

**International  
Institute of  
Social Studies**

*Erasmus*

**Between Restoration and Deforestation  
The Politics of Peatland Restoration in Neoliberal  
Indonesia**

A Research Paper presented by:

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(Indonesia)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Agrarian, Food and Environmental Studies**

(AFES)

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The Hague, The Netherlands  
December 2020

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# Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Appendices</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	<i>v</i>
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	<i>vi</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>vii</i>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Contested peatland restoration: between restoration and deforestation	1
1.2 Research problem and justification	2
1.3 Research objective and question	3
1.4 Location and methodology	4
1.5 Motivation, limitations and positionality	5
1.6 Structure of the paper	5
<b>Chapter 2 Theorizing the politics of contested peatland</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Social formation of state: between consent and coercion	7
2.2 State as a social relation: relational contestation	9
<b>Chapter 3 Restoration as a product of social relations</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 The political economy of fire	13
3.2 The BRG: restoring the overexposed peatland	15
3.3 Neoliberal ecosystem services: between restoration and deforestation	18
<b>Chapter 4 Restoration at site level</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1 Highlighting restoration at Pasak Piang village	22
4.2 Making sense the restoration and accumulation	25
<b>Chapter 5 Analyzing the politics of peatlands restoration</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1 Locating Indonesian peatland in capitalist relations	28
<b>Chapter 6 Conclusion</b>	<b>32</b>
<i>Appendices</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>References</i>	<i>36</i>

## **List of Tables**

Table 1 Restoration Targets and Criteria in 7 Provinces	17
Table 2 Peatland Area Per Regency/City of West Kalimantan Province	22
Table 3 Area of Forest and Land Fires in West Kalimantan Province	25

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1 Restoration Target Map in Black	12
Figure 2 The Tasks and Functions of the BRG	16
Figure 3 Workflows of BRG	17
Figure 4 The Entrance Gate to the Village of Pasak Piang	23
Figure 5 Corn fields in Pasak Piang	24

## **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 List of Interviewees	34
Appendix 2 Interview Guideline	35

## List of Acronyms

BRG	Badan Restorasi Gambut/ Peatland Restoration Agency
CIFOR	Centre for International Forestry Research
JATAM	Jaringan Advokasi Tambang/Mining Advocacy Network
MOEF	Ministry of Environment and Forestry
PHU	Peat Hydrological Unit
WALHI	Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia/ Indonesia Forum for Environment

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Julien-Francois Gerber, for his attentive and resourceful support, and to my second reader, Prof. Dr. Saturnino M. Borras, for boosting my spirit and striving to make the most to complete this study.

Thanks to their guidance, I had the privilege of writing a RP that was full of intellectual excitements and also long restless nights. I am deeply grateful to have a mentoring team like them.

To my fellow research assistants Drajat Kristanto in West Kalimantan and Lutfi Jayadi in Jakarta. This research has been made possible by your support. I am grateful to you both for completing this research.

To my wife, Fatimah Rizvi, who has been with me in so many ways to complete this research. Terima kasih!

## **Abstract**

This research explores the impacts of 'development' through the example of how restoration takes place on the world's largest tropical peatlands. I examine the character of the contestation that has taken place in the governance of Indonesia's peatlands, from the Suharto New Order to the Reform era. Indonesian peatland is becoming an active force in the production and reproduction of contested meanings of statecraft and development. It becomes an arena and a testing ground to observe the relation between the state, capital and society. Using the lenses offered by Gramsci and Poulantzas, I examine the social formations that lie behind contestation. I argue that the restoration is the result of social relations from various social forces that are never static and homogenous, let alone class determined. This research uses political ecology and political economy approaches and attempts to understand the underlying political processes of peatlands restoration. It explains that the processes are never neutral but highly political. In particular, I demonstrate that the actors responsible for the restoration of the peatlands are powerless and incapable of answering to the people's problems and the ecological damages they face. Restoration, in fact, goes hand in hand with the persistent desire for accumulation by large-scale monoculture practices. As a result, Indonesian peatlands are over-governed and hyper-politicized, but the aspiration of the peat villagers is nowhere in the debate.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

The study of peatland ecosystems in Indonesia lacks analysis that pays attention to the power relations that are shaping these ecosystems. This study adds to the rising body of literature in critical rural development studies that challenges the prevailing neoliberal paradigm. By focusing on the political aspects of the restoration, this study demonstrates how the implementation of environmental and conservation policies can be highly political and contentious. It shows how market-based environmental policy has streamlined the restoration of peatland. The restoration slowly serves as a mechanism for implementing neoliberal conservation that legitimizes the internalization of the socio-ecological destructions of peatland extraction.

## **Keywords**

Peatland, restoration, contestation, social relation, deforestation, conservation, neoliberal

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Contested peatland restoration: between restoration and deforestation

At the end of April 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the long-time coming depletion of Indonesia's food supply, Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) suddenly summoned all relevant Indonesian state-owned companies and ordered the development of food estate by creating rice fields targeting 900 thousand hectares on broken peatlands, particularly in Pulang Pisau, Central Kalimantan (Petir, 2020)<sup>1</sup>. The order is without a doubt surprising to the Peatland Restoration Agency, commonly referred to as Badan Restorasi Gambut (BRG) in Indonesia, that is carrying out the President's mandate to restore the peatlands, which is now opposing his own mandate. As a result, harsh criticism unsurprisingly came from civil society. Opponents warned against imitating the program of former President Suharto, who once developed one million hectares of rice fields in peatlands and caused ecological devastation and land conflicts.

Several NGOs such as the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA), the Mining Network (JATAM) and WALHI released data on why Indonesia is qualified to experience food crises (Thomas, 2019). During the era of President Joko Widodo, 200 thousand hectares of agricultural land were lost per year. Five million farmer families changed their profession to wage labour in the last ten years. Oil palm plantations cleared sixteen million hectares of forest. There are today at least 1171 active land conflicts and 1.7 tons of rice is lost per day due to coal mining activities (Thomas, 2019; Prabowo, 2019).

Now that the Corona outbreak is erupting and Indonesia is hit by a problematic food and import crisis, the President hastily needs to create rice fields. The food estate policy on peatlands unexpectedly came into force by consistently blinding the agrarian problem and ignoring the wellbeing of farmers who have been destroyed by his pro-food import policy and Jokowi's pro-market agricultural policies. Before the Coronavirus occurred, the President was still proud of the national oil palm industry and wanted to continue to expand oil palm to 20-30 million hectares to meet the need for oil palm biofuel.

*"It is a matter of business war between countries only because Indonesia's crude oil palm is cheaper than the price of their sunflower oil,"* said the President stirring up emotions on his political party's national work meeting (Sani, 2020). The President warned the European Union and international NGOs in Indonesia that were questioning the practice of Indonesian oil palm plantations on environmental and human rights issues, in particular for underage workers.

Indonesia is determined to use crude oil palm for Indonesia's biofuel needs with a target of B-50 (50% using crude oil palm as fuel) by the end of 2020 (Chandra, 2019), and that means continuing to encroach and clear the peat forest area. The Indonesian government

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<sup>1</sup> Historically the location is known as 'Mega Rice Project' covering peatland of more than one million hectares, which was first opened in 1995 by President Suharto and then proved to be a complete failure and destroyed peat.



continues to ignite nationalist sentiments against the European Union by expanding Indonesian oil palm from 13 million hectares to around 20 million hectares for development.

Rapid development is taking place in all wetland areas in Indonesia, mostly peat swamps. Expansion is not because peat swamps are desirable, but because alluvial and hilly regions have already developed, and peat swamps have finally caught sight of them. With the increase in land acquisition for agricultural development, Indonesia's peatlands have become a gateway to the rapid and widespread growth of oil palm plantations (Miettinen et al. 2012).

Indonesia had the most extensive tropical peatland in the world. It covers 24 million hectares of peatland and made up of 47% of the tropical regional peatland. Peatlands are a unique ecosystem with many complex interrelations. Not all peatlands should be used for crops, as they may cause adverse environmental impacts. Agricultural operations can only be undertaken at designated locations (Miettinen and Liew, 2010). The massive woody peat dome typically characterizes peat areas. Tropical peatland ecosystems are rich in biodiversity and play a crucial role in global environmental and climate change. But now peatlands in Indonesia mostly drained, deforested and burning (Page et al. 2011).

For more than three decades, peatlands have intentionally been burned to clear out rain-forest for commercial plantations. Life is always alert and tormenting in many peatland ecosystem hotspot villages in Sumatra and Kalimantan. During the rainy season, they are in danger of flooding, while during the dry season, they are more threatened by fires and hazes. The haze reaches out from the burning peatlands of Indonesia especially in Central Kalimantan and Riau, Sumatra to stretch across the Southeast Asian region, producing an international backlash against the Indonesian government for allowing land practices to cause conflagrations.

The fire event that burned peatlands throughout Indonesia in 2015 was considered one of the biggest ecological disasters in the world. The massive fire and the environmental crisis that resulted forced the government to commit itself to move beyond business as usual. Using a presidential decree, Indonesia created the Peatland Restoration Agency (BRG) in January 2016 to restore 2 million hectares of broken carbon-rich peatlands, mostly destroyed by fires and unsustainable plantations. The mandate to restore the program was active from 2016 up until today. It is an ambitious restoration, and no nation in the world has ever been restoring peatlands to such an enormous scale.

## **1.2 Research problem and justification**

The neglected peat swamp forest in Indonesia shows the different policies and interests between the state and many non-state actors, leading to a battle between antagonistic interests: companies, transnational actors, local governments and the people. This research argues that degraded peatland and land conflicts reflect the competing desires of the various actors in society as well as the institutions of supranational planning.

Peatland has been considered a no man's land for more than two decades, owing to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the wise management of peatland at the national level. It has, therefore, been heavily exploited in the name of growth. Indonesia's use of peatland for agriculture has long-standing historical roots. Indigenous people viewed peatland as ground tools for food production. In the history of swampland exploitation, the success of indigenous populations in the use of peatlands has encouraged the government to open wide-ranging peatlands (Wollenberg, 2009). Problems surrounding the use of peatland emerged after the usage of peat without adequate and appropriate management. Many peatlands were exploited during this time for the production of vast oil palm plantation monoculture. Oil palm is Indonesia's core commercial product.

Indonesia is the world's largest manufacturer of crude oil palm (CPO) and the world's biggest exporter of CPO in the world (Hirschmann, 2020). CPO and coal are the mainstays of Indonesia's economic growth. However, the price to pay for Indonesia's obsession with economic growth is destroying Indonesia's peat ecosystems faster than scientists can predict due to unsustainable drainage-based commercial plantations (Dommain et al. 2015). The dried-out peatland is easily ignited and burns underground; then the fire spreads under the surface. As a result, tropical peatlands in Indonesia are constantly experiencing fires and natural disasters. Varkkey (2017) points out that up to 80% of the forest fire was caused by oil palm plantations (or their subcontractors), compared with 20% by slash-and-burn farmers.

The peatland has been overly exploited since the 1990s, and, ironically, even more deteriorated by the coming of decentralization in 1999 (Rieley et al. 2008, pp. 20). It mirrors two conflicting desires: between deforestation and restoration. For two decades, there is a constant challenge in peatlands, which is continuously eager for land expansion and for what Harvey (2005) called accumulation by dispossession.

The development paradigm of Indonesia, which is deeply rooted in the neoliberal economy, is also supported by global and regional forces. This often explains why the Indonesian government has allowed such commercial practices to proceed unchecked and unregulated on peatlands. This study will further discuss whether peat restoration during the swift expansion of oil palm plantations is merely an outcome of conventional (neoclassical) analyses that follow market mechanisms in tackling negative externalities.

