempts by GLNP. Inspired by the Aceh refugees who consulted the National Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM) after an enforced eviction, they also mobilised a discourse of human rights, claiming that Plantation 52 is their major source of livelihood. They learn that an eviction involving physical violence would be considered a violation of human rights. Thus, in each threat of eviction the male planters would mobilise their wives and relatives to stand and guard the plantation, anticipating that if the GLNP apparatus would physically remove them, they would report it to Komnas HAM. As mentioned in the introduction, some Plantation 52 land control holders decided to join KETAPEL’s advocacy politics and invite landless labourers to occupy the land in Lapangan Tembak and establish Kuta Buluh sub-village (*kampung*).

**Figure 3.2**  
1990 Border map of GLNP referred by the planters



*Source:* Naibaho, 2020:18

In the interviews, the male planters and their wives contend that the land of Plantation 52 is not fully the state’s “property” because when the plantation was opened, the Conservation Centre staffs was in the process of releasing the tree farm status. Sandra, a planter’s wife I mentioned earlier, said,

We have paid the tax of the plantation 52 land. If they want to cut down because they don’t allow any oil palm trees in the forest area, that’s fine. But there must be a fair process. They can’t just cut down our trees. If we plant outside the plantation 52 area, we will understand. It’s the state’s property and who can fight against the state, right? (Interview, 3 September 2020)

Many agree with her. They wouldn’t mind if the land that their families have worked on for more than 30 years would be reclaimed and used by the state, as long as there’s a process that ensures a fair compensation. They reckon that GLNP authorities as the “state’s representatives” have more power outside Plantation 52, and when they wish to claim those lands the “illegal” inhabitants will have no bargaining power.

## Conservation Partnership Program

The first generation of PIR ADB participants acknowledged GLNP as an environmental conservation that cannot be accessed freely. Many are even afraid to enter the area. However, they know that in the end of 1990s and early 2000s, in a phase of Aceh conflict, many war victims fleeing from Aceh took refuge inside the forest, mostly in the area of Barak Induk

and Sei Minyak. This event became an entry point and a momentum for people around Langkat to occupy and live on the contested forest lands until today. Nevertheless, many informants in PIR ADB said that the forest area is “owned” by the state. People working or having control over the forest lands are thought of as “only users, not owners”. Many villagers, including from PIR ADB, who have no control over Plantation 52 are familiar with the stories and threats of eviction of people’s plantations, farms, and settlements from Lapangan Tembak. But many landless labourers still take turn (not always in peaceful ways) to borrow some land there to farm, performing an everyday politics. Rich farmers who control the land usually plant there only as a side income. Hence, rather than leaving the land unmanaged and abandoned, they let their fellow villagers farm there without rent and/or with an informal sharecropping agreement. A family of labourers usually plant on 0.25-0.5 hectare with *palamija*, like long bean, cassava, etc. During the 2011 eviction attempt, they joined the resistance. A Javanese woman labourer involved in the naked protest said,

We sometimes work on the forest land. But one time we didn’t work for 2 months, then when we come back other people already borrowed and claimed them. Well, rather than losing our life, we prefer to stop farming on the land. It’s our loss, since we have invested a lot of energy, but that’s fine (Interview,2 September 2020).

On another level, they perceive that the land they work on is anyway a “state-owned forest” that they couldn’t claim any right of. However, a Batak woman labourer pointed out,

...but Plantation 52 has a different story. There are official letters, though they are not certificates of ownership. Other farms (in Lapangan Tembak) are problematic. If there would be another cutdown, we can do nothing but cry over all the energy and money that we have put there (Interview,3 September 2020).

In response to the recursive tenurial conflicts and to accommodate the need of arable land for these “poor” labourers and community members in and around the national park, GLNP authorities start the Conservation Partnership program canvassed in the Directorate General Regulation (*Peraturan Direktorat Jenderal*, or Perdirjen) KSDAE No. 6/2018 (Aprilia,2019). Since 1990, the GoI has had several regulations to balance conservation attempts and the livelihoods of communities residing in and around national parks. Over time, community members’ roles are acknowledged in assisting the government to manage conservation areas. The communities’ rights to welfare haven’t been in focus before but now the Perdirjen calls the community members as “equal partners” and “collaborators”. However, the community participation is still limited to being invited in the socialisation forum. Those who agree upon the rights, terms and conditions will then sign the cooperation agreement (*perjanjian kerjasama*) (Prayitno,2020:195-203). In Chapter 28 of the Perdirjen, the conservation partners have the rights to receive facilitation from the conservation staffs to manage their existing farms in particular units according to the conservation rules, reduce their dependence to the forest and transition to other means of livelihoods, while having access to use the “invasive plants” (in this case oil palm) cut by the authorities. In return, they are obliged to actively support the ecosystem restoration, including to guard the national park from “encroaching” parties and report any attempt of encroachment.

An experience of participating in the official politics of the Conservation Partnership is narrated by a Javanese woman informant, Maryati. Her family members are known to be active in every opportunity of forest land release, particularly when her brother was involved in the opening of Plantation 52. But she herself is not entitled to any PIR *persil*. Like other



BHLs, she used to farm in Lapangan Tembak. For side income, she weaves oil palm leaves into brooms and sells organic fertiliser through a multi-level marketing system popular among women. When being asked if this is because of her concerns for the environment she said that it was more of a reason of “economic advantage”. “We (villagers) usually use organic fertilisers for chili and oil palm. They will grow faster” (Interview, 13 August 2020). Maryati acknowledges the abundant land conflicts happening in the area, hence she decided to join the program to secure her access to the forest land.

The strongest will rule... People without partnership status will not have any right to use the land. Without the partnership (status), consequently the land can be taken away anytime. With partnership (status), the government shall protect (Interview, 13 August 2020).

In the Conservation Partnership, Maryati is registered as a member with her own name. Her children’s names are also registered. There are 13 groups in the partnership. She is in the Cinta Makmur group which handles infrastructure. Other matters, such as seedling and marketing, are handled by different groups. In the Conservation Partnership, oil palm is banned but she and other several members still plant them. There are 80 trees in her 2-ha plot. She said,

Why do you (GLNP) ban us? When we started planting the oil palm trees, we were not yet in the partnership. ... If the partnership body wants to cut my oil palm trees, I will make them pay IDR 1,500,000 for each tree. Planting oil palms is not cheap; the fertilisers and the maintenance (are expensive) (Interview, 13 August 2020).

According to Maryati, everyone in the groups agree about this compensation because in the initial cooperation agreement the national park would let whatever has been planted to grow, as long as the farmers don’t expand them. “Even though I’m the only woman, I’m the only one brave enough to talk like this.” Indeed, among more than 100 members in the program groups, she happens to be the only woman. She thinks that people remember her good deeds and sees her as an active person, therefore she is elected and respected by her colleagues as a group representative. The group meeting is usually attended by 10-20 representatives of the 13 groups.

I happen to be the only woman but that’s no problem because the men are my friends, too. ...No other women were willing to be on the group committee. After all women have two mouths. Too many of them will create problems (in the meeting) (Interview, 13 August 2020).

