

# Livelihood Diversification as Political Translation: The Political Reaction of the Modang Dayak to Large-Scale Land Acquisition in Upland East Kalimantan

Sudirman<sup>1</sup>

**Received:** 12 June 2022 | **Accepted:** 24 August 2022 | **Published:** 12 September 2022

## Abstract

*This article questions the ability of the resistance framework to explain local communities' political reactions to oil palm expansion. Guided by a translation and ethnographic framework, this study investigates the Modang Dayak community's political reaction from below to large-scale land acquisitions in upland East Kalimantan. It shows that, based on their knowledge and everyday life practice, the Modang Dayaks have the agency to negotiate the land scarcity that has accompanied oil palm expansion. This study contributes to reaction theory by arguing that livelihood diversification is a form of political translation used to negotiate the difficulties created by palm oil; as land has become increasingly scarce, the Modang Dayaks have redefined their relationship with it. This reality tends to be ignored in political science debates because researchers generally view political reactions through a resistance paradigm. Ultimately, however, the politics of translation go beyond the politics of resistance.*

**Keywords:** translation, large-scale land acquisition, palm oil, livelihood diversification.

## Introduction

This article analyses how the Modang Dayaks of upland East Kalimantan have politically reacted from below (Borras & Franco, 2013) to the large-scale land acquisitions that have accompanied the expansion of palm oil. How has this expansion affected the struggles of the Modang Dayaks? In the political sciences,

resistance has been the most commonly used explanation. Chin and Mittelman (2000) suggest Gramsci's counter-hegemony, Polanyi's counter-movements, and Scott's infra-politics as potential frameworks for studying resistance to neoliberalism. In this paradigm, the Dayaks' struggle against palm oil expansion is more representative of the Gramscian model

<sup>1</sup> Department of State Administration, Universitas Kutai Kartanegara, Indonesia. Email: sudirman@unikarta.ac.id

(Potter, 2008) and everyday resistance (Toumbourou & Dressler, 2020; Gönner, 2017).

This article questions the concept of resistance as an explanation for local responses to oil palm expansion. It argues that resistance is merely a cover for the many faces of power and domination (Rose, 1999, p. 279). It is a binary concept, one that leaves people with only two choices when confronted with power: passive submission or total rejection (Cooper, 1994). It ignores other possibilities and denies power relations aside from these two options (Latour, 1986: 268).

As a result, the analysis offered by resistance studies fails to consider the various ways in which people use their knowledge and practices to deal with the effects of power. Individuals are not only acted upon by abstract structures, says Weiler (1988: 21), but negotiate, struggle, and create their meanings of power. As Foucault emphasises (Foucault, 1980: 142), power is not something that is exercised along a single chain in which it is received (thereby allowing it to continue in its original form) or is blocked by an active force that prevents or reverses its transmission. Instead, it operates through networks in which individuals continually accommodate, reshape and, at times, resist the discourses and practices of power that they encounter in everyday life.

Following Ortner (1995), Li (2012: 282) suggests avoiding "ethnographic refusal", namely the trap of "black-and-white" narratives that present people as heroes fighting against repressive powers. Instead, it is necessary to direct attention to how creativity can emerge from people who engage in certain relationships of

power and meaning, and what these possibilities build on (Rose, cited in Li, 2012: 50).

To explain such creativity, this study uses the case of the Modang Dayaks in East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan. Inspired by translation theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1986; Law, 1992), this article argues that, despite the problems posed by palm oil and the power it exerts to regulate their behaviour, the Modang Dayaks are not docile bodies but have the agency to translate them into circulating discourses. Their diversification of livelihood is one form of political translation undertaken in response to palm oil.