This research is important because the restoration of peatlands in Indonesia has hardly ever been understudied from a combined political economy and political ecology perspective, through the lens of critical development studies. The research also comes at the right moment: it took the opportunity to research the 5-year restoration momentum of peatlands (2016-2020) in Indonesia.

### 1.3 Research objective and question

The political ecology of peatland had hardly been studied until recently, and the necessary socio-ecological data is still lacking (Kosuke Mizuno, 2016). There are few studies and scholarly works focusing on the development of peatlands in Indonesia, and even less on their agrarian political economy and political ecology.

This research aims to examine and analyze the politics of peatland. It will seek to understand how the restoration in Indonesian peatlands ecosystem has taken place, shaped or been shaped in a contested context. The study will attempt to analyze and explore the state-capital relation in the production and reproduction of contested practices in peatland areas. Investigating the strategy of peatland restoration, the contesting authorities and the multiple interests of actors such as the state, companies and citizens who control their agenda in the peatland. I will use the Marxist-Gramscian lens to look at capitalist relations between the state, capital and civil society. The theory of the state developed by Gramsci and Poulantzas will be a reference in theorizing the nature of the conflict in the peatlands of Indonesia.

This forms the research question of this project:

**Why and how is the peatland ecosystem in Indonesia heavily contested within the context of neoliberalism and the extractivist model of development?**

This question will be unpacked through two of sub-questions:

1. Who is driving the politics of peatlands restoration, and what are the politics of the underlying policy processes?
2. What are the impacts of peatlands restoration: who wins, who loses and what are the consequences for rural livelihood?

## 1.4 Location and methodology

The methodology of this research is based on qualitative methods, particularly interviews and literature-based analyses. I will use this approach to analyse historical trajectories, governance and policies, and to link them to the concepts of political economy and political ecology. Primary data were obtained from the participants interviews in Jakarta and West Kalimantan for six weeks in August-September 2020.

In view of the COVID-19 situation, I decided to stay in The Hague and eventually combine online interviews with the hiring of two fieldwork research assistants. Their mission was to perform a series of interviews and follow-up with research participants in Jakarta and West Kalimantan as one of the seven provinces targeted for restoration by the Indonesian Peatland Restoration Agency.

A research fellow named Drajat Kristanto, who lives in West Kalimantan, helped me gather data and interviews. Participants were from local governments, university scholars, NGOs and villagers in a peat village called Pasak Piang, located in Kubu Raya Regency, West Kalimantan. All the people interviewed in Pasak Piang Peat Village were met face-to-face. We conducted four days of observations and semi-structured interviews with village heads and five villagers consisting of male, female and young adult farmers. They have been intentionally selected because they have experience in peatland restoration programmes in their village.

Another field assistant named Lutfi Jayadi helped me perform interviews with sources in Jakarta, including the Peatland Restoration Agency, academic researchers, policymakers and NGOs. Research activities in Jakarta focused on a series of interviews and data collection, in particular data from the Peatland Restoration Agency.

Interviews performed in Jakarta and West Kalimantan have been adaptively combined between face-to-face and online interviews depending on the approval of the participants and the corona-wise nature of the interview. However, most of the interviews were conducted in person, for instance with the heads and deputies of Indonesia's peatland restoration institutions in Jakarta and the heads of local government agencies in West Kalimantan. Written data, observations and visual recordings were collected from the Peatland Restoration Agency, local governments, researchers working on peat NGOs and other secondary sources such as news, books and journals.

We had 27 interview sessions with a total of 25 participants from Jakarta and West Kalimantan. All interviewees asked to agree to the results of the interview. My role as the lead researcher was to ensure that research assistants and participants understand the substance, purpose and goals of the research.

I have also developed questions for participants, along with research assistants. Interviews were performed using a recording system. The drawbacks of such recording systems were mainly the lower depth of the inquiry: a slightly rigid, non-fluid and somewhat over-structured rather than semi-structured interview process. The purpose of choosing to use a recording system is to make it easier for the research assistants to understand the content of the question and to obtain expressions and direct communication with the participants.

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations and texts from Indonesian sources used in this research have been translated by me.

## **1.5 Motivation, limitations and positionality**

As an Indonesian, I lived, grew up, and witnessed two political orders in Indonesia: the New Order under the 32 years of the oppressive Suharto regime, and the Reformation Order, an order that was meant to correct the previous order, but that ended up imitating it, if not in more oppressive ways. I witnessed a paradigm of development that has remained unchanged under both regimes and that is actually becoming increasingly prevalent/powerful in Indonesia.

Since Suharto became President in 1968, Indonesia has been a "good boy" in the practice of neoliberalism. Perhaps even one of the leading countries in neoliberal experiments. Indonesia's biodiversity and natural wealth, which should have been a blessing, have become a kind of curse paving the way for predatory extractive economic activities.

As anthropologist David Graeber (2001) reminds us, anthropologists must eventually open their eyes and become more substantive in denouncing capitalism as the dominant form of life and logic. To follow Graeber's message, I would like to take a small part in examining and describing the effect of neoliberalism and extractive economic practices on Indonesia's peatlands as a unique, valuable and critical ecosystem.

The politics of peatland restoration, in terms of its achievements and shortcomings, is an essential part of my research to find real alternatives for the protection of peatland. The limitations happened with time constraints in the conduct of this research, the effect of the pandemic, and the lack of opportunity to do more in-depth fieldwork. I feel grateful at the same time to have been a close part of the peat problem and to know the working environment from a very close perspective.

I assume that while working on this study, my role as an insider in peatlands restoration will lead to both benefits and challenges. The experience of having worked closely with the organization, and the donor will give me the opportunities that others would not have. Through the lens of relational positionality (Rose, 1997, pp. 305–320), I realized that the downside of privileges could also lead to bias due to pre-formed opinions and perceptions.

I am aware of the value of consistently questioning my position and the inclination to bias that most likely arises from my role as an Indonesian middle class, who was exposed to policymakers on the topic of peatland restoration. My closeness to the restoration institution and its network in Indonesia could potentially put me at a drawback in interpreting data and analyzing problems.

My political and ideological orientation is another possible prejudice that I need to consider. I am actively involved in criticizing the extractive development model, including the rejection of oil palm planting and coal mining. I assume this position without apology and believe that it is not necessarily a drawback in conducting rigorous social-scientific research. Indeed, to be explicit about my value premises allows me to be particularly careful about my possible biases. Throughout the research, I was well aware that many of my assumptions could be questioned, challenged and eventually modified.

## **1.6 Structure of the paper**

Chapter 1 covered the introduction, the research problem and questions and methodological concerns. Chapter 2 will provide a theoretical explanation for the contested peatland restoration in the context of neoliberalism and the extractive development model. Chapter 3 will

present field data and findings from Jakarta on the politics of peatlands restoration. Chapter 4 will explore the findings from field sites in West Kalimantan. Chapter 5 will present analysis by synthesizing theory with empirical evidences and connecting findings to research questions. Chapter 6 will conclude the research offering a brief overview of the research objective and explaining the implications of the research.

## Chapter 2

# Theorizing the politics of contested peatland

Many studies have rigorously addressed the aspects of peatland ecosystem services such as hydrological function, carbon offsetting, and existing biophysics. Among other things, it is also politically and socially critical to study how the global neoliberal interests have been operated, opposed and competed with multi-level agendas and actors in peatlands arena.

This research theoretically indicates that peatlands are becoming an active force in the production and reproduction of competing meanings of statecraft and development. Peatlands are becoming arena and testing ground for monitoring the health of the national body-politics, and to analyze the relationship between the state, capital and society.

Several studies, at a glimpse, have articulated the nature of contestation in Indonesia's natural resource specifically peatland ecosystem (Sanders et al. 2019: 196–197) (Jewitt et al. 2014: 406–408) (Bettinger et al. 2014: 198–200) (Mizuno et al. 2016: 148) (Peluso, 2007: 25–26) (Li, 2018: 330–333). The contestation involves a complexity of issues among multi-actor interventions with capital accumulation commonly as its primary objective.

Peatland contestation is not only represented by two classical opposition in the form of business interests that continue to open and turn peatlands into commercial plantations against conservation interests such as climate issue, carbon sequestration concerns or ecosystem services. There is also a rivalry between the central government and local government authorities, especially around the land concession permit policy as well as the internal contradictions between residents regarding the economic value of the peatlands.

The political economy of resource nationalism emphasizes Indonesia has been one of the pioneering countries and champion of the neoliberal experiments (Haque, 2008: 30–34) (Carroll, 2006; 2012) (Springer, 2017: 27–38) and Paul K. Gellert (2019) in their contribution to the study of international political economy have positioned Indonesia in the third wave of neoliberalism period. It is from Washington Consensus structural adjustment through 'participatory neoliberalism' moving to 'disciplinary neoliberalism', where neoliberalism has become increasingly coercive. Power structurally embedded in the mode of production and legitimacy derives from the hegemony of the neoliberal project (Carroll and Jarvis, 2017). In this process, capitalist social relations are deepening beyond the forms of the post-Washington Consensus. This neoliberalism's paths marked as 'deep marketization of development' or simply 'deep marketization' (Carroll, 2012: 378).

### 2.1 Social formation of state: between consent and coercion

I will explore Marxist-Gramscian approach to understand the relationship between state and society in the production and reproduction meanings of development in Indonesian peatlands. I took the liberty to use the conception of Nicos Poulantzas with regards to his sophisticated Marxist theory of the state in specifying the complex relations among a plurality of social forces involved in the exercise of state power in a given social formation. I use the term “social formation” to distinguish the Marxist notion of “society”, which refer to a complex articulation between the economic, political, and ideological relations.

I believe that Poulantzas' theory of the capitalist state is useful to understand and sharpen Gramsci's view of the modern capitalist state in a more relational approach and as a foundation for theorizing the role of the state and the process of capital accumulation in Indonesian peatland.

In the theory of the capitalist state, Gramsci and later Poulantzas see the state as an institution of class domination, which plays a crucial role in the unification of the ruling classes and has a tendency towards capitalist power. Moreover, Gramsci elaborates that this unity is deeply embedded in the organic ties between the state as a political society and civil society, rather than identifying specific institutions and apparatuses as instruments of government. Gramsci argues that although the state has the legal monopoly on using force and violence, state power is not at all a monolithic force, but a result of social formation (Jessop, 1990: 52).

In his argument, Gramsci addresses the importance of social formation to integrate a far more complex system of concepts that will better organize the studies of the social basis of state power and the nature of the political contestation within the state. In a social formation as a whole, Gramsci reflects on the modalities of class dominance. He described the state as the whole complex of practical and theoretical practices with which the ruling class not only justifies and retains its supremacy but also succeeds in obtaining the active consent of those other social forces involved (Jessop, 1982: 144-145).

Gramsci focuses on the theory of the capitalist state by paying attention to the 'exercise of the state' rather than 'the apparatus of the internal organization of the state'. To see the real effects of state intervention, which relies heavily on the whole of social relations in a given society. His attempt to look deeper into the social base that influenced social formation made Gramsci able to present the organic contradictions of capital and the self-destructive tendencies of its expanded and uneven reproduction and development (Jessop, 2007: 112).

State power in a capitalist society, according to Gramsci, is necessarily bourgeois. Still, there is no guarantee that bourgeois domination can always be reproduced through an appropriate mixture of coercion and consent. The significance of seeing hegemony as a mixture of the relative weight of coercion and active consent is increasingly more meaningful than seeing the state as an essentially coercive apparatus (Gramsci, 1971: 80). He has defined two types of class dominance that are force and hegemony. Forces include the use of the coercive apparatus, historically seen by Marxists as a specialized repressive apparatus in the intricate ties between the police and the military and their social bases in civil society, and the role of the ideological element in deciding police-military relations (Gramsci, 1977: 181, 190).