Being the only woman in such male-dominated space made her feel brave and empowered. But her perception that women are “fussier” and she’s somehow better than them shows an internalised misogyny from a gender norm associating and limiting women’s space to “informal”, “apolitical”, “gossiping” activities in food stalls and home porches (explored in Chapter 5).

Finally, the groups in the Conservation Partnership hope that they can strive like KUD RATA. But as Maryati told, the groups clash and disagree with the ways of Kuta Buluh villagers as they directly occupied the land without as much coordination with the authorities as they did. In their field notes, both Lisna (3 September 2020) and Janti (17 August 2020)

sensed a combination of suspicion and envy harboured by Conservation Partnership members towards Kuta Buluh people.

## Kuta Buluh

After the 2011 eviction attempt, some KETAPEL members, including some Plantation 52 rich farmers, invited their landless relatives and acquaintances to occupy Lapangan Tembak. 400 landless family heads (mostly male) in total were listed as KETAPEL new members and each was promised 2-ha arable land. Together with the old members, they formed Kuta Buluh. KETAPEL claimed to accompany their “struggle for private land ownership” (Arofat et al.,2020:17-19). Many landless labourers from diverse ethnicity (but predominantly Karo) joined the occupation because they saw an option to improve their “miserable” living conditions. A former Karo male labourer of Kuala Sawit State Plantation Company (PTPN II) (located 43.8 km from Lapangan Tembak) admitted,

I have no arable land and my wage couldn't fulfil the household needs. What I did in Kuala Sawit to survive was against my heart and conscience, I am not lying. I used to steal some oil palm fruits from PTPN II plantation... Then we heard the news that there would be land for us to farm, a land of struggle. Me and my friends decided to join (Interview,4 May 2019).

The process of land allocation was quite messy and conflictual, as those allotted in the lower Lapangan Tembak were afraid and feeling insecure of being too deep inside the GLNP borders and forested area. To address this problem, some rich farmers in KETAPEL lend some of their land for the new occupants.

Kuta Buluh villagers started to clear and prepare the land, built their houses from woven bamboo and rattan, with *rumbia* leaves or zinc as their roof. Without electricity, they rely on sunshine during the day and candles during the night. Without water service, they need to fetch water from the nearest rain-catching well to which they have to walk  $\pm 3$  km through a steep foot path. During the drought this well would dry up, so they have to go to another well, which is  $\pm 2$  km further. The monsoon hasn't been friendly either since the water would go into their house through the fragile roof and the porous walls. In the earlier days of occupation, to fulfil their daily needs and collect capital to farm, they usually go inside the forest to forage tree resin. A Karo woman said, “For the first two years we went deep inside the forest to tap resin. We collected money little by little. After the saving was enough, we started to plant eggplants and long beans” (Interview,5 May 2019). The collected resin would be sold to a middleman who visit Kuta Buluh daily, paying IDR 2,500 for each kilogram. Some of the resin would usually be bartered and traded-in for rice, food, and vegetable seeds.

Some seeds are also obtained directly by asking outsiders passing by with their vegetable and *palawija* produce. Cassava was the most popular option to plant because it needs cheap input, as well as easy maintenance and harvesting. Easy-to-sell vegetables with fast ( $\pm 1.5$  months) cycle, like eggplants and long beans, were also preferable. As suggested by KETAPEL committee, due to the insecure land status, seasonal crops would be more feasible than perennial crops like oil palm, coffee, rubber, etc. which would need high maintenance and many years to grow. But on the other hand, yield from these vegetables is low and slow in improving their economic condition. Moreover, the land in Kuta Buluh is barren and dry. Many Kuta Buluh villagers can hardly afford to eat daily. Some have to sell the house and cattle in their homeland to survive. Thus, fertiliser is a luxurious expense for them. Being

far from the water resources, watering the plants is a challenge. As a result, many of the seeds planted don't grow optimally. In addition to this hardship, they have to pay membership fee (*iuran*) to KETAPEL committee who claimed to use the money for the legal advocacy of the land status. Squeezed in their social reproduction without clear future, some families decided to leave Kuta Buluh (Arofah et al.,2020:20).

Lamtiur, a Batak woman informant in Kuta Buluh witnessed how the GLNP authorities evicted her neighbour's orange groves when they were ready to harvest. The farmers tried to fight back but failed (Interview,30 August 2020). She said that to preserve their homes and farms, the villagers had to bet their lives. The conservation authorities ban them from planting oil palm and allow them to live there as long as they plant the specific plants they prescribe. But on the other hand, she's worried that if they successfully grow the allowed plants, the conservation people will claim the plants as their successful reforestation attempt and eventually ask them to leave the land since they have no legal proof nor any prospect of obtaining a land title. Lamtiur is also worried that Hajj Anif or other villagers wants to take over her plots because of its strategic location and topography so she's always anticipated that these people can come and threaten her anytime. In her wish to live in peace she said,

I hope this land can be like their (Plantation 52) land, where we can access and control, work on them until the next 25 years. 25 years will be good enough. At least our children will finish their schooling and have their own livelihoods. ...I hope my child can one day be a soldier, so they can defend our land. (Interview,30 August 2020).

## An Analytical Note

From the previous sections, we can see that all the informants' statements about the contested land are aligned with the colonial and New Order's problematic claim of the "state's property". The 1960 UUPA has removed the state's "property" in the 1870 Agrarian Law and replaced it with the state's "rights to control" (*Hak Menguasai Negara*). The state is interpreted as "an organisation of all Indonesian people's power", based on the basic constitution and its democratic institutions. Only individuals—with Indonesian nationality—can own lands. The state cannot own but is only delegated to regulate and allocate land usage, provision, maintenance, management, and their emergent relations (Bachriadi,2019). The New Order didn't revoke the 1960 UUPA, but the logic of agrarian politics was turned upside down, resulting in legal ambiguities and endless agrarian conflicts. The state marked an imperialist, extractive rationality over its territoriality through three laws launched simultaneously in 1967: (1) the Forestry Law, (2) the Mining Law and (3) the Foreign Investment Law. It revived the 1870 Agrarian Law in the way the state acted as if it was the "owner" of lands and forests, enclosing and transforming them to large-scale plantations, power plants, factories, roads, dams, airports, and others in the name of "national development" and resolving economic crises caused by Soekarno's administration. The state disciplined dissents and depoliticised citizens through a "floating mass" policy, union busting, and enforced disappearance of people whom they accused were disturbing political stability and economic growth, and labelled them as affiliated with the "communists"<sup>13</sup> (Nevins&Peluso,2018:9;Roosa, 2006). Similar methods of maintaining the state's hegemony persist until today. Though the

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<sup>13</sup> During the Cold War, the United States and Britain were actively involved in the political destabilisation in Southeast Asia, including Soekarno's leftist-oriented administration. They supported Soeharto and the army in the 1965 massacre of the left, anti-communist propaganda, and economic liberalisation. North Sumatra was one of the infamous slaughterhouses.