### Theoretical Framework

Conceptually, the politics of translation emerged from within the body of Actor-Network Theory—also known as ANT (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1986; Law, 1992). Latour (2005: 204) claims that no place is domineering enough to be global, nor is any place independent enough to be local. Networking is a central issue in ANT. Networks never consist solely of humans; they involve complex relationships between people, objects, and texts (Latour, 1987: 180). One important point of ANT is that humans are not the only ones with agency; nature, too, has agency and its own will.

How is the network between the actants<sup>2</sup> formed? It is formed through the process of translation, i.e., the process by which actants join a network, being brought into a situation of coexistence (Latour 2005: 108) by moving from one state to another (Callon, 1986). In these networks, one actant reinterprets or shifts the interests (goals, problems, solutions) or even the identity of the other actants, thereby ensuring the alignment of their interests (Law, 1992). In short, translation is an attempt to define and control other actants (Horowitz, 2012: 809). It is a process for shaping thoughts and behaviours, one involving discussion or negotiation between human and non-human actants (Williams-Jones & Graham, 2003). In other words, translation is an act of invention that combines previously disparate elements.

This study follows the translation framework developed by Callon (1986). According to Callon (1986: 203–219), the translation process occurs through four potentially non-linear moments: problematisation, interessement, enrolment, and mobilisation. Problematisation is where focal actants (churches and NGOs) seek to make themselves indispensable to other actants (swiddeners and nature) by defining the nature of the problems that actants face in achieving their goals. Interesement is the stage where focal actants lock others in place by repositioning themselves and weakening other actants' relationship with alternative interpretations through the development of Village Forests as an obligatory passage point (OPP) that all

actants must pass. Enrolment refers to the success of interests. Finally, mobilisation is the stage where focal actants borrow the alliance power of their agents and transform themselves into representatives or spokespersons for the Modang Dayak people and customary forests.

## Method

This article draws on ethnographic field research conducted by the author over the course of nine months in Long Bentuq (pseudonym), a Mahakam Dayak village located in East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia. To explore the research questions, a mix of participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and in-depth interviews were used. The fieldwork involved a total of 89 formal interviews with the provincial, district, sub-district, and village government officials, as well as informal interviews with NGOs, *adat* leaders, *adat* elders, and swiddeners.

Participant observation and interviews were used mainly to collect data on spatial concepts, landscape changes, and how these changes affect livelihood strategies. The themes that were common in semi-structured interviews (i.e., the scarcity of land and forest resources, as well as the desire for alternative revenue streams) were then explored through in-depth interviews. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants.

---

<sup>2</sup> Following ANT theorists, this study uses the term actant to replace the anthropocentric actors.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. Problematisation: Finding Customary (*Adat*) Rationality

In 1998, the Governor of East Kalimantan launched the One Million Hectares of Oil Palms programme. Five years later, a new ambition emerged: to double the area covered by oil palm plantations, reaching two million hectares. East Kutai Regency was central in the expansion of oil palm agribusiness, as it accounted for 453,490 hectares of oil palms—37.8% of the provincial total (Kaltim Plantation Office, 2019). As of writing, a total of 21.7 million hectares of concessions have been granted in East Kalimantan for mining, forestry, and oil palm cultivation—more than the province's total area of 19.6 million hectares (Fel, 2019). This "bubble" has occurred because of overlapping permits issued by the national and local governments.

In 2007, the Modang Dayaks in Long Bentuq began to express unease with the limited availability of land for cultivation due to the expansion of oil palm plantations. The village head, with the support of the Catholic Church, established an alliance with an NGO, the Perkumpulan Nurani Perempuan (Women of Conscience, PNP), to take action against the palm oil plantations. The village head, PNP, and the Catholic Church emerged as focal actants because they aimed to translate the interests of other actants and establish networks.