Gramsci uses a well-known formula to precisely describe the state as an amalgam of political society and civil society to explain best what factors affect the state. He once argued that civil society and the state are the same things. Gramsci connects them to their social bases and emphasizes how their roles and consequences are shaped by their ties with the economic system and civil society, and by the fact that class dominance is retained by a variable combination of coercion and consent by articulating hegemonic project (Jessop, 1982: 146).

Hegemony involves the successful mobilization and reproduction of the active consent of dominated groups by the ruling class through their exercise of intellectual, moral, and political leadership. Maintaining hegemony means systematically taking into account popular preferences and demands. (Gramsci, 1971: 55-61). Hegemony in capitalist societies is an everyday routine. The hegemony process seeks to secure the support of all significant social forces. The hegemonic power itself bound in the long term to be an economically dominant class rather than a subordinate class or non-class power.

Contemporary Marxist theorist Bob Jessop (1990: 211) reminded the readers of Gramsci that the project of hegemony would always succeed with universal support is merely misleading. He resonates Gramsci's opinion to why hegemony must be self-limited or in other words, to why it is useless to form a hegemonic force that is 100 per cent ideologically homogeneous. In politics, there is no one group can ever achieve such a level of homogeneous domination. Such attempts will only provoke a 100 per cent revolt, Gramsci says. Self-

limitation must be done as the moral-universal partner of the process of hegemony (Fonseca 2016: 80).

The process of hegemony is only powerful and significant by accommodating moral universality and enabling pluralistic contestation. The process of universalizing gives great weight to the role of intellectuals and ideological class struggle in organizing and leading the dominant and dominated classes alike (Jessop, 1990: 208). Hegemony can operate at close to 100 per cent according to Gramsci only if the capitalist power in the state can normalize and transform the other social forces into a new form of moral universalism (Fonseca, 2016: 63). Claus Offe (1984) further complicates the fact that the capitalist state is efficient and effective, not according to its principles, but the degree that it succeeds in universalizing the type of commodities. The capitalist state makes every person feel that they can take care of their needs through involvement in market processes and the inherent test of the rationality of policymaking in the capitalist state (Offe, 1984: 138)

In the pursue of capital accumulation that needs to achieve by coercion and consent, Gramsci's state theory explicitly indicates weakness that lies in the organic contradictions of capital and the self-destructive impulses of its process of prolonged and unequal growth and reproduction (Jessop, 1982: 148-150). Gramsci rejects the reductionist-essentialist argument, which defines all political subjects as class subjects or sees the state's political operations as an automatic consequence of class affiliation. This concern was further articulated by Poulantzas in a more rigorously relational, focusing on economic policy and ideological activities within state power.

## **2.2 State as a social relation: relational contestation**

Capital is not a thing. It is a social relation. Karl Marx coined this famous claim. Later, a complete version would describe capital as a form-determined social relationship (Jessop, 1985). Subsequently, Poulantzas extrapolate this notion in theorizing state as a social relation as an attempt to transcend the dichotomy between capital-theoretical and class-based theoretical approaches. According to Bob Jessop (1982: 221) the main theoretical contribution of Nicos Poulantzas was to establish a concept to see state power as a social relation that reproduced within and around the interaction between state's institutional structure and the evolving nature of the political class powers (Jessop, 1990: 221).

Poulantzas first derives the form of the capitalist type of state from the nature of the capital relation. Then he shows how this form both permits and problematizes a distinctive political role for the state system in organizing a balance of forces favourable to capital accumulation. He argued that the state is a social relation in the same way as capital is a social relation. This approach excludes any treatment of the state either as a simple instrument or as a subject. He considers the state is not directly subordinate to the logic of capital, nor it is a simple instrument of class forces. Poulantzas also suggests that the state as such has no power of its own. State power must be analyzed as the power of the social forces which act in and through it (Jessop, 1990: 256).

Following Poulantzas' view, a state is a material condensation of the balance among class forces. The state form has a structural or strategic selectivity which reflects and modifies the balance of class forces. (Jessop, 1990: 256). The state should be seen as an institutional ensemble rather than as a unitary political subject. It shapes the relations between the class-relevance, the balance of forces within and outside the state, and its implications for the exercise of state power (Jessop, 1985: 337). Poulantzas argues that the state defined by its general function as the factor of cohesion or unity in a class-divide social formation. The state reflects and condenses all the contradictions in a class-divided social formation that



political practices are always class practices, and the state power is always the power of a definite class to whose interests the state corresponds (Jessop, 1982: 159).

Poulantzas elaborates the effectiveness of state power depends on the balance of forces in a given situation reinforced through the mobilization of support for official policies as well as through the monopolization of means of coercion (Jessop, 1990: 129). The complexity of specific social formations makes blanket generalization inappropriate, and it would be wrong to suggest that any given state form best secures and adequate social base in all situations. However, it is clear that as monopoly capitalism consolidated, and state intervention becomes more significant, he suggests the need to build a strong social base in the working class instead of relying entirely on the dull compulsion of market relations and political repression. Thus, for Poulantzas, social democracy has become more significant as a social base for capital accumulation in both monopoly and state-monopoly capitalism (Jessop, 2007: 129).

He added that, under the domination of market powers, capital accumulation pursued its own logic of economic exploitation, valorization, and realization. He suggests that the social relations of capitalist production are inherently physical, political, and ideological (Jessop, 1990: 129). It implies that economic, political and ideological class forces are all present within the social relations of production, exploitation and surplus-value extraction which could be seen as structured ensembles of institutionally embedded practices or as different moments of a wide range social relations dispersed across a social formation. The distinct effect of the state system on the capacity of different class-relevant forces over a given period and the pursuit of their interests is not embedded in the state system as such but in the relationship between state structures and strategies adopted by different powers against it (Jessop, 1990: 217).

In the dynamic dialectics of state systems and social powers, Poulantzas was primarily concerned with how the state system itself influenced classes. In this context, the relationship between state institutions and political powers in a complicated dialectic system was emphasized by his relational approach. He treated authoritarian statism as a new form of the capitalist type of state in the current period of capitalism that characterized tendency of increased state power over all domains of socio-economic life, combined with the radical collapse of political democracy institutions (Jessop, 2007: 131)

Poulantzas sees the capitalist state relation is an inherently divisive system and discursive in its policies, and never represents one dominant group. The process of social relations is the dynamic of the contestation of various social forces which demands itself to coexist with the social stability necessary for it to reproduce itself, including using nationalism as a means to overcome class divisions in capitalism (Jessop, 2007). For Poulantzas, the fragmentation of the class system is a defining characteristic of late capitalism. He sees the capitalist class as too focused on the pursuit of short-term individual gain rather than maintaining the strength of their class as a whole. Short-term orientation makes them use state power for their own benefit, and this tendency makes their class force discursive rather than solid (Jessop, 1990).

## Chapter 3

### Restoration as a product of social relations

In this chapter, I will address the findings on the policy of peatland restoration conducted by the Indonesian Peatland Restoration Agency. I will explore how restoration is formulated and how the Agency performs amid the strong tendency towards neoliberal-extractive views in Indonesia's development. I am using the political ecology of ecosystem services as the conceptual basis of analysis and by seeing the peatland as a site of strategy as theorized by Poulantzas and Bob Jessop.

*"When we work at the site level, we can tell that we are dealing with overexposed peatlands. People believe that peatland can only generate economic value by drying it. It has happened so neatly. Science is not present on the site. Just check, who in the villages knows the peatland ecosystem. We do have serious problems with human resources." (Jakarta, September 4, 2020).*

This statement was made by Haris Gunawan, Deputy Chief of the Peatland Restoration Agency in Indonesia for Research and Development. He was born and raised in a peat village in Riau. A region with the most massive peat forest fires in Indonesia. He spent his career as a peat ecologist at the University of Riau. He often romanticized the good all days when he was a child and peatlands in his village were still full of wildlife, swamps, and abundance of natural products.

He has seen for more than 20 years, economic trends in peatlands have repeated single narrative that peatland must be planted with commodities by doing massive drainage channels. He elaborates "this change of mind and system will not be as easy as turning a hand because this linked to larger economic interests."

The political decision to restore Indonesia's peatlands in seven provinces and how this strategy is formulated by setting up BRG describes a complex process. Before BRG was formed, the exploitation of commercial plantations in peatlands had reached a breaking point as a result of the non-stop expansion process from timber through industrial plantation forest permits to oil palm plantations particularly since the boom of oil palm commodity in 2000-2014. At that time, great demand and high prices of crude palm oil were the core discussions of the Indonesian economy, along with coal mining activities. Businesspeople, bureaucrats, national and local politicians have joined together to open oil palm plantations, including expanding in peatlands.

The study of Transparency for Justice or TuK (2018) exposes the findings of their research on the tycoons behind 25 oil palm companies that control over 5 million hectares of oil palm land in Indonesia and are active in the forest fires of 2019. Most of these tycoons are also involved in controlling coal mines according to the report of Mining Advocacy Network or JATAM (2018). According to TuK and JATAM, the tycoons have links to power and influence policy, including being a member of the task force appointed by President Jokowi in drafting the controversial Job Creation Law or Omnibus Law in Indonesia. Tycoons encourage the Omnibus Law to facilitate investment in the form of easy access to land, accessible environmental permits and flexibility of labour. The opponents considered the law had been made secretly without public participation and tended to be authoritarian in legal arrangements. This group of businessmen along with political party leaders have been accused by civil society (opponents of the Omnibus Law) as an oligarchic network that controls Indonesia's natural resources.

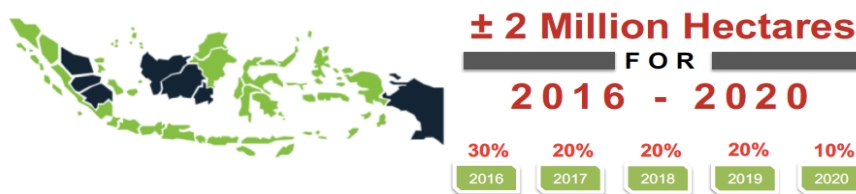
Fires and haze have repeatedly occurred in Indonesian peatlands, particularly in Sumatra and Kalimantan. Great fires recorded in 1997 and 2009; however, from June to October

2015, peat forest fires were identified in Indonesia as one of the world's largest ecological disasters. The area of forest fires that occurred in 2015 was equal to 32 times the size of Jakarta Province, according to data from the National Disaster Management Agency of Indonesia. Based on the satellite imagery reported by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MOEF), fire hotspots reached 70 thousand points in 2015, far above the number of fire hotspots in 2019, which reached 14 thousand points. The total area of land burnt in 2015 amounted to 2.6 million hectares. More than 800 thousand hectares of them were in the peatlands. Fires in peat areas produced much higher emission outputs and were difficult to extinguish. According to the World Bank report (2015), the total fires and haze throughout 2015 estimated to have cost the country 230 trillion rupiahs.

Catastrophe 2015 became a momentum for the establishment of the Peatland Restoration Agency. At the COP 21 meeting in Paris in November 2015, President Jokowi promised the world, who was suffering the massive impact of Indonesia's forest fire emissions, that he would quickly restore Indonesia's peatlands. On January 6, 2016, the BRG was then formed by Presidential Regulation No. 1 of 2016 To accelerate the rehabilitation of degraded peatland caused by peat and forest fires in seven provinces. BRG is a non-structural agency under the auspices of the President and reports to him.