“state’s property” is inconsistent with the 1960 UUPA which deleted the state’s property domain, the formal political processes in the “organisation of all Indonesia people’s power” that the 1960 UUPA predicates have been dominated and co-opted by the oligarchs (Bachriadi,2019).

However, to say that the people are passive victims who uncritically buy the state’s hegemonic ideology is inaccurate. This chapter has shown various political reactions from overt to covert resistance to contest the national park authorities’ claim of the forest land, as this following table summarises.

**Table 4.1**  
Political reactions “from below” in Lapangan Tembak contestation

Spaces of contestation	Class positions	Types of politics	Terrains of struggle
Plantation 52	Rich and middle-class farmers	Official politics, advocacy politics, everyday politics, overt resistance	For land recognition, against expulsion, compensation of the cut plants
Conservation Partnership	Landless labourers I	Everyday politics, overt resistance, official politics	Against expulsion, for land recognition, to be included within terms of incorporation
Kuta Buluh	Landless labourers II → Landless labourers I	Everyday politics, overt resistance, advocacy politics (limited)	Land occupation, for land recognition

*Source:* Author’s own table

Class is significant in the contestation dynamics, as it partly influences what kind of reactions different groups take. The middle-to-upper-class farmers are able to engage in more spaces of politics than their lower-class counterparts. In the advocacy politics, they assume the leadership in the decision-making processes. The struggle also (re)shaped the participants’ class positions. The rich and middle-class farmers want to uphold their status quo, while the landless labourers undertook an upward class mobility but it’s not easy to categorise their class locations. In Kuta Buluh, the landless labourer now has land to till, but with insecure land status and threats of eviction. In Conservation partnership, they do not have ownership title on the contested land either, but the participants feel “more secure” about the land control status as they have validation from the government officials, though it’s not ownership title and the authorities partially control what to plant, the farm management, etc. Without secure land status, they are relatively more vulnerable than the poor farmers with their own plots in PIR ADB and envy Kuta Buluh people able to fully control their land management without bureaucratic complication. How Maryati and Lamtiur look up to the rich farmers of Plantation 52 shows how the hegemonic class structure is internalised. Both also cling their hope onto the state, albeit differently (Maryati to GLNP, Lamtiur for her child to be a military apparatus). This is despite the structural state and class relations that continuously erode their “fundamental concerns” as working class (Wright,1978). There was a “class compromise” during the resistance against the GLNP eviction attempt, where different classes postpone their “class interests” for a common cause (Wright,2010). But this convergence and “exchange of interests” concurred in a plane of asymmetrical power relations. As the next chapter explores, the contradictions would play out in the pores and afterlives of the movement.

In relations to gender, women’s movement location and articulation of standing are important factors to look at since they shape their possibilities of involvement in collective action. In this case, the location of women’s experience, can be understood as “nongender direct”, in which “...women are mobilised into political movements on the basis of primary lived experiences and identities other than those of gender” (Beckwith,1996:1038). The

women are standing with men, bind through their struggles over contested land. Their motivation and interests are related to the access and control of not only the land but also the decisions about that land, their families' major factor of re/production. In a worst-case scenario, the wives of Plantation 52 agree to receive a fair compensation because their family have other plots in PIR as their source of household income. But Kuta Buluh villagers like Lamtiur are more adamant in their struggle since they have no other options of livelihoods. They are reluctant to join the Conservation Partnership because they don't have any social safety net and recognition like Sandra and Maryati, who are formally registered as PIR ADB villagers with their other family members.

The dominant local gender norms and practices that assign women to social reproduction and domestic responsibilities shape the women's motivation. As a consequence, like men women were also worried about losing the material benefits obtained from land. Even though the control of land is sometimes in the husbands' hands, particularly in Plantation 52, women are implicated since it will impact the households' income. In the case of Maryati and Kuta Buluh, the land is also theirs to manage and till. Here, women experience a "double insecurity" since they have to negotiate the land access and decision not only with the GLNP authorities but also their husbands and/or male relatives (Agarwal,1994a;Razavi,2009). A combination of deep frustration, anger, sadness, and hope drive their reactions. Protest emerges not just out of grievances but also of the "belief" that the situation can be changed and improved (Meyer&Reyes,2010). Therefore, they would not passively accept when the GLNP threatens to infringe their/husbands' rights of the land and are actively involved to contest it.

## Chapter 5 — In the Pores of the Struggle

*“Struggles over resources and labour are simultaneously struggles over socially constructed meanings, definitions, and identities.”*

(Hart, 1991:95)

### Contesting Gender Relations

#### Gendered Political Opportunity

How do women navigate the boundaries of local gender norms and relations, as well as their positionality as “women” in the contestation? How do they negotiate their gender-specific interests? What are the limitations of undoing gender in this mixed-gender struggle? Gendered political opportunities “...condition whether and through what political channel” women act (Morgan, 2017:1187). As Maryati said, she is a rare woman to choose to engage in a “formal” and “official” political space through the state’s Conservation Partnership program. The wives of Plantation 52 rulers and Kuta Buluh women, on the other hand, participate in the “informal” political spaces of direct protest and occupation, accompanying their male relatives standing face-to-face with the GLNP apparatus on the ground, beside making sure that their household needs are fulfilled. With the depoliticisation and demonisation of “disobedient” women during the New Order, women’s involvement in both formal and informal political spheres is ground-breaking. But at the same time there are also silences and risks of reinforcing the problematic gender norms.

Despite a common sense of belonging to the contested land, unlike the men, the women are rarely consulted or involved in the formal decision-making processes. In the case of Plantation 52, it was all male planters who correspond with the different ranks of government officials. In KETAPEL, the political processes are dominated by men and the land in Kuta Buluh was allotted to the predominantly male household heads. The pre-and post-protest hearings are pretty much the same. It reflects a misled assumption that the family is always a homogenous unit with equal distribution and united interests, with the husband as the primary household representative. The decentralisation and women empowerment discourse after the 1998 Reform have allowed an extent of women’s participation in village meetings and socialisation forums (Blackburn, 2004), including in the Conservation Partnership. But as Maryati told, other women aren’t willing to participate in male-dominated formal meetings and committees out of habit and lack of confidence. As mentioned previously, it is partially caused by a gender norm associating and limiting women’s spaces to “informal”, “apolitical”, “gossiping” activities in food stalls and home porches. This exclusion from “formal” political spaces becomes a factor that “pushes” women to engage in more “informal” politics (Hart, 1991; Agarwal, 2000). In “informal” spaces like protests, several gendered boundaries that hamper women’s participation can be crossed.

Direct protests and land guarding that the Plantation 52 and Kuta Buluh women joined were one-time events needing less time and energy than a series of formal meetings before and after the demonstration. This way, women would not need to regularly compromise nor abandon their household and social reproductive responsibilities—which also explains why some women were absent in the protests. The stereotypes that women are “fussy” and “already represented by their husbands” would not be barriers to their participation in the protest, since their physical presence is as important as that of men. In formal meetings,

women often feel that they are “uninvited” or think that their presence is insignificant. But in direct actions, the goal is to mobilise as many people as possible. In their movements against eviction it was to show GLNP authorities that a lot of people depend their livelihoods and would like to assert their rights on the contested land. Whether they attend the “formal” meetings is not important, as long as they are physically able to stand on guard.