In mid-July 2007, focal actants began to hold discussions with *adat* elders to develop a better understanding, awareness, and sense of belonging amongst the indigenous of the Busang District. Inspired by the neighbouring Wehea Dayaks, who

have succeeded in developing Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM), focal actants proposed that 40,808 hectares of forest be designated as a Village Forest, a scheme that was officially recognised by the Minister of Forestry. The village forest programme was established to strengthen CBFM in the Indonesian forestry sector; if customary forest areas are approved as village forests, residents can protect the area from corporate expansion and maintain it under their management for 35 years (Urano, 2014: 18). For focal actants, community-based forest management initiatives offer a medium for community organisation as well as a basis for negotiations with the state without requiring open resistance.

Thus, focal actants aimed to translate themselves as the main force, or at least as inspirations for an ongoing struggle. The moment of problematisation involves definition and solution. As narrated in the Letter of Rejection against Oil Palm Plantations, dated 9 July 2007: "forest land and water are gifts from God that must be protected and preserved for the sake of the integrity of creation and its survival. Land, water, and forests are not only of economic value but also of social and cultural value."

The focal actants identified the problem, namely that the forest—as God's creation—was subjected to cruel and destructive practices due to oil palm expansion. Protecting the forest, as God's creation, was paramount. Furthermore, problematisation is highly dependent on focal actants' definition of customary forests. In this case, focal actants defined the landscape (forest, land, water, and animals) through the gaze of the Catholic Church. In this gaze, the forest is imagined

as natural and thus needing to be kept away from destructive human activities, while the Modang Dayaks are narrated as victims who are bound to and live in harmony with forest resources. The narrative of the natural landscape and its inhabitants as victims justifies the compulsory eviction of companies.

The removal of oil palm was thus considered to be the primary interest of the forest, with the narrative of a "helpless forest" that must be saved from human greed being the main feature of focal actants' arguments. In this narrative, the forest narrative (as an actant) is powerless to rationalise the actions of a focal actant to represent its will.

However, the focal actants did not have the power to stop the expansion of oil palm plantations. They faced a power network that stretched from the national to the local. As such, to challenge this power network, focal actants had to attract other actors. The Village Head of Long Bentuq Village gave the authority to eleven NGOs<sup>3</sup> to join the network against the presence of palm oil.

## **2. Interessement: Aligning Actants Interests**

At this moment, focal actants are trying to establish themselves as an alliance that has the privilege to advance the struggle of the Modang Dayak by severing other potential ties, especially with oil palm companies. According to Callon (1986), during the interessement phase, other actants should become interested in the proposed solution: designation of

Village Forests. The moment of interessement is necessary because an alliance of focal actants is not the only option. Actants may reject or accept the Village Forest by defining their needs, preferences, goals, and attributes, thereby stabilising the network. For example, the Village Head could mobilise citizens in demonstrations against the company, but he would be vulnerable to legal action due to his position.

At the moment of enrolment, roles were assigned to actants. Focal actants acted as the main driving force behind the grassroots struggle against the claims of palm oil companies, while traditional protest groups served as the public face of the movement and became the basis of its political and moral legitimacy at the national and international level. By using the discourse on customary rights, focal actants succeeded in persuading the Indonesian National Human Rights Commission and the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia to join a larger network. The formation of new networks required a redefinition of the relationship between nature and humans. Nature was no longer linked with a spiritual discourse, as defined by the focal actants, but with the internationally recognised discourse of customary rights. In the new discourse, customary rights were linked with the argument that oil palm exploitation went against customary morals and culture. Oil palm was contextualised within the discourse on indigenous peoples' rights, suggesting that its exploitation violated the idea of customary forests as havens for

---

<sup>3</sup> Nomaden Institute, Perkumpulan Nurani Perempuan (PNP), Serikat Hijau, Padi Indonesia, Kelompok Kerja (Pokja) 30, Perma Adat, Wahana Lingkungan Hidup (WALHI)

Kalimantan Timur, Lembaga Pemberdayaan Perempuan, Missio Institute, Jaringan Tambang (JATAM), and Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nustara (AMAN)

wildlife and that posed a significant obstacle to the community's usage of its customary space. This is evident in the Village Forest proposal:

*Forests are part of the daily life of the Modang Dayak indigenous people and cannot be separated from the local culture. From the perspective of moving villages, it is closely related to human dependence. When people are looking for directions to make changes, they must enter the forest, and meet and communicate with various animals ... A new paradigm was introduced after independence, when forests were cut down on a massive scale, and after the government's Large-Scale Palm Oil Plantation programme, the cultural destruction of the Modang community began (author's translation).*

The narrative of customary rights was further linked to biodiversity: "Pressure has forced the Long Bentuq community to fight to protect and save the forest, including the biodiversity it contains, such

as hornbills, peacocks and orangutans" (Forest Watch Indonesia, press release, 15 April 2013). Escobar (quoted in D'Andrea, 2013: 206) said that the term "biodiversity" is a new discursive finding, a new form of capitalism that accumulates not capital but nature by creating landscapes that are consumed by thousands of corporate sponsors and members who pour money into organisations. As such, through the discourse of "biodiversity", facilitators transformed the Long Bentuq forest landscape into a global commodity. Here we see a redefinition of the relationship between humans and nature, shifting from the Catholic gaze to the global discourse on conservation. In this new discourse, customary practices were narrated in line with conservation efforts. This discourse shift aimed to align the interests of Church-based actants with those of customary rights activists. Problematically, as shown later, even though they were against the existence of oil palm plantations, the village forest solution was ultimately based on the same logic: abstract space (Lefebvre, 1991).

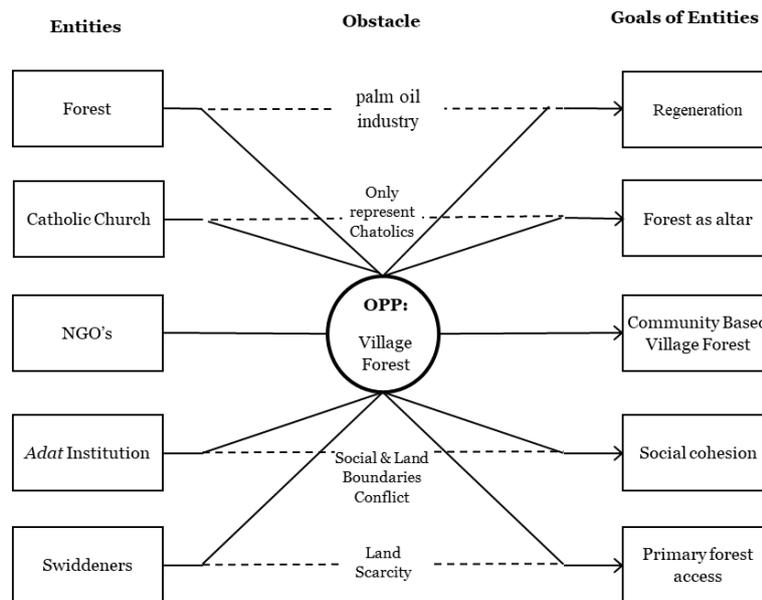


Figure 1. Conservation Discourse Network  
OPP = Obligatory Passage Point

### 3. Enrolment: How do focal actants represent the will of Modang Dayaks?

In the moment of interessement, focal actants secure their preferred definition and ensure it is received well, but they do not involve entities in active networks. In other words, interessement devices do not always lead to alliances, i.e., actual enrolment (Callon, 1986: 2011). This is only achieved through what Callon (1986: 211) calls a "group of multi-lateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks."

Negotiating with nature is not an easy matter. If the forest is to be enrolled, coordinates must first be found through Global Positioning Systems (GPS). In December 2011, the team from the East Kutai Forestry Service failed to find the coordinates. After conducting a field survey between 2012 and 2014, activists from Jaringan Kerja Pemetaan Partisipatif (Participatory Mapping Network, JKPP) helped the Modang Dayaks produce a participatory map of Long Bentuq in 2017.