Figure 1 Restoration Target Map in Black

**BRG Restoration target based on Presidential Regulation of the Republic Indonesia Number 1 of 2016**



Source: BRG 2017

Without the devastating fire and haze in 2015, peat restoration might just continue to be wishful thinking and rhetoric. Head of BRG Nazir Foad said in an interview BRG was born in 2015 due to the severity of the fires. According to him, the burnt area might be smaller than the previous fires, but the haze in 2015 was possibly the worst. As he puts it, this condition has unified all parties, starting from the President, coordinating ministers, governors, civil society and entrepreneurs that dry peat due to its overexposed utilization is very dangerous to burn and the cost is prohibitive. It was then concluded that the need to rehabilitate the peatland by prevention and rewetting was indispensable.

Civil society, especially environmental activists, has repeatedly reminded the government of the need to manage the peat ecosystem more sustainably years before the catastrophe of 2015. According to Myrna Safitri, the BRG Deputy Chief who came from activists' circle, the civil society held intensive discussions with the MOEF during the 2015 fire. She describes, the discussion was continued at the presidential palace. Several NGO figures were invited to meet the President. They conveyed the importance of peatland restoration. However, the euphoria of oil palm glories masked the degradation and severity of the conditions of the peat forest. The relation between peat forest fires and restoration leave a tale about the real practice of land clearing and misuse of peat forests in Indonesia.

### 3.1 The political economy of fire

The latest report from the Indonesian National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) states that human activities caused 99% of the 2019 forest and land fires in Indonesia because they were intentional or negligent. The Head of BNPB reported that the fires in 2019 were more difficult to extinguish because the previous fires in peatlands were still reasonably wet. While, in 2019, 328 thousand hectares of peatland burnt were very dry.

A case study of peat forest fires I conducted in 2018 from West Aceh District to Aceh Singkil in four peatland districts in Aceh<sup>2</sup> clarified that more than 90 per cent of forest fires occurred in peat forests (insignificant fires also occurred in dry lowlands). It was burned by human activities rather than by a natural setting. However, the root causes of the fires are complex, and there is no single party to blame, nor a quick solution to the problem.

Who is responsible for ignitions in Indonesia is highly contested. Reports on the roots and sources of ignitions are many and varied (Dennis et al. 2005: 465) (Page et al. 2002: 61–65)) mostly produced in a chain of finger-pointing (Suyanto et al. 2004). The symptoms are like a blame game with each party pointing the finger at someone else.

The practice of arson is often mentioned, but the evidence is indeed arguably challenging to explain the solidity of the method as the main factor. A number of cases that I have met in the field have indeed explained that fire is also a mean of protest against unresolved land disputes or to reclaim their native customary rights lands that have been grabbed by plantation companies with the support of the government (Potter, 2015). When the fires spread uncontrollably, protesters could not prevent fires from their small plots to the wider concession area. However, this arson pattern is not convincing enough to explain widespread and recurring fires (Bompard et al. 1999). Even less often, smallholders, in turn, strongly suspect companies of arson and firing smallholder plots as a way to minimize the compensation they need to pay when they finally purchase land for creating a new plantation.

Slash and burn activities are the weakest subject of allegations. The term 'slash-and-burn-farmer' clearly defines reckless-no-pattern agricultural practices for many people and established prejudicial accusation that swidden farming is destructive subsistence practices. This practice is now named as a top threat to Indonesia's dried peatlands alongside plantation burning. It is swidden farmers, according to the Indonesian government and some researchers, who ignite the fires that grow into unstoppable wildfires.

Based on the observations I have seen in the Peat Forests of Aceh and the Dayak Iban tribe in Sungai Utik, West Kalimantan, the reality is the opposite. Swidden farmers indeed require clearing patches of forested land, mostly by burning, for small-scale farming. Nevertheless, they are living in settled rural areas. The traditional farmers have burnt land to clear it for centuries and have developed the skills to control the fires. They have excellent knowledge of fire behaviour in their environment.

They burn only limited areas within the known permanent boundaries of their farms to clear land on a cyclic basis to plant the food and the income-earning crops that they need to support their families. To expect this practice not to use fire is both impracticable and unfair. They have neither the financial resources nor the workforce available to clean their plots by hand, and their fires are usually well controlled and relatively non-polluting. This burning tradition is not in itself the cause of conflagrations. The dry and flammable condition of the peat forest due to massive drainage canals and the exploitation of commercial plantations that make the swidden farming tradition vulnerable and blamed.

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<sup>2</sup> This fieldwork was facilitated by the European Union and GIZ to trace the root cause of fires on peatlands in Aceh

Other findings reveal big businesses such as industrial plantation forest companies (HTI) and large-scale oil palm plantations as the culprits of the peat forest fires. Some of which was promoted by government policies themselves (Page et al. 2009). Scholars found that many plantation companies have deliberately set fire to their concession areas and extended traditional local burning techniques to clear their land inexpensively for planting purposes. Land accumulation, such as land bankers, by collecting as many land permits as possible without the need to immediately use them because the rent value will continue to rise is also one of the motives for burning.

According to the World Resources Institute data (2015), more than one third (37%) of the fires in Sumatra are occurring on pulpwood concessions. Most of the fires in the years 1997-1998 and also following years were on plantation concessions (Marlier, 2015), directed research at the time toward the activities of oil palm plantations. Between 2013 and 2019, 49% of landscape fires occurred in peatland (Huijnen et al. 2016).

Varkkey (2015) is more specific in her research that more than 80% of forest fires originate from oil palm plantations or their subcontractors compared to 20% by the practice of slash-and-burn farmers. Up to 90 per cent of the fires come from oil palms planted on peatland, and around 45 per cent of Indonesia's 24 million hectares of peatland are currently deforested or drained. Later, the Indonesian government opened its land to foreign investors as well. More than two-thirds of the Indonesian palm plantation industry is financed by Malaysian and Singaporean investors and have been involved in local fires (Varkkey, 2013).

There is a strong connection between the intensity of haze and the expanding agribusiness sector in the region, particularly oil palms. Evidence indicates that high-impact fires often result from plantations, logging concessions, and significant land clearing projects and contribute to deforestation (Carlson et al. 2012). In the oil palm industry, only 2% of smallholders have licensed land rights, while the remainder cultivates without official ownership of land or tenure. This situation leads to unclear land tenure and land ownership disputes, which complicate the unambiguous identification of fire perpetrators. Smallholders have also occupied land through fires and blamed companies for escaping prosecution, taking advantage of the confusion. The opposite case is also noted that companies have used the opaque land rights regime to initiate fires and then blame local communities and smallholders.

Recent research (Purnomo et al. 2017) has attempted to explain more complex forest fire patterns and motivations. In many cases, fires can be traced through the burning process, economic motives, and a complex network of actors. They were ranging from low-end burners for land clearing, elite farmers responsible for land preparation, government officials, investors and oil palm entrepreneurs in developing oil palm in areas that have been burned. It is including rent-seeking interests behind fire-fighting activities. Forest fire actors relate to each other in a variety of contexts, such as information exchange, economic transactions, legal leniency, kinship or political relations. Each form of relationship may stand alone or reinforce one another.

Fire is the most cost-effective way to clear the ground and clearing land by fire provides economic benefits to some people. CIFOR (2019) has found out that compared with cutting down trees, the benefits derived from burning land is about \$856 per hectare with half of the profits going to the local elites. Economic incentives have worked against more environmentally friendly or some-free methods of producing oil palm. Clearance by fire is the cheapest method (\$5 per hectare) compared to clearing the land mechanically which averages (\$200 per hectare), or by a bulldozer which averages USD380 per hectare (Dauvergne, 1998) (Purnomo et al. 2017), so this concluded as a primarily economic decision. This condition makes the pattern of forest fires complex and involves multiple actors. Parts of the Government are sometimes accused of 'enabling' the fires, through elements such as patronage

politics and political elites at the local level who have a vested interest and financial return associated with land clearing and fire activities. There have also been claims that large companies employ smallholders to slash-and-burn.

Weak monitoring is yet another factor causing fires to persist. The overall study pointed to low tracking and law enforcement as the main obstacle to mitigating fires. Indonesia's unclear land rights regime has been highlighted as an additional factor triggering landscape fires. Multiple government actors are involved in land licensing and permit allocation. Concession maps are not made public pleading national security concerns, and they are not even shared vertically and horizontally within the government. Yet this is only one of the many issues within the broader structural challenges facing Indonesia. Lack of clarity on the land boundary and spatial planning also trigger forest and peatland fires.

This report suggests that companies, smallholders and government are forming social relations of the capitalist mode of production and equally responsible for the expansion and land clearance. Most likely, they only considered short-term gains when clearing their lands by burning them. In the process, they externalized the costs in the form of haze to over 50 million people in Southeast Asia.

### **3.2 The BRG: restoring the overexposed peatland**

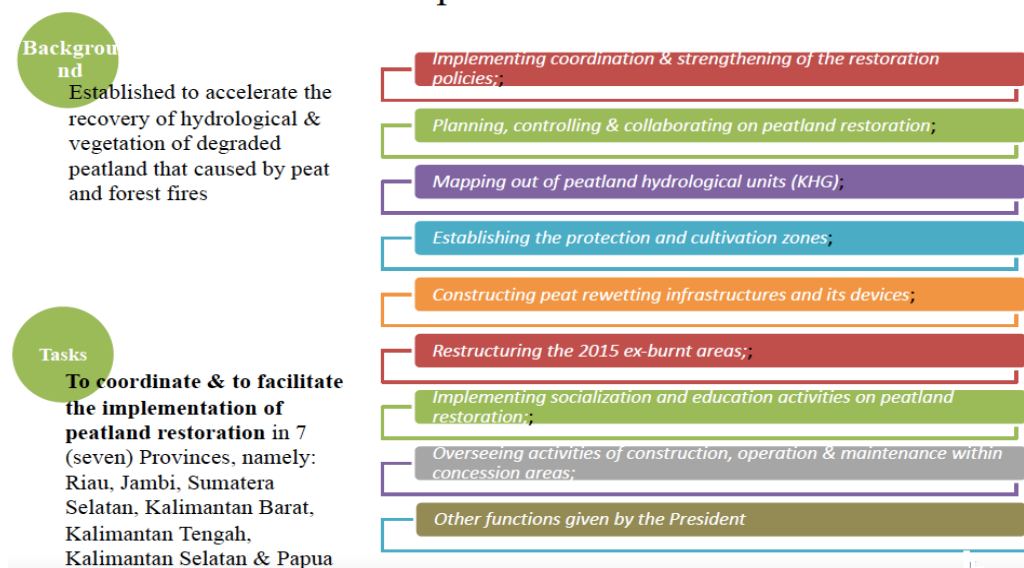
*"If peat is already opened and utilized, it seems impossible to restore to its original state. Peatlands have been turned into plantations, transmigration areas, and industrial crops,"* said Hartono, Secretary of the Peatland Restoration Agency (Jakarta, September 2, 2020). His duty is at the heart of BRG's bureaucratic administration. Before joining BRG, he was the director of forest conservation at the MOEF.

The Chief and Deputies of BRG said in interviews that they are actively working to improve the problems of past developments or what they often describe as overexposed peatlands. When the central and local governments easily allow the use of peatlands areas that should not be cleared for planting. This ease is due to inaccurate maps of the peat and old paradigm that does not appreciate the ecology of the peat.

The establishment of BRG in restoring degraded peatlands based on the hydrological characteristic was a victory for the environmental movement. However, based on interviews with BRG officials, they explained that those at BRG were facing the condition that the peatlands were overused and overexposed. A situation where peatland has been cleared and utilized for more than twenty years through various licensing schemes. Meanwhile, the assessment of the peat ecosystem as a specific ecosystem that functions as ecosystem services involves new governance of land use and conversion permits. The new governance had just been formulated and arrived halfway too late. The conservationists urged BRG to restore peat to its original ecosystem. However, in the same place, BRG witnessed that companies and the villagers have cultivated peatlands for so long.