## Body Politics

The women’s bodily presence in direct confrontations and some women’s stripping off their clothes to struggle for their rights to the contested resources poses a symbolic significance, where gendered socio-cultural construction and meaning of the body, as well as its relationship with society and ecology, are implicated. Negotiation of power operates through corporeal bodies, directly and through representation (Oldfield et al.,2009:3). People use, contest, and manipulate the body sub/consciously for different purposes. In Lapangan Tembak, women’s social roles as nurturing mothers, obedient housewives, and disciplined agricultural labourers are scripted on their body. Nevertheless, the body is not only a symbolic field for reproducing hegemonic values but also a potential “site for resistance to and transformation of those systems of meaning” (Crawford,1984:95), where women can exercise their agency.

To halt GLNP evictions, the women’s physical presence is an important tactic in guarding the land, especially after the communities learned that any human rights violation could be reported to Komnas HAM. The local gender norms generally assume that the feminine body is more “delicate” and “fragile”, thus has to be “protected” by the masculine ones. Women are assigned jobs considered “lighter” by men, such as maintenance and *brondolan* collecting jobs in the plantation, and nurturing duties at home. Following this line, violence on women’s body in public by the policemen and other masculine state apparatus, assumed to protect their “vulnerable” subjects, is perceived as a greater violation than that on men’s body. If the GLNP enforces any violence upon them, the villagers can record and report to Komnas HAM and other public channels, using it as their “weapon” of struggle. The women who performed a nude protest took this matter further. When standing, yelling, and crying cannot sufficiently stop the eviction, they took off their clothes to embarrass the male state officials and intervene their operation. They suppose that the authorities wouldn’t dare to touch their naked bodies, particularly the female body parts that the gender norms prescribe to “cover” out of a contradictory combination of “respect” and “shame”. As reminisced by a Javanese landless woman labourer, undressing is her expression of anger and frustration after a repertoire of provocations by GLNP authorities. Demonstrating her naked body can be seen as a symbolic representation, another way to know and communicate that she is ready to put all of “her life” for the land she tills, the land that feed her family (Interview,2 September 2020;Harcourt, 2009).

Some scholars argue that the use of the body and nakedness in protests is a “tactic for those who have no other recourse”. The body is a “weapon of the weak” (Ebila&Tripp, 2017:39). But even “the weak” is differentiated by class. The landless women labourers definitely have less options compared to the Plantation 52 women. But their actions have transgressed the local gender norms, particularly in subverting women’s body into a basis of resistance. Connecting their interests to land with their roles as mothers that have to raise their children, the women have also redefined “motherhood”, “family” and “home”. Talking with women villagers at a noodle stall, Janti and Lisna note that outside the home the public roles of women (especially from the lower class) are limited and mostly associated with undesirable “non/antimothers”, such as overly sexualised dangdut singers (*biduan*), prostitutes,

overworked plantation workers neglecting their husbands' sexual needs<sup>14</sup>, and madwomen (Interview, 20 August 2020). By a dominant Western understanding, motherhood is often seen as always "weak" and "vulnerable" (Ebila&Tripp, 2017:33). But the women in Lapangan Tembak contestation show that being "mothers" in themselves can also be "strong", "assertive" and "political" without having to follow the liberal-white-feminist tropes of corporate "career women". These subversions and inversions are significant at a symbolic level to "point to the possibilities and the capacity of society to create new realities, roles and power relations" (Ebila&Tripp, 2017:43). It also signals that struggles around land and dispossession, though at first are not explicitly concerned about gender, can simultaneously be sites of struggle about gender (Morgan, 2017:1177).

## Silences and Risks

As Razavi (2003) reminds, we should be critical to think if women's participation in rural politics translate to a fulfilment of their specific gender interests, or of a more radical proposition to undo and abolish gender (Butler, 2004). The silences and risks of reinforcing the unequal gender norms in this case are partially related to the capitalist processes and class relations. First, social reproduction in the domestic sphere is still unfairly burdened on women. Despite its significant workloads and contributions, it is not even considered as "work" and is valued less than "productive" work done by men. Many women labourers say that doing income generating paid work outside the home is actually easier. "Going to the (plantation or farm) field feels nice. During break time we share stories, laugh together. I can forget household matters for a bit," a woman labourer admitted. Her friend added, "Indeed. ...Though I am still thinking about my two children at home, if they are okay" (Interview, 22 August 2020). But even in the "productive" spaces of plantations and farms, women's maintenance work and subsistence farming are similarly underestimated, their reproductive health concerns neglected. Hence, gendered oppression in the layered burdens and insecurities of women has challenged theorisations of class that assume a congruent class position in a family unit.

Second, as a consequence of male-dominated political processes, women's gender-specific concerns and interests are side-lined and compromised. They are considered as "less important" and "personal", and not addressed as "political" issues, though the women informants connected the household's economic well-being threatened by the GLNP eviction with several other concerns, such as child raising, sexual violence, husband's infidelity and domestic violence. Many poor women and widows in Besitang work as overly sexualised dangdut singers (*biduan*) in local events, maids, and prostitutes in local coffee shops (*warkop*), where men usually play chess and gamble (Interview, 20 August 2020; Tagar.id, 2020). Many women informants talk about how men flirt and cheat on their wives with them, whom they thought as "not good women". It is a gendered impact of oil palm plantation development that the class differentiation among women shapes and reinforces the fragmentation of "good" and "bad" women (Siscawati&Rachman, 2014). The women informants are worried that this "current of free promiscuous lifestyle" (*arus pergaulan bebas*) will drag and harm their children, especially when they know about several "famous male sexual predators" from upper to lower class (Interview, 20 August 2020).

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<sup>14</sup> As narrated by the informants and a current reportage (Aljazeera, 2020), the exposure to pesticide, chemical fertilisers, and hard labour in the plantation harms women's reproductive health.



In another matter, the lack of arable land, reduction of working days in the plantation and other economic hardships are related to several cases of domestic violence. A woman labourer said that her husband often hits her and their two sons.

He doesn't hit our daughter but scolds her often, 'You're lucky that you're a girl. If you're a boy, I would've hit you!'. He will be angry if someone talks about his unemployed status. Once our son did that, saying that his father 'doesn't work' and he hit him, creating a ruckus in our home. He ran away to the village chief's house asking for help. If the village chief didn't come that day, he would run away from home (Interview, 10 August 2020).

Beside verbal and physical violence, she also experiences financial violence. She said that she feels "calmer" when her husband is in his parents' house since she will be able to "enjoy" the money from her home garden oil palm harvest, which is about IDR 150,000-250,000 per day. Otherwise, her husband will take and gamble that money away, though the house and the land are registered as her inherited property. "He likes to gamble so much that our daughter calls him 'the king of *togel* (lottery)'" (Interview, 10 August 2020). Despite her women friends' suggestions, she doesn't think of leaving her husband, hoping that he will change for the better. A widow labourer whose husband died of a lung cancer recounted a similar experience and said,

There are some perks of being a widow. I am free now to do whatever I want. ...I am more comfortable living as single mother. With men, I have to succumb because men are selfish, thinking that they are always right. ... When he was still alive, our salary would be finished for cigarettes, coffee, and petrol. ...It is also an advantage in the labour recruitment process because the foremen and employers will be sympathetic and prioritise me (Interview, 11 August 2020).