Mapping is a very powerful medium for shaping a particular place (D'Andrea, 2013: 189). A counter map, as Peluso (1995) calls it, offered the Modang Dayaks an important tool to negotiate their territorial claims with the state. Through participatory maps, the Modang Dayaks could also see the extent of concessions on their customary lands. In short, through a participatory map, the Modang Dayaks could match the state's claims (Kurniawan, 2016).

While JKPP helped the Modang Dayaks map their territory, another actant, the Nature Conservancy (TNC), provided knowledge on zoning techniques. Long Bentuq Village Forest was divided into five zones: Conservation, Timber Forest Plantation, Annual Plantation, Micro-Hydro, and Ecotourism.

In October 2009, the coalition proposed a village forest covering 40,000 ha to the Ministry of Forests. This became an obligatory passage point (OPP) that had to be passed by every actant who joined the conservation discourse network. Therein

lay the dilemma. For a customary forest to be registered, it must be tied to the district government. However, such links were not easily achieved. Referring to Law No. 41/1999 on Forestry and Law No. 32/2009 on Environmental Protection and Management, customary forests must be recognised through local regulations. As a result, the proposal process failed to meet expectations, and the focal actants were forced to submit three proposals after the first two (in 2009 and 2010) were said to have been "lost on the Regent's desk". Facing pressure from the Human Rights Commission and the Indonesian Ombudsman, on 21 June 2011 the Regent of East Kutai finally signed the proposal for the Long Bentuq Village Forest (albeit with only 11,648.90 ha of the proposed 40,000 ha). In November 2012, the Ministry of Forests issued a Decree on Management of Long Bentuq Village Forest, covering an area of 880 hectares. The Modang Dayaks of Long Bentuq rejected this decision, as not only was the approved area greatly reduced, but the designated area was outside the proposed location and administratively separate from Long Bentuq Village. As such, it could trigger horizontal conflict with neighbouring villages.

The Minister of Forests did not issue a policy following the proposal, as in 2009 it had granted PT Permata Borneo Abadi an industrial concession to 54,000 ha of forests (Ministry of Forestry, 29 May 2009). Thus, both the Minister of Forests and the Government of East Kutai Regency sought to establish obligatory passage points through their permits. Since Indonesia had implemented autonomy and decentralization, regency governments had found room to manoeuvre and renegotiate

their powers. Having already felt the benefits of forest exploitation and ready to achieve autonomy, they often ignored the Ministry of Forests (Wollenberg, Moeliono, & Limberg, 2009: 15).

The East Kutai Regency Government sought to involve the Long Bentuq community in its pro-palm alliance, using as its enrolment tool the village head elections (*pemilihan kepala desa*, or *Pilkades*). These elections provided the pro-oil palm networks with opportunities to involve the Kutai Dayaks and Buginese. The Buginese are the largest ethnic group in Long Bentuq, representing approximately 40% of the total population. Exploiting religious issues, the pro-oil palm network succeeded in eliminating the incumbent, a major opponent of oil palm plantations, in the village head election on 20 December 2016. According to a PNP coordinator, the palm oil company was behind the incumbent's defeat. In translating the situation, representatives of the pro-palm oil network framed themselves as having provided Long Bentuq with employment and promised future financial benefits. Using such narratives, as well as religious sentiments, the company succeeded in involving the Buginese and Kutai Dayaks in a pro-palm oil coalition. As observed elsewhere (see Tjitradjaja, cited in Li, 2002: 33), some of them became land brokers for outsiders. These individuals may betray their class interests and their fellow villagers to form alliances with newcomers, including patrons who promise access to jobs, resources, and/or government power.

Thus, the successful mobilisation of contesting networks depends on proving which representation is more "representative" (Woods, 1997: 33). The question is, how representative are the

focal actants representing the people and nature?