Under the mandate of Presidential Regulation No. 1 of 2016, BRG has obligations to coordinate and facilitate the restoration of peat in seven provinces. Politics for the BRG is government policy, according to Hartono, the Secretary of the BRG Agency. He describes that the BRG does not have the power to make binding regulations. The ministry, especially MOEF, which can be said to be the 'biological mother' of BRG, is the party which has the power to make binding rules. BRG may only make rules but only apply them to themselves.

Figure 2 The Tasks and Functions of the BRG  
BRG's Principal Tasks and Functions



Source: BRG 2017

The authority of the BRG to carry out the restoration is just coordinating and facilitates the interests of the MOEF, local government and indigenous peoples. The power to regulate peat is in the government, in particular the MOEF, in the assessment of criteria for the restoration of peat and permits for forestry concessions. The coordination of BRG also refers to the Ministry of Agriculture, which deals with the concession permit for plantation lands also with the Ministry of Agricultural and Space Planning. And most critically, coordination with regional and district governments in the implementation of restoration work. The conditions of insufficient authority and complex cross-institutional coordination in the performance of the restoration create room for negotiation and compromise for the different interests who want to gain their interest in the restoration of politics.

The BRG has officially identified the restoration priority of 12.9 million hectares of peatland in 7 provinces. Initially, the mandate of BRG was two million hectares. Still, later as a result of further inquiries into the degraded peatlands, the area of 2.7 million hectares is allocated by the Agency and urged for restoration purposes: 684,637 hectares in protected areas, 1.7 million hectares in concession areas and 396,943 hectares in other cultivation areas, to be carried out by 2020. According to the head of BRG, the seriously degraded and open peatlands covered an area of seven million hectares, but the President requested to deal with the first two million. After BRG conducted the mapping out, it turned out that companies owned a lot of damaged peatlands. The Minister of Environment and Forestry then released restoration regulations that companies should enforce in their concession area. The BRG is then responsible for guiding restoration to companies.

Table 1 Restoration Targets and Criteria in 7 Provinces

## BRG Restoration Target based on Priority Restoration Criteria

PROVINCE	Ex-burnt 2015			Peat Dome with Canals		Shallow Peat with Canals	Total
	Production Areas - Licensed	Production Areas - Non Licensed	Protection Areas (KK & HL)	Production Areas - Licensed	Protection Areas (KK & HL)	Protection Areas (KK & HL)	
RIAU	38,884	63,535	2,008	668,502	9,913	31,890	814,732
JAMBI	19,245	26,008	19,642	80,530	2,738	3,500	151,663
SUMSEL	172,290	76,797	41,277	305,573	10,427	9,543	615,907
KALBAR	1,769	27,239	2,850	62,308	4,801	20,667	119,634
KALTENG	16,057	162,951	155,899	13,754	173,577	190,837	713,076
KALSEL	1,586	11,153		26,022			38,761
PAPUA	4,144	29,262	4,659	278		409	38,753
<b>Total</b>	<b>253,975</b>	<b>396,945</b>	<b>226,335</b>	<b>1,156,968</b>	<b>201,457</b>	<b>256,846</b>	<b>2,492,527</b>

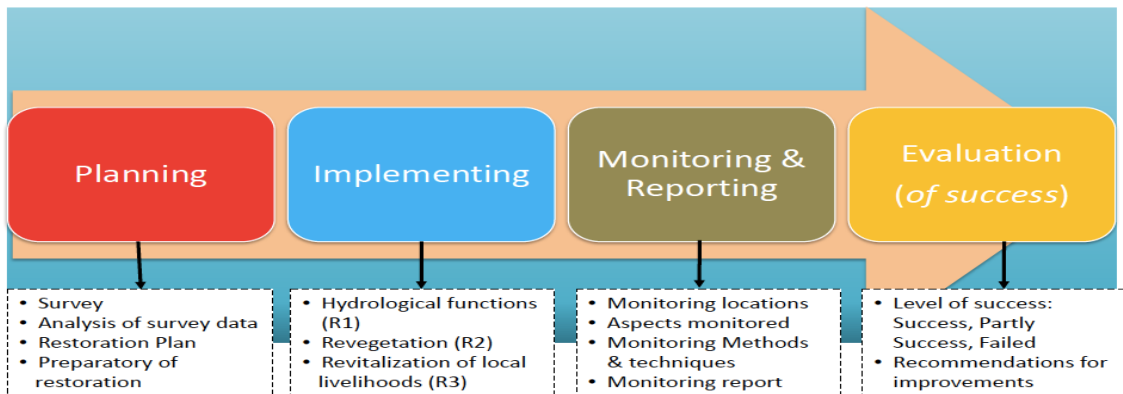
KK=Kawasan Konservasi or Conservation Areas  
HL=Hutan Lindung or Protections Forests

Source: BRG 2017

According to the BRG deputies, the achievement of restoration outside the concession area reached 88 per cent in 2019. The rest of the work is ongoing until 2020. Restoration within the concession areas is progressing slowly. Achievement is just close to 5%, and this is because the concessionaires, according to the regulation, should conduct out the restoration on their own. The primary responsibility for the supervision rests with the MOEF, while the role of BRG is only to supervise and provide guidance on the implementation of restoration by concession owners.

Figure 3 Workflows of BRG

### Peatland Restoration Steps



Source: BRG 2018

There are 500 of 1400 target villages have been helped and facilitated by the creation of village development plans in which regulations for the protection of the peat ecosystem are in place. The restoration is conducted based on the Peat Hydrological Unit (PHU), and it has been mapped that there are 106 PHU of the restoration target of more than 2 million hectares. 23 PHU has been extensively mapped with spatial maps, including its topography, contours and canals. The map is displayed at a ratio of 1:50,000.

Meanwhile, the remaining 83 PHUs are still under development. BRG Secretary Hartono and BRG Deputy I Budi Wardhana said the restoration of 2 million hectares was very ambitious and would not be achieved in just five years. Hartono elaborates, "at that time, the



*President was thinking about restoring 2 million hectares first. If successful, the restoration will proceed. So, in 2021, we will try to sit down together for unification and go into more detail." (August 28, 2020).*

BRG has adopted the 3R as an approach to expediting the restoration goals. 3R stands for Rewetting of drained peatland (R1), Revegetation of bare and fragmented peatland (R2) and Revitalization of local livelihoods (R3) (Dohong et al. 2017b). It should be known, however, that MOEF differentiated the aim of hydrological restoration between cultivation and conservation of peat ecosystem functions with the Minister of Environment and Forestry Regulation Number P.14 of 2017. The hydrological restoration objective in peat cultivation areas is to control water (water management objective), while the main aim of hydrological restoration is to conserve water (water conservation) in the peat conservation function. Subsequently, variations in the role of the peatland ecosystem affect the treatment of restoration and companies benefit from the differences and the obscure restoration rules set down by the MOEF.

### **3.3 Neoliberal ecosystem services: between restoration and deforestation**

Analyzing the material output of peatland restoration is only one 'normative' aspect of looking at the performance of BRG. Another part that was the underlying policy processes for the restoration of peatland is determined by how the Agency deals with competing desires and consent in the restoration processes and to fully recognize that BRG is a result of complex and dialectical social relations. How the formation of multiple class interests within the structure of the state, which is not always coherent and sometimes contradictory, are involved in setting what the BRG should do to restore the degraded peatlands of Indonesia.

Nur Hidayati, WALHI National Executive Director in an interview, described this condition as putting BRG on the fence between the willingness to restore and an imperative to continue to produce (pulp and paper and oil palm). This section focuses on analyzing three restoration policies that can indicate negotiations and contradictions in the underlying political processes for the restoration and then affect the performance and achievements of BRG.

After the institutionalization of the BRG and peat restoration, the strategy of ecosystem services can be analyzed by examining the government's restoration regulatory regime, in this case, the MOEF's strategies in governing peatland restoration. The existence of BRG centred on the government's inability to cope with forest fires due to the ease with which the government allows unsustainable use of peatlands. However, BRG's role and power in the restoration work remain under the authority of the MOEF.

The Government, through the MOEF, regulates the conservation and management of the peat ecosystem, including restoration based on the Peat Hydrological Unit (PHU) approach, taking into account the hydrological aspects of the fire prevention strategy. Initially, peatlands were governed according to their depth, with peatlands more than three meters deep forbidden for agricultural use. Using PHU, peatland governance was rescaled after the 2015 fires to reflect the hydrological characteristics of the peatland (Astuti 2020). This approach is considered following the needs of peat ecosystem restoration. On the other hand, the PHU approach is seen as a compromise to bridge conservation efforts and the production of peatlands that have been opened to concession holders and the community.

According to Budi Wardhana as the BRG Deputy for Planning, the ideal approach for the protection and management of the peat ecosystem should be based on landscape or the function of the peat ecosystem. However, this approach cannot be implemented because it often clashes with spatial planning and land use management policies that have been negotiated for production purposes. I quoted his statement *"the governing process still has strong silo sentiments. Spatial planning and*

*land use management should be based on PHU; based on ecosystem function in PHU. It is permissible for production forests to be used as production areas. Still, the products that are harvested should be ecosystem services, such as water regulatory services, carbon services as an absorber of carbon emissions and carbon storage." (Jakarta, August 28, 2020).*

In the policy of deciding the function of the peat ecosystem, another compromising character of restoration can be seen. The functions of the peat ecosystem are defined in two ways by MOEF: conservation and cultivation functions. This ambiguous function, according to conservationists, is to provide convenience to companies that own concessions on peatlands. Despite having been designed based on environmental conservation rationalities, it was used to justify continuous peatland resource extraction.

Governance Regulation No 57/2016 determines peat with a cultivation function as an area less than three meters deep outside peat domes, whereby hydrological governance preserves peat humidity by maintaining the level of the groundwater table at 0.4 m below the surface (MOEF, 2016). The combination of protected peatland water protection and cultivated area water management is believed to keep any peatland hydrological unit fire-free. However, it can be argued that restoration services which only prevent fire without paying attention to other ecological aspects are considered very pragmatic and pro-market.

MOEF also made another pragmatic change by changing the mandatory protected peatland only to cover the tops of the peat dome. In contrast, the previous MOEF policy covered all peatlands in the conservation zone. This change has reduced most of the peatland that should have been protected from economic use. Observations from environmental organizations suggest that the MOEF policy change has had a tremendous impact on concession holders.

For concessionaires, new regulations on peat dome tops have saved their plantations. Previous rules made them have to return 80% of their plantation area or not to reuse them because they are located on peat for a conservation function. They are also obliged to restore the used peat by rewetting and replanting the peat with endemic plants. Meanwhile, the new policy only makes them pay attention to the upper portion of the peat dome and still gives them permission to manage plantations without having to stop until the concession permit (35 years) ends even though the concession is in a peat area with a conservation function. According to WALHI, this MOEF policy provides re-legalization of the continuation of permits operating in protected peatlands.

Another compromise character in restoration politics lies in the implementation of restoration in concession areas for both industrial timber estates and oil palm plantations. Restoration in the concession area is left to the concessionaires, and its fulfilment is the responsibility of MOEF. BRG only serves to provide direction and guidance of technical guidance. Unquestionably, concession areas are the key causes of peat destruction and fires. The degraded peat area covers 1,7 million hectares and is the largest in the BRG total restoration target of 2,7 hectares from 2016-2020. However, the restoration in concessions has been sluggish, difficult to track and lacks accountability.

The Anti-Forest Mafia Alliance published a report (2019) questioning the transparency of government (MOEF) and concessionaires in the conservation of peat. They challenged the fact that the list of companies that submitted their restoration work plans had not yet been made public. The coalition is worried that the lack of transparency would open up a room for compromise between the company and MOEF such that it is vulnerable to corruption and results in the public being unable to track the output of the restoration of the peat ecosystem in the concession area.