Nonetheless, the women agree that domestic violence and household problems are considered a disgrace and taboo in the village, thus they can't share it in "public". They talked about these gender-specific concerns in food stalls, all-women lunch breaks, and home porches widely thought as "apolitical" and "feminine" spaces. Due to various gendered barriers in the political opportunity structure analysed earlier, their everyday problems, collective manoeuvres, and politics are not translated and articulated in the resistance movement political processes. Despite women's indispensable roles in the struggles against GLNP eviction and their sub/conscious reconfiguration of several gender prescriptions, "...their relegating domestic work to the background was seen as a temporary aberration, and life was expected to revert to the familiar pattern after the struggle" (Agarwal, 1994b:102). Or as a postcolonial feminist scholar Gayatri Spivak famously wrote,

...even if, in the crisis of the armed or peaceful struggle, women seem to emerge as comrades, with the return of the everyday *and in the pores of the struggle*, the old codings of the gendered body, sometimes slightly altered, seem to fall into place (Spivak, 1990:113; original emphasis).

## **Class and Intimate Entanglements**

Another thing that is “slightly altered, (but) seem to fall back into place” after episodes of various political reactions is the class structure. On a macro level, the oil palm commodity has reasserted its “boom” status after the 2008 crisis. Supported by various IFIs that promote oil palm as a solution for global multiple crises, the government continuously strives to attract investors by increasing the “ease of doing business” in Indonesia, opening new frontiers that give large-scale land concessions to big corporates like (or larger than) PT. ALAM. The state has continuously eroded the rights of workers and environmental protection thought to disturb the flow of investments and development through various legal rules and regulations. Hence, the vicious cycles of capitalism regenerate. The capitalist processes that create wage labour relations and class differentiation also penetrate in mundane ways through the characteristics of oil palm as a perennial tree commodity. Planted in monoculture, it enforces private and masculine land control (Li,2014;Elmhirst&Darmastuti,2015).

As Neo/Gramscian theorisations examine, in Lapangan Tembak contestation the ideological representations emanating from the dominant upper class’ interests become the hegemonic norms and discourses that shape other classes and groups’ preferences and courses of action. Their interests are perceived and internalised as a superior position within a range of representations and practices (Overbeek,2000;Agarwal,1994b:111). The Conservation Partnership is one institutional space to maintain the state’s hegemony. Plantation 52 and KUD RATA are two other interrelated spaces where the male rich farmers sustain theirs. But as this section proceeds, the perimeters of their hegemony are exposed in the “intimate exclusions” they arrange in relations to the labourers and KETAPEL internal conflict happening in Kuta Buluh, where some rich farmer members want to take back the land they lend after failing to get a compensation for their evicted oil palm trees from the GLNP (Hall et al,2011;Naibaho, 2020).

Private land ownership is thought to be a main pillar of capitalist processes that fuel the tendency of class differentiation in rural settings (Lenin,1899). The “struggle for private land ownership” the farmers mobilised in the movements is intended to strengthen their claims and control of the contested forest land. They connect it with the universal human rights to make decent livelihoods. For the rich farmers, it was effective to mobilise their landless acquaintances and relatives to occupy and establish Kuta Buluh, who cling to a hope of a class mobility from landless agricultural labourers to “poor farmers” with a small plot of their own. Another dimension of human rights they engage with is the freedom from violence. But their understanding of “human rights” and “violence” is narrowed merely into “physical violence” during direct confrontations with GLNP authorities (Naibaho,2020:21). It turns a blind eye to other kinds of violence, especially the class exploitation and uneven redistribution embedded in their social relations of re/production.

### **Internal Conflict in Kuta Buluh**

In the end of 2015 until the beginning of 2016, there was a conflict between the committee (consisted mostly of the old members and rich farmers) and new members (Kuta Buluh villagers) of KETAPEL. The committee members labelled the Kuta Buluh new members as “newcomers” and asked them to empty and return the land they borrowed earlier. The borrowers refused as they were still farming on the land. They tried to negotiate on the land size, thinking that after all it was the committee members who invited them to Kuta Buluh in the

very first place. Notwithstanding, the old members continued to threaten and forcefully cut the sub-villagers' growing crops. The new members resisted, resulting in conflicts involving physical violence. A male villager said,

In 2016, the committee said, 'there's no place for newcomers anymore here. It's us who have fought the armies. You people only enjoy the fruits.' ...Our crops were growing big and they just cut them away. A leader threatened us, 'You can rub and sharpen your machetes. I will not go home'. They provoked us to fight them. We were surely angry and resisting. We fired that leader (Interview, 3 May 2019).

Amidst the conflict, the new members eventually found out that the organisational fee they paid were not used to secure their legal land titles, but to ask GLNP to compensate the old members' evicted oil palm trees. They felt that they were fooled for the rich farmers' advantage. They stated their resignation from KETAPEL and since then the organisation has been inactive and unheard of. Feeling under pressure, many left their houses and farms, leaving Kuta Buluh with only 34 families. Some of those who stayed moved to the upper Lapangan Tembak plots that had been abandoned by its previous occupants. A male villager admitted, "At least we can farm vegetables and work whatever odd casual jobs offered around here" (Interview, 3 May 2019).

Until the day of this study fieldwork, Kuta Buluh people still have to experience conflicts with the older members, though not as intense as before. To better their livelihood, many started to plant oranges and rubber through stem cuttings to save input costs. Some, especially women, do casual wage labours in other farms in other villages (Arofat et al., 2020:22). But a sense of collective insecurity still pervades the air. One day, there was a crowd gathering in front of Kuta Buluh gate. "A conflict just erupted", said Lamtiur. One of her group representatives was stabbed by an opposition group. Lamtiur's husband immediately went with their group leaders, while other villagers guarded the gate, including Lamtiur and many other women (Interview, 5 September 2020). Lamtiur said that to preserve their homes and farms, the villagers have to bet their lives.

This conflict shows a partial manifestation of the significant emergence of "identity" articulation formerly suppressed under the centralised, secular developmentalist ideology of the New Order. After 1998, negotiations of "indigenous" (*pribumi*)/"newcomer" (*pendatang*) identities colour public discourses (Nordholt & Klinken, 2007). Otherisation based on these sentiments fragment the working class and is increasingly used to articulate the causes of socio-economic marginalisation, pervasive in agro-industrial sectors like oil palm. It is not only a battle among groups with different labels, but also invisible and unarticulated ways of class dynamics. Especially when the state still structurally enforces anti-left doctrines, institutionalising them in legal documents and constant surveillance, repressing critical debates and class perspectives in Indonesia. Under these circumstances, economic exploitation and cultural otherisation are intertwined in a loop that reinforces each other (Peters, 1994:210; Bhattacharyya, 2018:102-3).