#### 4. Mobilisation: Why the Conservation Discourse Coalition Failed

"We took one step further in the fight for the Village Forest, but suddenly the *Kepala Adat Dayak Besar Modang* (Great Customary Chief of Modang Dayaks) came to see me, got angry, and said: "Why are you rejecting palm oil? Not everyone here doesn't like palm oil. There is no point in refusing palm oil; it makes a profit." (author's translation).

The above quote describes the focal actants representing the will of the Modang Dayaks. If interestment is successful and enrolment is achieved, the network of entities can be mobilised and actants can be transferred to the network designed by focal actants. In this case, however, the attempt failed due to the knowledge gap between the actants and the persons being presented. Many social movements based on collective identity weaken when members no longer feel adequately represented (Polletta & Jasper, 2001: 292), resulting in what Callon calls the fifth moment: dissidence. In the case studied by Callon (1986), seashells refused to be presented or involved (p. 220). Likewise, fishermen do not obey their spokespersons (scientists) and were tempted to harvest shells in restricted zones.

From the perspective of ANT theory, dissidence arises because of the problem of the "representativeness of representatives". Mobilisation means consolidating entities where this was not previously the case (Callon, 1986: 216). Initially, forest actants, swiddeners, and

assistants were scattered; they only became a network after the facilitator said that community-based forest management was the solution to save the "remaining customary forest." This mobilisation (or concentration) has a certain physical reality that is manifested through a series of displacements (Callon, 1986: 217). Forests are transferred to GPS coordinates, coordinates to GIS numbers, and numbers to maps that are easy to reproduce and move (Latour, 1985). However, GPS is often unable to accurately determine the coordinates of particular points. For example, the coordinate points used for the 700-ha forest area of Long Bentuq village were located within the transmigration area of Long Tesaq Village, Muara Ancalong District. Usually, such problems occur because of the curvature of the earth. However, the error can be adjusted through computer calculations; to create precise maps, it is necessary to enter information into the computer so that the points can be shifted slightly and boundary lines can be drawn accurately (D'Andrea, 2013: 222). This cannot be done in the field; it must be done in the office. The Long Bentuq Forest, for example, was easily moved to a "companion" office space for further map production, ultimately becoming represented by maps that could easily be reproduced and carried to conference rooms, seminars, mass media, and others.

At the moment of enrolment, thus each entity is simply represented. In this case, forests were represented by maps, the Modang Dayaks were represented by focal actants who were depicted as victims of development and capitalism. The problem is that the focal actants' efforts to map and divide Village Forest zones to produce community-based forest

management plans used an approach that conceptualised an abstract space that was empty of occupants. Abstraction not only reduced forest landscapes into images but also replaced the Modang Dayaks' indigenous knowledge of space. In their traditional knowledge, the Modang Dayaks classified landscapes into *sebelau* (young forests), *tenoaq pwun* (secondary forests), *la mauq* (swidden plots), and *tenoaq nan* (primary forests) using not maps, but conceptual zones (field notes, 6 May 2019). In this model, zones were strictly defined by the types of activities that could be conducted within. For example, in conservation zones, all human activities were forbidden—including swiddening—because this zone aims to maintain natural authenticity and protect water sources.

The next dilemma lies in focal actants perspectives on the classical/romantic concept of indigenous peoples. Focal actants viewed indigenous communities as built on solidarity and cohesion, failing to recognise that the Modang Dayaks are a divided society where conflict affects many aspects of their networks—including their efforts to oppose large-scale plantations.

Thus, network mobilisation depended highly on the extent to which the Modang Dayaks accepted the image of palm oil companies and their cruelty. Not all residents of Long Bentuq accepted the conservation discourse and rejected the idea that oil palm cultivation was destructive.