Bambang Hero, a member of the BRG Expert Group, criticized MOEF's lack of transparency in disclosing data on restoration implementation in concession areas. He said the

data should not be covered up. According to him, the public needs to know the results. BRG itself confirms that the restoration that is most difficult to deal with is the restoration of 1.7 million hectares in concessions listed as protected peat habitats. The greatest challenge is the rules of PP 71 of 2014 in accordance with PP 57 of 2016 that permit holders can only return their permits at the end of the permit period. And this means that a whole restoration strategy can be taken in the coming decades. This condition indicates that BRG is only engaged in partial restoration, limited to the restoration of peat in non-licensed areas or community areas.

MOEF, according to BRG, has only provided indicators that must be met by concessionaires. Each year it is evaluated. MOEF supervision is output-oriented self-reporting. This kind of control is what BRG thinks problematic. BRG requested that the concession owner be revised the rules for monitoring restoration. Until now, only 200 hectares of concession land can be supervised by BRG. The number is tiny compared to the 1.7 million hectares of concession degraded peatlands that need to be restored. BRG feels that the government has not been given the mandate and authority to enforce compliance with the production management of permit holders in areas on peat. The authorities, in this case, are the licensing institution, namely MOEF and the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Agrarian and Spatial Planning.

The Government of Indonesia has undertaken efforts to stop the exploitation of peatlands by issuing two Presidential Instruction. Presidential Instruction No. 5 of 2019 regulates the termination of granting new permits and improving the management of primary natural forests and peatlands. The second Presidential Instruction Number 8 of 2018 concerning postponement and evaluation of oil palm plantation allows and increases the productivity of oil palm plantations.

The termination of new permits and an explicit moratorium on paper has a positive impact on the sustainability of the peat ecosystem. But there are still weaknesses because old licenses that were issued before the Presidential Instruction was made but have not been used by the permit owner are allowed to operate. Here's another loophole in the company's favour. Transparency towards the list of concession permit holders has been difficult to access. Many parties think that MOEF does not want to disclose data and even seems to cover it up.

This condition certainly makes the achievement of preventing further peatland forest destruction through the moratorium regulation actually ineffective despite the availability of the two presidential instructions. According to Nur Hidayati from WALHI, the legal basis in the form of a Presidential Instruction which is more internal to government institutions makes it difficult to get accurate information from the government. This is because there is no obligation to report to the public. Reporting is only tiered at the government level. WALHI, for example, has tried to ask the MOEF and the economy ministry to open data, but it is always difficult to get updates on the extent of the permit granting process. Transparency in this process is one way to tidy up the management of oil palm plantations and improve peat areas, and so far, this has been the most difficult to do.

It can be examined that the policy of the ad hoc and inconsistent existence of the government's restoration explains the force of the political struggle and by itself, defines how significant the outcomes of the restoration are. BRG not only operates in a situation controlled by extractive views but also by minimal authority and insufficient regulatory support. This imbalance ultimately serves the interests of the concession holders and in turn, adds to the danger and risk to the ecology and the peat villagers.

Governance and rescaling peatland by the government has legitimized the internalization of the socio-ecological externalities of the exploitation of peatlands (Cohen and Bakker, 2014: 132). The government opted for a water-based solution and has re-arranged the peat

dome for the restoration of the peat, in essence making it easier for the production and exploitation of the peatlands to proceed. This policy has a strong political impact that it can empower particular actors while marginalizing others and risks producing conflicting effects that will displace rather than address peatland fire and cross-border haze.

The environmental model of the ecosystem services on the restoration of peat explains that ecosystem services, as a reference framework for environmental management, are never neutral, but highly political concept. The use of the concept depends on how it is used by whom and for what it is used. Ecosystem resources, as ideas and tools have been exploited in a variety of ways by different interests to justify various kinds of measures that could often be opposed.

Critical scholars see ecosystem services as a neoliberal approach to the environment that commodifies nature and create new sites for capital accumulation mainly in the hands of a global elite (Heynen and Robbins, 2005) (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004). Critical ecologists argue that ecosystem services have served the neoliberal approach agenda. Ecosystem services is a mechanism for implementing neoliberal conservation, market-based environmental policy, or as a 'green-grabbing' project to preserve the accumulation and commodification of nature and improve unequal power relations or contribute to social inequality (McCarthy and Prudham, 2004) (MacDonald and Corson, 2012).

However, a number of other scholars have suggested that this is not the default function of ecosystem services. The use of this term does not in itself suggest adherence to nature's neoliberalization philosophy (Dempsey and Robertson, 2012). According to this group, green neoliberalism as a conceptual framework is also very versatile, not monolithic (Bailey and Caprotti, 2014).

The case of the regulation of peat restoration in Indonesia, the neoliberal nature of the policy on ecosystem services is reflected in the types of policies which promote and legitimize the peatland extraction process. This neoliberal character, however, is not the only reality. Still, it is accompanied by other government attempts through BRG to try to find the correct way to restore the ecosystem services to its full ideal. These two logics continue to work, to influence each other and to create meanings of restoration. They are not always coherent and often contradictory. Over time, the function of restoration will most likely experience a change of purpose in the hands of free-market regimes which notoriously proved to be very adaptive in taking advantage of the green development.

## Chapter 4

### Restoration at site level

This chapter will address the restoration of peat in West Kalimantan in a peat village called Pasak Piang. It aims to take a closer look at how restoration clashes with the desires of accumulation that leads to deforestation, dispossession and ecological disasters.

#### 4.1 Highlighting restoration at Pasak Piang village

After the fires of 2015-2017, BRG has a peatland restoration program covering an area of almost 150 thousand hectares in West Kalimantan. One of them is in the village of Pasak Piang. I did not visit the village due to the pandemic barrier. Nevertheless, my research assistant has been my eyes and ears to see the impact of peatlands restoration in the village. The village of Pasak Piang is situated in Kubu Raya the district that owns the largest peatland in West Kalimantan. We have chosen this village because it represents diverse interests and dialectical social relations.

Table 2 Peatland Area Per Regency/City of West Kalimantan Province

Number	Regency/city	Large	Hectare
1	Bengkayang	42.366	Hectare
2	Kapuas Hulu	264.529	Hectare
3	Kayong Utara	216.395	Hectare
4	Ketapang	252.734	Hectare
5	Pontianak City	2.445	Hectare
6	Singkawang City	1.644	Hectare
7	Kubu Raya	523.377	Hectare
8	Landak	60.076	Hectare
9	Melawi	5.540	Hectare
10	Mempawah	72.731	Hectare
11	Sambas	78.149	Hectare
12	Sanggau	81.118	Hectare
13	Sekadau	12.121	Hectare
14	Sintang	66.388	Hectare
<b>Total number</b>		1.679.613	Hectare

Source: extracted from the Environmental Office of West Kalimantan province 2019

The peat village of Pasak Piang has an area of 13,535 hectares. The village owns various deep peat domes that are classified as protected. However, more than half of the village area, which is around 8,500 hectares is controlled by the owners of two oil palm concession companies. In that village, BRG also initiated a 10-month peatland restoration programs in 2018. The villagers are Dayak natives mixed with immigrants from Madura, East Java. Some of the villagers work as workers in oil palm companies, but most of them are farmers on peatlands. We see the village as having transitional situation. A peat village with abundant natural resources is now slowly experiencing an ecological crisis as a result of land conversion for the interest of two oil palm plantations in the village.

Figure 4 The Entrance Gate to the Village of Pasak Piang



Source: Yasin 2020

Yasin, 42-year-old, head of hamlet in Pasak Piang and chosen coordinator of the village restoration program by BRG testified: *"before 2018, we did not realize that the peat was anything special. We obtained assistance from the BRG in 2018. We have come to realize that the peat needs to be preserved. As a result, since 2018, I have started inspiring residents to plant crops in a non-burn pattern."* (September 10, 2020).

It was also through Yasin's eyes and some other residents we know the 3,685 residents of Pasak Piang Village have undergone ecological changes since the operation of two oil palm plantation companies in 2010. They saw their peat forests vanished along with Orangutan and other biodiversity. They realize that wood, honey and rattan no longer exist in their peatland. In the past, forest products such as wood and rattan could sustain the villagers' economy. Now that the forest has been used for oil palm plantations, villagers whose character are forest-dependent have lost their forest livelihoods.

The floods became more frequent shortly after the peat forest was cleared into oil palm plantations and the companies continued producing drainage canals. Today, any time there is heavy rain in the village, there will be floods. Previously, the floods happened only once in 4-5 years. The residents said that the company had destroyed trees so that they could no longer absorb water.

*"Floods are not just once a year, but it can be every month,"* said Yasin. Their crops are under threat. They have repeatedly experienced crop failures due to intensive flooding. Around 40% of their rice and maize output has failed, particularly in the last two years. It is safe to say that the two companies caused quite a disaster, according to the villagers.

Figure 5 Corn fields in Pasak Piang



Source: Yasin 2020

However, these grievances are not rock-solid. Some villagers who work for the company do not accept that the company is the culprit of the disaster. They are mostly residents of the two hamlets where the two companies operate. These divergent voices divided the opinions of the villagers together with those old village elites who enjoyed the benefits of being employed by companies and stationed at the provincial capital. They only return to the village once in a while to reduce conflicts, particularly in the event of floods. The existence of companies not only destroys peatlands but aggravates potential disputes between residents.

In 2010, the oil palm company entered the village of Pasak Piang. At that time, the district government invited them to come, and the village head welcomed them. In the village hall, the prospective investors explained the idea of a plasma nucleus plantation with a sharing results of 70:30, and the largest proportion goes to the companies. At first, the residents rejected. The discussions then continued with a meeting of some residents and investors in a hotel in Pontianak. The sharing percentage did not change, but investors promised that the majority of workers would be people from the village of Pasak Piang.

Soon after, the peatland ecosystem covering 8,700 hectares in Pasak Piang eventually transferred to the hands of the concessionary owners. Later, the residents noticed that their access to jobs was not as beautiful as the initial promise. Many employees were coming from outside the village. The number of staff from the village employed were just 240. That was a small sum, according to Yasin and the people. The residents who work on the plantations are mainly labourers. On average, their monthly income is 1.6 million rupiahs (USD 110). As oil palm prices plummet, the number of days and hours employed was often reduced.

BRG reached the village of Pasak Piang to carry out a 10-month restoration in 2018. Under its roles and functions, the BRG can only do conservation work on community peatlands. Meanwhile, the concession area is the responsibility of the concession owner and is supervised by the MOEF. BRG engaged four hamlets in the village of Pasak Piang in the restoration programme. Still, the focus of the operation was on damaged peat in the hamlets of Sungai Piang and Banyu Ates. The restoration educates 38 villagers, and they were actively qualified to become community facilitators.

BRG has taught fire and flood emergency response training. According to Yasin, the restoration has enabled residents to develop sustainable agricultural models in peatlands. BRG supplied agricultural equipment, developed demonstration plots, refined fertilizers and provided fire sprinklers. Previously, the villagers were able to burn the land in such a way that the land remained fertile. The method of slash-and-burn was generational. However, as the peatlands have become increasingly dry due to the exploitation of commercial plantations, traditional slash-and-burn methods have now become dangerous. BRG then adopted non-burn farming patterns. In the past, residents were free to cut and burn as broadly as possible, and now as a result of the BRG program, residents have established village regulations enforcing land clearing practices without burning.