## **Intimate Entanglements in Labour Relations**

The class structure in the plantation production is intertwined with intimate relationships with emotional dimensions like marriage, kinship, and friendship, where gender, generation, religion, and ethnicity play roles. In choosing their labourers, the planters tend to prioritise

their close relatives and friends. A planter said, “If we can give jobs to those close to us, why would we give to others? Our intention is to help, so we can equally (*sama-sama*) eat” (Naibaho,2020:15). But as evident from this table of harvest income, the income of the planters and their labourers significantly differ, showing the unequal labour relations *vis-à-vis* the uneven surplus redistribution.

**Table 5.1**  
Comparison of planters and labourers’ income in Plantation 52

Planters’ income			Labourers’ income		
Differentiator (IDR)	Land size		Differentiator (IDR)	Size harvested	
	2 ha	7 ha		2 ha	7 ha
Production cost/year	16,327,100	30,437,950	Harvested FFB/year (kg)	50,900	147,033
Harvest income/year	51,700,415	164,676,960	Harvesting wage/year	7,635,000	22,054,950
Profit/year	35,373,315	134,239,010	Wage/month	636,250	1,837,913
Profit/month	2,947,776	11,186,584	Wage/month/ha/group*	318,125	262,559
Profit/month/ha	1,473,888	1,697,881	Wage/month/ha/person	106,042	87,520
Labourers’ income relative to the profit of planters				7.19%	5.15%

\*In average, each harvesting group consists of 3 people.

*Source:* Naibaho, 2020:15

The historical-emotional dimensions underpinning their labour relations with the planters make it difficult for the labourers to negotiate about workload and wage, and to refuse the employers’ unpaid demands. Interacting in complex and contradictory ways with the local gender norms, the intimate entanglements in the production processes also pervade in the relationships among men and women from different class positions (Agarwal, 1994a:15).

## Seeds of Class Struggle

With their precarious situations, it doesn’t mean that the labourers accept the hegemonic relations passively. As their everyday politics, labourers help each other in the social reproductive spaces. For example, many women labourers form rotational saving groups (*arisan*) for emergency and unpredictable expenses, they hide each other’s health problems from the employers to stay recruited, and elder workers give advice to the younger ones. They said that when the workers are talking among themselves, sometimes they intend to ask for a wage raise. A male labourer reminisced his working experience with a rich farmer,

Once we asked for a wage raise. We did not ask much, only 5 rupiahs, because the employer paid below the average rate. But we were told, ‘if you don’t want this job, I can give it to another person’. So, we followed. ... though the working risks are great. ...for example, some fruits fell on my feet. They were swollen. I have a friend... an *egrek* (cutter) accidentally fell on his back, piercing through his stomach. His ribs were split. Luckily, he didn’t die. ...There’s no health insurance.” (Interview,23 August 2020)

After the 2011 GLNP operation, many labourers were fired. Some decided to migrate out of the village. Others become daily wage labourers in other place. A Malay male labourer said, “We were given only IDR 500,000 when we were fired. Though I know that what I managed

was billions in value”. His wife said once there was a protest for a wage raise (from IDR 35,000 to 45,000/HK) to the KUD. But her husband reluctantly said that it was a “demand” or “negotiation”. He held himself from saying the word “protest” as he was aware and worried for being recorded (Interview,3 September 2020). Another labourer said that those involved in the protest have been monitored and threatened that they would not be employed anymore (Interview,2 September 2020). The decision to raise the wage would only be made possible through a KUD meeting and the daily wage labourers aren’t allowed to attend. In the end, the KUD did raise the wage but the working days offered to each labourer were reduced. Hence, the monthly payment they receive is more or less the same as before.

## Chapter 6 — Conclusion

In this study I have attempted to understand the dynamics of class and gender that intersect, mediate, and shape various political reactions “from below”. My study is not only filling the literature gaps on the interrelations between (1) class and gender and (2) the agrarian and the environmental, but also combining the analyses of those two. I have done this by examining the case of the political contestation of Lapangan Tembak in Indonesia. Since the colonial era, class and gender politics have been historically embedded in the contradictory convergence of capitalist plantation and conservation attempts. Contrary to the “apolitical” understanding of conservation, the national park has been a “political forest” in the state-making technology (Peluso&Vandergeest,2001). With large-scale land concessions given to private corporations, the lack of access to common land has re/produced cheap and disciplined labours that benefits capitalist growth. Hence, colonialism and capitalism unleashed a repertoire of accumulation by dispossession, followed by a tendency of concentration, differentiation, gender-based subordination, and ecological degradation that becomes the context of contemporary contestations. The release and change of the national park land status to accommodate the development of PIR ADB is an example of the state prioritising its capitalist orientation and dependence on an extractive commodity boom. The implications of the oil palm contract farming scheme have extended beyond the project perimeters, in both the spatial and the temporal sense, re/generating class differentiation and gender subordination.

The political reactions of local community members to the contested forest land and conservation program are ambivalently shaped by the hegemonic misunderstanding of the “state’s property” land (Bachriadi,2019). They are also significantly influenced by their class positions, which I partially canvassed based on their social relations on land, labour, and institutional positions in the cooperative and PIR scheme. The upper-class farmer households are able to expand their reproduction through Plantation 52. The male rich farmers’ engagement in official politics with the government officials since 1989 becomes their basis of advocacy, everyday politics, and overt resistance when the GLNP claims the contested land. During and after the 2011 GLNP eviction attempt, they hold important positions in the movement leadership. The mobilisation of many landless labourers to occupy the land and establish Kuta Buluh demonstrated a case of “class compromise” and “exchange of interests” in asymmetrical power relations which later permeate the movement’s afterlives. Meanwhile, many PIR ADB landless labourers who used to farm in borrowed lands in Lapangan Tembak participate in the GLNP Conservation Partnership scheme to feel “more secure” about the land control status. Hence, the resistance and struggle against the green-grabbing have re/shaped their class positions.

With the depoliticisation and demonisation of “disobedient” women during the New Order, women’s involvement in the political spheres of the contestation is ground-breaking. Intertwined with class, the local gender norms and practices shaped the women’s political reactions and opportunities, as well as limitations and risks of reinforcing the unequal gender relations. Though the control of land is sometimes in the husbands’ hands, women are encouraged to engage since the contestation will impact the households’ social reproduction. The “formal” political opportunities are dominated by men, hence most engage in “informal” spaces of direct confrontations where the gendered boundaries that hamper women’s participation can be overcome. The women’s bodily presence in direct protests and some women’s stripping off their clothes to struggle for their rights to the contested resources possess a symbolic significance and shows that struggles around land and dispossession can also be sites of struggle around gender (Morgan,2017).