Table 3 Area of Forest and Land Fires in West Kalimantan Province

<i>No</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Area (hectare)</i>
1	2015	93.515,80
2	2016	9.174,19
3	2017	7.467,33
4	2018	68.422,03
5	2019	151.070,00

Source: extracted from the Environmental Office of West Kalimantan province 2020

In reality, Yasin and a number of residents of Pasak Piang Village hoped that the BRG restoration program would continue so that the community would not have a partial understanding of the restoration as is currently happening in the village. He said that many villages in West Kalimantan were stuck not knowing how to continue the restoration program after BRG was completed in 2018. Yasin criticized the fact that restoration would not be successful in changing the way people live in peatland if the programs had been just a year. He expects the restoration to be sustainable and to have regular programmes.

## 4.2 Making sense the restoration and accumulation

Through field observations in Pasak Piang, we sense that there is a disconnected condition between the restoration of the BRG on community peatlands and the accumulation practice by oil palm plantations that keep operating in the same peat region. Villagers see two opposing peatland development model working in their village. However, in reality, the two of them did not solve their problem.

The presence of BRG does not answer the significant problem of the peatland in Pasak Piang. Too much attention has been paid to technical concerns such as fire prevention, non-burning farming models, assistance to agricultural machinery and firefighting types of equipment. However, a good program is also in place, namely the creation of a Peat Care Village institution that focuses on community empowerment. In general, however, we see that the root problems of Pasak Piang's peat village are structural and complex.

People live in peatlands without a sufficient ecosystem understanding. The government has a minor role to play in developing sustainable water management agriculture on peatlands. After the disaster came and the BRG restoration program arrived in the village, they realized that peat soil is an ecosystem that is different from mineral soil. Nevertheless, this problem is not the most problematic issue at play in Pasak Piang. The biggest issue arose when more than 60 per cent of the Peat Village area in Pasak Piang was allocated to oil palm companies.



The land licensing process involves multi-stakeholder interests. They are starting with the interests of the neoliberal market commodity regime, the obsession of national and local governments with growth, and the rent-seeking practices at the elite village level. All these interests influence each other and are intertwined with different interests in restoring the peatlands. This process resonates Gramsci and Poulantzas' view that social basis and social formations are never homogeneous but are the results of complex social relations.

Before the oil palm companies came to the village, people were farmed in different patterns. They planted rice, corn and other forms of horticulture. Rubber and pepper farming were widespread in the early 2000s. Villagers have properties ranging from one to a maximum of three hectares. A shift takes place while the oil palm company works. Some of the farmers who once farmed their land at the end sold their land to the company. They sell because of crop failure conditions that they are witnessing more and more frequently as a result of flooding. Alternatively, because they are unable to follow the pattern of the plasma-nucleus farming due to lack of capitals. Some of the villagers who sold their land work for oil palm companies, while 137 families lost their jobs. According to Yasin, there were 670 low-income families in the village of Pasak Piang because they did not own land or unemployed. He elaborates the socio-economic conditions of Pasak Piang Village are in transition. Peatlands still provide farmers with benefits, but the catastrophic flood conditions and the degradation of their peat ecology due to deforestation have resulted in recurrent crises and crop failures. Slowly, this situation leads to land sales and income losses.

The practice of accumulation in the village of Pasak Piang does not just caused an ecological catastrophe that threatens people's agriculture. The expansion of oil palm plantations, which quickly occupied for 60% of the total peatlands, explains the concept conceived by David Harvey (2005) as a process of accumulation by dispossession in his theory of neoliberalism. The method of dispossession provides a number of examples, including land dispossession, financial devaluation, intellectual property rights, and the privatization of public resources. According to Harvey, land dispossession, in particular, is a strategy to overcome the growing of profit crisis in capitalism.

Michael Levien (2018) further argues that land dispossession is rooted in the dispossession regime. He expands Harvey's theory that dispossession is more than just an economic mechanism for the accumulation of under-commodified properties. According to Levien dispossession was appeared from the coercive redistribution of social relations. This mechanism is a political process in which the state and other coercive powers use what Levien terms "extra-economic force to help capitalists resolve the barriers to accumulation (White, B et al. 2012: 322). Levien elaborates the force is a means of class struggle, but the regime of dispossession itself differs through various phases and unequal geographies of capitalist growth.

In his book *Land Dispossession* (2018: 212) he argues that the process of land grabbing and the divestment in his study in India was no longer a transitional regime of development towards capitalism. It was in essence, a response to the necessary cost of development led by state interests, and dispossession was the product of the neoliberal regime of dispossession. While the previous system of dispossession redistributed land for the public sector and infrastructure, the neoliberal system of dispossession steered dispossession and redistributed it directly to the private sector. If the previous regime considered a commitment to productivity, labour intensity and a balance of development, the neoliberal regime did not take into account any considerations except growth at all costs. Levien claims that the regime has its origins in land brokers states.

Farmers in Pasak Piang are in danger of experiencing twin dispossession, which is losing their land and source of income. Tania Li (2018) clearly described what might have happened in Indonesian agrarian policy as the opposite situation of agrarian reform. People's land has

been consolidated by the government and handed over to corporations (capital owners) for commodity purposes. The process of social differentiation is inevitable in Pasak Piang due to unequal access to land, technology and resources. Indonesian palm oil is not a commodity for poor farmers because it is highly dependent on extra maintenance, such as bulldozers and intensive monocropping. Small farmers are forced to serve the interests of commodification by planting monoculture crops and have no other option, particularly if their crops continue to fail due to floods and losses have resulted in the sale of their land.

## Chapter 5

### Analyzing the politics of peatlands restoration

In this chapter, I analyzed the Indonesian state-capital relations as an integral state which includes political and civil society entities according to Gramsci. Or as a material and institutional condensation of power relations between and within classes according to Poulantzas. The contestation in Indonesian peatlands illustrates the strong position of capitalist groups that exist in and through the state.

#### 5.1 Locating Indonesian peatland in capitalist relations

In the *Rise of Capital* (2009), Richard Robison said that his study of Indonesia's capitalist state was intended to show that the presence of the national capitalist class was not a myth. The indigenous capitalist class did not emerge from petty-bourgeois origins, but from inside the state that was born in the late 1970s. Their appearance starts with institutional tools. It included joint ventures with international and Chinese entrepreneurs and the numerous business groups that flourished after 1965 that were military and politico-bureaucratic in character. For Robison, the state capital in the New Order Indonesia was not an instrument for the confrontation or expropriation of bourgeois capitalism, but the central component of a state-led, corporatist model of control (Robison, 2009).

The emergence of Indonesia's powerful indigenous bourgeoisie has an influence not only at a certain level but at the level of the structure and functioning of the state itself. As capitalists, the dual position of politico-bureaucrats takes the current contradictions in the relationships between state and capital to a new social state formation. In forcing the beginning of a transformation of state power, the powerful Indonesian capitalist class has been successful (Robison, 2009). This situation describes how the formation of an Indonesian capitalist state is formed on a social basis that is not monolithic but rather dialectical in the production of a complex state formation and its accumulation strategies.

During the three decades of Suharto's New Order government, we can recognize that state power focused on the centralization of administration and the concentration of power in the top-down hierarchy with a patrimonial character (Hadiz and Robison, 2005: 220–225). Suharto's efforts to make Indonesia back on solid footing relied on opening the country to foreign investment in exploiting and extracting the country's natural resource wealth (Robison and Hadiz, 2004).

The first phase of Suharto's exploitation of the abundant natural resources of the archipelago was to establish and implement state control over forests and mineral resources, which was done by legislation Act No.5 of 1967, commonly referred to as the Basic Forestry Law that declared that the state owned all forested areas in the archipelago (Lindayati, 2002: 35). The direct impact of the application of the Basic Forestry Law makes all lands and forests that are managed as common property resources, turning into state properties. A developmental discourse was becoming the predominant framework used by the Suharto government to explain its policies (Peluso, 2007, pp. 23).

The reform era since 1998 arguably followed a neoliberal trajectory and has modified the social formation of the state since the fall of the New Order and Suharto (Hadiz and Robison 2005). The reformist movement produced new bargaining power to the relation of state and of civil society through imposing democratic agendas over the new creation of political parties, parliament and judiciary institutions or through the movement of civil

groups, enter into state formation. It cannot, however, be denied that the elements of reform also included old elites and retired military-generals from the New Order. They changed their positions to celebrate the Reform era (Nevins and Peluso, 2008: 377).

The transition of the system from the New Order to the Reform Order created a new social basis for the formation of the state. By opening up foreign investment in the oil, mining, agriculture and forestry sectors, the original capitalist group formed by Suharto in this process shared interests with Indonesian capitalist groups of Chinese descent, as well as multinational cooperation (Robison, 2009).

The state, as a result of social relations, also created political consolidation between political forces and civil society after the Reformation era emerged. They succeeded in pushing human rights as well as adat rights, and environmental concerns into the state's institutionalization while at the same time, encouraging commodification of nature and asserting that private enterprise as the most effective resource allocator (Rodan et al. 2006).

As Gramsci and Poulantzas observed, the dialectic relationship between state structure and political power shows that state formations in Indonesia are complex and mutually influential. Various actors make choices based on a number of social, material and political logics. While there are conflicting desires among the different interests and multiple players take decisions on the basis of their economic self-interest, they are stuck inside the hegemonic system. At the same time, the economic choices open to them are determined by the hegemony of neoliberal imperatives. The ruling class's position in shaping its capitalist agenda continues and is adapting well from regime to regime.

During the global commodity boom of 2000-2014, Indonesia's state power paved the way for neoliberalism. The path remains in the privatization, deregulation and expansion of the extractive economy. Investments in coal mines and oil palm plantations, for example, were carried out in a high expansionist spirit, including the clearance of large-scale peatlands in 2000-2015. State intervention was carried out in terms of ease of licensing, land clearing, and flexibility of labour (Peluso, 2007).

State intervention and policies to promote investment in the fulfilment of global resources are assisted by the coercion of military and police officers, especially in matters of land protection, and by criminalizing protesters or bribing community or customary leaders. In addition, the power of the state often establishes a hegemonic economic narrative in the form of a normative development campaign about what kind of growth is 'good' and 'necessary' for the interests of the state (Hadiz and Robison 2005).

The rhetoric of nationalism becomes a cover for the smooth running of neoliberalism. Scholars identify this state-capitalist relationship in Indonesia with the term 'resource nationalism' (Warburton, 2017) (Kaup and Gellert, 2017: 27). The term is used to show the state and people's efforts to asserting control over natural resources in their territory, resulting in conflicts with the interests of multinational companies.

My observations in looking at state-capital relations in the extraction activities on peatlands assess that 'resource nationalism' is more about rhetoric (part of hegemony) produced by state power to protect neoliberal interests and domestic capitalist interest groups. In contrast, at the citizen level, the meaning of nationalism is a matter of contradictions in defending their territory: land, forest, water, from the threat of investors that are brought in and facilitated by the state. As Gramsci and Poulantzas have argued, nothing is single in the struggle within the state for the production and expansion of capital. All of which play their respective narratives and positions based on social basis and social relations that are produced in a specific conjuncture and context.

The rhetoric of nationalism aimed at seeking consent was often expressed by President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) when he justified the importance of oil palm expansion in Indonesia

to support Indonesia's biofuel needs up to 50 per cent by 2022 using crude palm oil. He responded with full of nationalist rhetoric to the European Union's reprimand about Indonesia's oil palm plantation practices that are unsustainable and violate human rights.

The President said the feud with the European Union about palm oil is all about the business matter because Indonesian crude palm oil is cheaper than the price of their sunflower oil. Meanwhile, the face of state coercion in defending oil palm expansion was marked by the public by the statement of a senior minister who is also known as President Jokowi's right-hand man named Luhut Binsar Panjaitan. He is a retired general and a coal mining and oil palm entrepreneur who has loudly tried to stifle criticism and public protests about oil palm plantation practices by saying *"anyone who disturbs the palm oil industry will be bulldozed!"* (April 2019).

Strong financial support and lobbying of entrepreneurs to the Jokowi regime are explored in a documentary film titled "Asimetris"<sup>3</sup> on oil palm activities in Indonesia. Indonesia has the 25 largest oil palm companies that controlled 6 million hectares of land, including the President's ministers who own large oil palm companies. Indonesia's palm oil industry as a global investment involving foreign investors, including European banks, also explains another contradiction. This also illustrates how global economic ideologies interact within the structure of national political hierarchies and socio-economic factors.

Peatland studies in Indonesia have generally followed a top-down approach, often focusing on state-level practices, in particular on how the state deals with peatland and its population by exercising control and exerting power, initially, by claiming land and forests. (Bonn et al. 2016) (Miettinen and Liew, 2010: 394–401) (Page et al. 2009: 263–270). On the other hand, the bottom-up theorist paid a great deal of attention to the local activities of peatland peoples on how these peoples negotiate with the state authorities and influenced the peatland ecosystem (Page et al. 2009: 263–270). Bottom-up theories use as their starting point the motives of local populations and the socio-political practices and strategies of peatland peoples (McCarthy, 2010: 821).

Scholars have commented that the difficulty has hindered research in Indonesia's peatlands, either because of its politically contested nature or because of the various hidden agendas that the state may have in the regions. Peatlands in Indonesia are testing sites for monitoring the health of state governments, especially in terms of development and democracy, land and ecology (Thomas M Wilson, 1994) (Miettinen et al. 2012: 124–128) (Li, 2014).

The rivalry over Indonesia's rapidly declining primary peat forest resources is rooted in a long history of different laws and regulations and a power struggle between other actor groups. Land claims by local groups are weaker since the government claims all the peat forests as state lands. Companies also find it easier to secure large areas of peat forests for conversion to oil palm plantations with limited compensation compared to planting in agricultural landscapes (Austin et al. 2017: 41–48).

The ambivalence of forest definition and land rights institutions is an artefact of the historic change in government and public administration legislation. When the laws of the government alter, so do the actual rights and practices of local communities. With rising exposure to commercial plantations, the question of sustainable peatland practices has created another layer of land and property rights uncertainty. This situation illustrates how changing policies have triggered conflicts between the national and local governments in Indonesia over ownership and altered rights of forest resource governance (Peluso, 2007).

In addition to changing existing property rights, the dynamics of forest allocation and land use reform in peatland areas have also disrupted customary institutions and generated

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<sup>3</sup> The link of the movie <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OhaxAaJdk>

higher-level conflict among multiple stakeholders. The implementation of political and administrative decentralization in 1999 greatly expanded the control over natural resources of the district and provincial governments (Engel, 2007) (Wollenberg, 2009).

The trend of capital accumulation that persisted from the Suharto period to the present which perpetuates a neoliberal development agenda all is demonstrated by the existence of contestation in the peatland. However, the manner in which the neoliberalism agenda is introduced has never made the state simply an instrument of the capitalist class, but the product of a struggle between the various social and structural powers that confirms Poulantzas' theory of seeing the state as a social relation.

The institutionalization of the restoration of peatland through the establishment of the Indonesian Peatland Restoration Agency was born as a result of a commercial plantation scheme on peatlands that was unsustainable and had an impact of damage and disasters. However, conservation efforts to offset accumulated interests are also influenced by the hegemony of neoliberal market framework. Although neoliberalism is not monolithic (Gellert, 2010: 546), this system in principle promotes continuous economic growth and commodification of nature. Capitalism always needs an ever-greater output of resource to survive, and that means making deforestation and ecological damage inevitable (O'Connor 1998).

The underlying policies for the restoration of peat describe an ad hoc and contradictory restoration model. BRG was stuck in a highly technical restoration model and has almost no political power to interfere. The structural problem of peatlands is allowed by the government to be negotiated through incoherent restoration regulations in order to facilitate extractive accumulation interests.

At the site level, restoration and concessions act as two alien things that continue to confuse people and ultimately divided villagers' perceptions of the economic benefits of peatlands. But beyond the differences of perception, it is important to see the fact that all villagers in Pasak Piang experienced multiples dispossessions materially from the accumulation by dispossession practices produced by oil palm plantations. More than half of the village's peat areas are occupied by monoculture plantations that cause harm to the village's environment and ultimately threaten their livelihoods. We see the faces of the contestation in the peatlands from the upstream to the downstream: from the policies at the national level to the grassroots.

It can be concluded that Indonesia's peatlands are a place where interests and class powers work together to form peatlands in and through the hands of the state power. The contestation is the product of a social relations that produces not only a tendency of specific class interest but also contradictories and discursive policies. It explains the conflicting desire that affects the state in mediating development strategies and policies in the peatlands of Indonesia. The contestation may clarifies the messy and discursive face of the capitalist state and confirmed Gramsci and Poulantzas' theories of the capitalist state.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

In the grip of global neoliberalism and the nature of the accumulation therein, Indonesian peatlands are transforming themselves into a site where economic interests and class powers meet, compete and negotiate. These ecosystems, as we have seen, are not at all empty, let alone idle, but they are becoming a terrain where active forces are deployed in the production and reproduction of meanings of statecraft and development. Peatlands are unwittingly destined to become an arena and a testing ground for observing the health of the national body-politics and examining the relationship between the state, capital and society.

Through this study, I examined the character of the contestation that has taken place in the governance of Indonesia's peatlands from the Suharto New Order period to the Reform era. Using the lenses offered by Gramsci and Poulantzas, I observed the social formations that lie behind peat contestation, analyzing how peatland restoration operates in a conjuncture of a particular political context. I attempt to see the restoration as the result of social relations from various social forces that are never static and homogenous, let alone class determined.

Contestation in Indonesia's peatland restoration is taking place in the process of policy formulation and institutionalization of the restoration. This study explained how economic and business interests continue to adapt to the institutionalization of restoration, including through controlling the roles and functions of peat restoration agencies. The restoration that emerged from the devastating fire disaster in 2015 and the international pressure to correct unsustainable peat ecosystem management could not prevent capital expansion and accumulation practices through forest and land concession permits in peatlands. The government has institutionalized a restoration agency, and at the same time the latter has limited ambition to radically restore the peatlands.

A number of factors stunt the restoration of BRG. The government clearly debilitated BRG authority to restore. BRG not only operates in a situation controlled by extractive views but also by minimal authority and insufficient regulatory support. The irony is that BRG should exist to correct the performance of such institutions like MOEF and the Ministry of Agriculture that have played a significant role in peatland degradation due to land conversion permit they have given for years. In reality, however, the restoration of BRG must comply with the rules laid down by ministries whose role on peat should be restricted and corrected.

The restoration has become very technical, while the root of the peat problem is very structural and complex. BRG cannot restore damaged peat in the concession area, even though the latter has contributed most to the damage. MOEF sets out technical restoration rules that continue to make it easier for businesses to carry on exploiting in peatlands which need to be restored. This research argues that the role of restoration as ecosystem services has been rationalized in the style of neoliberal market logic. Restoration served as a mechanism for implementing neoliberal conservation, market-based environmental policy and has legitimized the internalization of the socio-ecological externalities of the exploitation of peatlands.

At the site level in the village of Pasak Piang in West Kalimantan, we saw that the restoration of the peatlands is powerless and unable to answer to the problems of the people and the ecological harms they face. BRG has initiated a restoration program while the damage and disaster continue to occur through the accumulation practices of oil palm plantations. BRG conducted a restoration program on community peatlands but the main problem happened because half of the village's peat area is controlled by companies that have deforested,

drained the peat through canals and resulted in flood disasters and crop failure for residents. We saw that the company continues to accumulate and make profits, while the people of the village of Pasak Piang suffer the most. The villagers are not only ecologically deprived, but the condition of crop failure, which continually occurs due to routine flooding threatens them to sell their land and end up working as agricultural labourers in oil palm plantations.

The goal of this research was to understand the underlying policy processes of the restoration of peatlands. We saw these processes are never neutral, but highly political. The restoration is not a unified process of policy implementation and it manifests itself in very different ways. In Pasak Piang, restoration can mean different things to different people in the same place. The village elites who support oil palm concessions are cynically viewing restoration. Other villagers don't even know the existence of restoration. Site-level research explains the necessity of distinguishing not just how they perceive restoration and concession activities, but also how they experience it materially.

Indonesia's peatland politics is the product of the social relations of various class interests using the state's coercion and hegemony to facilitate and mediating multi-actor interests in the peatlands. These actors came from indigenous entrepreneurs created by the state, businessmen of Chinese origin, multinational companies, global financial institutions, national and local governments. I have deliberately left out the interest of the peat villagers. I argue that when Indonesia's peatlands are over-governed and hyper-politicized, the aspiration of the peat villagers is no longer present in the debate. The contestation in Indonesia's peatlands may clarify the messy and discursive face of the capitalist state and confirms Poulantzas' theory of the capitalist state. Efforts to restore degraded peatlands to their original condition are extremely difficult. Most of the damaged is hard to recover. This condition becomes more complicated as restoration must go hand in hand with the interests of large-scale monoculture practices. If this situation continues, Indonesia's peatlands will perish and become a bitter memory in the development narratives.



# Appendices

## Appendix 1 List of Interviewees

No	Name	Background
1	Nazir Foead	Head of BRG
2	Hartono	Secretary of the BRG Agency/ex officio Deputy II BRG: Construction, Operation and Maintenance
3	Budi Wardhana	Deputy I BRG: Planning and Cooperation
4	Haris Gunawan	Deputy IV BRG: Research and Development
5	Myrna Safitri	Deputy III BRG: Education, Participation, Outreach and Partnerships
6	Bambang Hero	Member of the BRG expert group
7	Martua Sitorus	Member of the BRG expert group
8	Laksmi Savitri	Food estate researcher
9	Ahmad Kusworo	Peat researcher
10	Henri Subagyo	ICEL Director and member of the BRG expert group
11	Nur Hidayati	Executive Director of WALHI Indonesia
12	Ilarius Wibisono	BRG Consultant
13	Gusti Hardiansyah	Academics at Tanjung Pura University, West Kalimantan
14	Gusti Zakaria Anshari	Academics at Tanjung Pura University, West Kalimantan
15	Dwi Astiani	Academics at Tanjung Pura University, West Kalimantan
16	Maswadi	Academics at Tanjung Pura University, West Kalimantan
17	Andre Illu	Program Manager of WALHI West Kalimantan
18	Hendri Firdaus	Officials at the Environmental Service, West Kalimantan Province
19	Bimo	Head of Economic Affairs in Development Planning Agency, the Kubu Raya District
20	Nicodemeus	Director of WALHI West Kalimantan
21	Yasin	Hamlet Head, and Peat restoration coordinator in Pasak Piang
22	Surip	Head of Pasak Piang Village
23	Fathurozy	Village youth
24	Purmalasari	Village woman
25	M. Khotib	village farmer

## **Appendix 2 Interview Guideline**

- i. Practical questions: how to assess the achievements of restoration over the past 5 years and what are the challenges and successes
- ii. Background and motivation: what is your role in the issue of peatlands restoration and what made you involved in the peatlands issue
- iii. Study and policy: How do research address peatlands ecosystem issues in Indonesia and what are the implications for peat studies and policies
- iv. Empirical experience: what are your daily activities on peatlands and what do you think about the impact of restoration in your village
- v. Political analysis: How can companies operate in the village, who gets the benefits and loses
- vi. Ecological and social impacts: how to assess the existence of oil palm companies in the village and what are the environmental and social impacts
- vii. Assessing restoration work: does peatland restoration addresses social and ecological problems occurring at the site level?

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