Nevertheless, women's participation in rural politics doesn't automatically translate to a fulfilment of their specific gender interests, or of a more radical proposition to undo and abolish gender (Razavi,2003;Butler,2004). The gendered division of labour devalues women's work in and outside the household, and social reproduction is still disproportionately burdened on the women's shoulders. Hence, gendered oppression in the layered burdens and insecurities of women has challenged theorisations of class that assume a congruent class position in a family unit. As a consequence of male-dominated political processes, women's gender-specific concerns and interests are underestimated and compromised, though they are connected with the insecurities caused by the GLNP threats of eviction. The class differentiation among women also exacerbates the problematic gender norms, particularly in the fragmentation of "good" and "bad" women and in the cases of domestic violence among lower-class households.

After the resistance, the hegemonic class structure remains unchallenged due to several reasons. The dimensions of "human rights" they mobilised are anchored to the discourse of private land ownership and narrowed down into "physical violence" during direct confrontations with GLNP authorities, ignoring the structural exploitation and uneven redistribution embedded in the social relations of re/production (Bernstein,2010;Naibaho,2020). The historical-emotional dimensions underpinning the labour relations make it difficult for the labourers to confront the class relations. Interacting in complex and contradictory ways with the local gender norms, ethnicity, and generation, the intimate entanglements in the production processes pervade in the relationships among men and women from different class positions (Agarwal,1994a:15). There are seeds of class struggle sown in the everyday politics and social reproductive spaces among women and labourers. But multi-scalar policies still structurally enforce anti-left doctrines and patriarchal institutions, repressing class and feminist perspectives in Indonesia, resulting in entangled economic and cultural exploitation. Breaking this loop needs an intersectional approach that acknowledges the interconnection of (1) the agrarian and the environmental and (2) class and gender (among others). As this study has shown, feminist political ecology as a critical engagement and transboundary conversation between feminist/gender studies, agrarian political economy, and political ecology can enrich our knowledge and attempts of socio-ecological transformation.

## **Silences and Future Directions**

How do we transition to an agroecological lifeworlds with social-environmental justice and challenge the hegemony of mainstream conservation discourse and capitalist market-based solution? Building the grounds for a post-plantationocene future entails a long process of de-alienation of fragmented classes of labour with their living conditions; a re-alignment of human labour with the metabolic rift of nature (Pye,2019). The struggles are intense, awkward, messy, and exhausting. The women and labourers in Lapangan Tembak contestation have shown through their everyday resistance and class struggle that the social reproductive space can be a potential starting point. To grow and support these rhizomatic networks of survival and transformation is a collective response-ability we have to explore and re/learn. Due to limited data and space, this study hasn't sufficiently explored the observable credit/debt relations, ethnicity, and generational dimensions that are entangled with gender and class in the contestation. The relationship between humans and more-than-humans in the forest landscape and socio-ecological dynamics is also under-addressed. Hence, studying these matters can be considered for future research endeavours.

# Appendices

## 1. Fieldwork Terms of Reference and Interview Guides

Pre-fieldwork discussion:

- Reading and discussing previous papers and research design
  - Working paper “Kompleksitas relasi sosio-ekonomi masyarakat di kawasan hutan resort sekoci TNGL” (Arofat et al.,2020)
  - Article “Terus menerus mengeksklusi atau terekklusi: perjalanan 3 dekade pekebun mandiri di kawasan Kelompok 52, Besitang, Langkat” (Nai-baho,2020)
  - ISS Research Paper Design (Austringrum,2020)
- Mechanism of payment --to be discussed
- Forms of informant’s consent, anonymity, and information non-disclosure/confidentiality statement

Data collection

- Relevant documents
  - PIR ADB village data (from the village office)
  - PIR scheme contract with PTPN and PT. ALAM
  - AD/ART (or other documents) of collective organisations/associations
    - KUD RATA
    - PKK
    - Peasant/Labor Union
    - Other relevant kind of collective associations
  - Land transfer records
  - Land plot holding map (*peta persil*) in:
    - PIR ADB
    - Plantation 52
  - Records of labouring contract
    - PIR ADB
    - Plantation 52
  - Payment invoice/bill of FFB selling
  - Payment invoice/bill of labouring fee
  - News report or documentation on mobilisation against GLNP cut-down
- Qualitative interview and FGD (if possible)
  - Informant composition in terms of gender
    - 50F/50M or 60F/40M or 70F/30M (?)
  - Gendered division of labour, gendered choice of crop planting/maintenance



- The pluri-active livelihoods of the labourers
- The pluri-active livelihoods of women
- Political Economic Questions:
  - Who owns what, who does what, who gets what, what do they do with the surplus, what's their relationship with the environment/ecology?
- Labourers' and women's general concerns (labour relations, livelihoods, environmental degradation, etc.)
- Labourers' and women's perspective in the case of Plantation 52 tenurial insecurity
- Labourers and women's strategies to manoeuvre or navigate in the case of plantation 52 tenurial insecurity
  - Including on the human rights discourse mobilised by the rich farmers and global conservation discourse
- Labourers' perspective and concern on the labour relations
  - Including their perspective on "work"?
    - What is considered as "work", and what is not?
  - What hinders laborers from breaking the patron-client/capital-labour relations?
- Assuming that women are mostly assigned social reproductive roles in the household: women's perspective on the relationship of the household, and the interconnection between the household and the plantation
- Women's perspective on gender dynamics in the decision-making processes across different levels (household, village, cooperative, plantation, mobilization against GLNP)
- Women's roles in the mobilisation against GLNP cut-down
- Labourers' roles in the mobilization against GLNP cut-down
- Is there any kind of collective agency (of labourers and women) coming out of this vulnerable and precarious situation? If yes, what kind of collective agency?
  - Interviewing collective association of women or plantation labourers

#### Discussion during fieldwork:

- RAs will send recordings of interviews and field observation (audio, photograph, video, fieldnote etc.) every ... days
- I will listen (and transcript important points), read, and browse the files
- I will communicate regularly with the RAs based on their field notes and recordings
- If there are questions, problems, and concerns of RAs on the field, please let me know and I will do as best as I can to respond, as well as consult with my supervisor

## 2. Relational Positionality

It was the beginning of Covid19 outbreak in the Netherlands when I worked on my research design, as scheduled by the ISS. As an international student/migrant, I, as many people, was being overwhelmed by the pandemic and its implications for our family at home<sup>15</sup>. Though I have roughly mapped the prospective topics throughout the previous terms, there was a time when I had no specific case or site in mind that can ground my research. During a discussion session with my supervisor, doing a desk study was not feasible for my initial and broad interest to research the intersection of class and gender relations in shaping political reactions “from below” in Indonesian oil palm contract scheme. We agreed that this paper should not only be a “literature review” of previous “bulky” literature on similar topics.

I decided to contact and consult several comrades from my previous network in Indonesia, close and distant. Later on, a senior researcher (Dianto Bachriadi) from Agrarian Resource Centre (ARC) agreed to share information and contacts about the organisation’s current collaborative research-educational project with the Faculty of Agriculture Padjadjaran University and the Indonesian Biodiversity Conservation Trust Fund (KEHATI) on the topic of “*Agrarian Transformation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and Sustainable People-based Palm Oil in Indonesia*”. One of the research sites is in PIR ADB village, Besitang, a village of oil palm contract farming scheme bordering GLNP and some corporate plantations. I used whatever secondary information I could collect for my research design. However, due to the pandemic lockdown, the decision about the collection of primary data was uncertain. My initial intention to undertake an ethnography-inspired fieldwork became impossible. A “proper” ethnography usually needs much longer time than 1-2 months of fieldwork to acquire in-depth understanding of the research participants’ life experiences. However, an ethnographic orientation can be useful for short-term qualitative research, in which researchers actively aim to understand deeply and put the participants’ perspectives, values, ways of manoeuvres, etc. of particular phenomena in central through participatory observation (Porta&Keating,2008). My supervisor advised me to do online interviews, but Dianto argued that it would be inappropriate to assume and demand that the research participants should be proficient and comfortable enough to discuss their problems via social media to someone they have never met before.

The design seminar panels agreed that my proposed research problem was too broad, unfeasible, and should be more specified. To address this problem, my supervisor and I decided to have a skype interview with Dianto to discuss more information about the dynamics and contradictions happening in the field. Through that series of conversations, they suggested to me the possible-though-dilemmatic option of hiring “field assistants”, especially when the lockdown measures in Indonesia were relaxed. After ensuring the villagers’ (verbal) consent to become my research participants, Dianto introduced me to Junarcia Molisna Naihaho (Lisna), an independent/freelancing young woman researcher in the project who did fieldwork there and was finishing the research report. Interestingly, she was born and raised as a Batak, in a region near PIR ADB village. Like me, she is also an alumni of ARC’s Critical Agrarian Studies of Indonesia (CASI), only from a different batch. When Dianto asked if she was willing to be my field assistant, she agreed. Since then, beside my supervisor, I mainly

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<sup>15</sup> Our experience to juggle and survive amidst this strange situation, including the academia’s “speed culture”, is being well documented and critically reflected by a friend from ISS MA/Mundus MAPP 2019-2020 batch through his own research paper.

discussed with her. We talked about her previous fieldwork experience and research findings, which altered and eventually shaped my research questions.

On 16 June 2020, I attended the project's online plenary discussion of the working papers and policy recommendations. Lisna did a presentation there on the multi-layered exclusions in PIR ADB village and the Plantation 52 inside the GLNP borders, a historical intersection of contradictory attempts to conserve rainforests and convert them for profiteering ends. Nearing the end of the session, an "expert" panelist from KEHATI commented that the contestation between "economic welfare" and "environmental sustainability" had indeed been in a state of recursive deadlocks since the colonial era. Public administrators, scientific circles, and community groups debated about the state's exclusive political territorialisation over areas termed as "forests", in which local people's land rights and agricultural livelihoods were implicated (Peluso&Vandergeest,2001:761). These encounters and conversations with different people in different stages of this study have shown a collective socio-nature of intellectual work. Hence, the topic choice, framework, and other ways to understand were embedded in this process. As Hilhorst and van Voorst (2018) suggest about doing ethnographic approach in interactive research, it should also challenge whom we are considered to be researchers, gatekeepers, research assistants, research participants, etc. in the co-construction and negotiation of knowledge production, while navigating the various tricky planes of power asymmetry. Reporting the investigative process is as important as the research findings, "...to detect different ways of making sense of the risk or problem being studied" (Hilhorst and van Voorst, 2018:55).

In an unfortunate way, Covid-19 has exposed to us once more the problematic system of knowledge production, including in the field of social studies. Collaboration and partnership among researchers, research participants, and field assistants must be continuously problematised since it is intertwined within unequal, geopolitical power relations and privilege contestation. In his criticism of the colonial legacies of North-South racial division of labour in socio-cultural research, Bisoka (2020) points out how research assistants are often thought as "body-instruments" or "bodily extension"<sup>16</sup> of privileged researchers residing comfortably in Global North countries, while the assistants are exposed to various difficulties and risks during their fieldwork in the Global South. Meanwhile, on the methodological and ethical consideration of working with the research participants, Hilhorst (2020) acknowledges a persistent colonial tendency of data extractivism in humanitarian studies. Too often researchers don't build "...meaningful interactive research (that) involves partners and participants as much as possible in every stage of the research". We come and go once in a while to the research participants only for the sake of collecting data, with fixated theoretical or hypothetical framework, without providing dialogical, reflexive spaces for them to give feedback and criticism. These ethico-political conundrums are definitely pervasive in this research process. I am bound to the Dutch government's scholarship contract to finish this study and research on time. For that, I am outsourcing the risks of Covid-19 exposure and its anxiety-inducing protocols to my field assistants and research participants, while working from my desk in my room or café tables around the Hague\*?!\*<sup>17</sup> Many scholars warn that there is no easy shortcut to resolve this uncanny situation and, indeed, many questions haunt me. Are

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<sup>16</sup> I compare this criticism with an email sent by instructors of ISS-3105-19-20 Research Paper Preparation to the current MA Students on the possibility of hiring an assistant to collect data in the time of pandemic, in which they wrote, "that means you will ask someone else to help you collect the data you need from the field. So, you become somebody else's supervisor. ...A research assistant is your eyes and ears in the field."

<sup>17</sup> During my first draft seminar (22 September 2020), my second reader critically pointed out that a desire to "mimic" ethnography—instead of adjusting the research methods—during impossible circumstances of Covid-19 pandemic should be problematised.

we reproducing these problematic structures without any hint of emancipatory momentum? Am I only confessing out of guilt but without any willingness to sacrifice my privilege? How to shift this admission, no matter how imperfect and muddy, into something transformative that seriously challenges the status quo? (Ahmed,2004;Lockard, 2016)

*On Field Assistants:* Lisna told me that she would like to have another woman field researcher as a companion. According to her previous stay, working alone as a young woman in a predominantly patriarchal society could be exhausting and alienating (i.e. getting unwanted attention and interaction from a male person whose house she stayed in). I could relate with her from several common fieldwork experiences in the past. Thus, I decided to apply for multiple grants to fund another recruitment. I contacted Nur Janti (Janti), a Javanese student of history and a young journalist. We once worked together in an intergenerational feminist archiving and writing project. We are also members of the Media and Creative Industry Labour Union for Democracy ([sindikasi.org](http://sindikasi.org)), in which she's involved in addressing gender issues and drafting the union's freelancer's guide to working contract. Hence, we formulated the contract of collaboration for this research based on the union's guide, at least to ensure that each labour process is democratically discussed, and each worker's right will not be violated.

*On Research Participants:* As previously mentioned, ARC is the one establishing and maintaining contact with the villagers of PIR ADB. The village leaders allowed us to work with them as long as the fieldworkers could provide a statement of negative results in their Covid-19 tests and follow the necessary health protocols during their stay. As I have clarified with Dianto, ARC also plans to work continuously with them to establish a model of transition toward more sustainable agricultural practices, for example to work with the villagers to transform the growers' cooperative into a more equal and democratic system. Thus, this research paper can be a good start to explore, discuss, and incorporate a feminist political ecology perspective in this attempt. If possible, I would like to travel to Lapangan Tembak to meet the research participants, or to work in another project in this collective trajectory of realising agro-ecological justice.

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