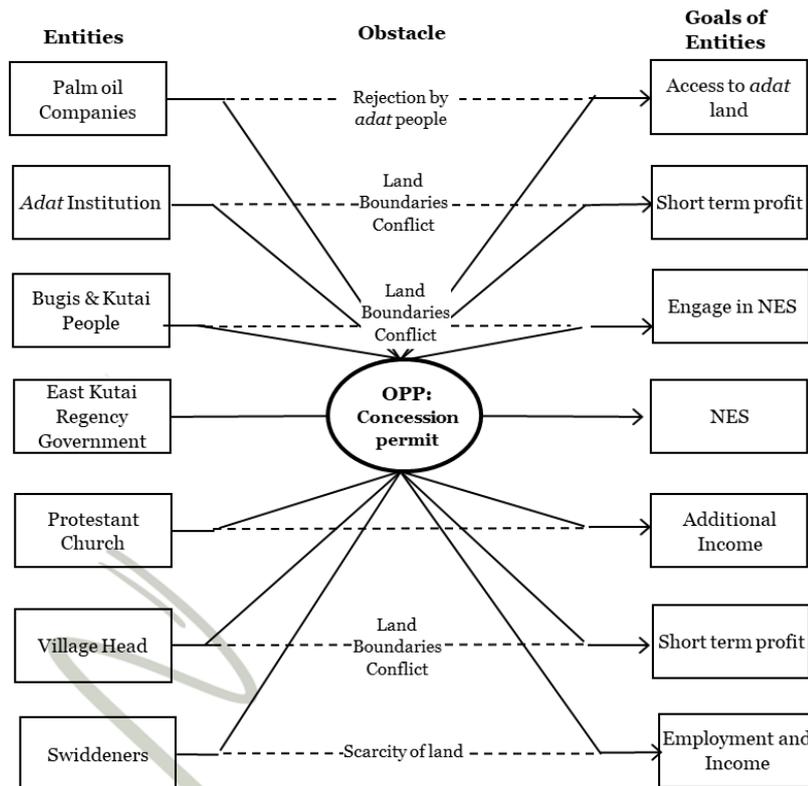


Figure 2. Development Discourse Networks

OPP = Obligatory Passage Point; NES = Nucleus Estate and Smallholders

## 5. Livelihood Diversification Strategies as Political Translation

The failure of focal actants to build a coalition against palm oil prompted the Modang Dayaks to develop a new strategy for the situation they were facing. Rather than aiming to preserve local ecosystems, their main goal was to protect the indigenous peoples' interests from exogenous threats to their landscape and livelihoods. Unlike the focal actants, who blamed cultivation for their woes, *adat* protest groups have not rejected oil palm exploitation. As one *adat* leader put it:

*We don't reject palm oil. What we reject is their way of not asking us for permission. They don't respect us. In our custom, people who do not ask permission to plant in our fields are considered thieves. That's a serious offence. In the past, people who did that were carried out in a traditional ceremony and then expelled from the village.... If the company came to us nicely, there wouldn't be a problem. Just like the Bugis, the Kutai, and the Kenyah who now have a village. They used to come nicely asking for permission; they were allowed to not even pay a penny. But now we are having a hard time finding land (author's translation).*

The narrative explains that Modang Dayaks do not blame the cultivation efforts or reject palm oil in its entirety; such a narrative was promoted by the conservation discourse. Not infrequently, the Modang Dayaks' way of redefining their relationship with nature was accused of framing themselves as "victims of capitalism". For example, in my interview with an environmental activist, it was

explained: "it's hard for us to fight because they always want money... if they want to protect the forest, let's fight together".

Environmentalists and proponents of peasants' rights who assume that "traditional" societies oppose the state or government to maintain their "own" institutions and practices may be forgetting that rural dwellers often try to get the most out of their positions as full citizens (Li, 2002: 36). Understanding the concept of power through a binary lens has been common among NGOs who take a Dayak identity as their conceptual foundation: the Dayaks and their way of life are described as sustainable, biodiverse, and natural, based on the ideals of collectivity and cooperation, spirituality, traditional rituals, subsistence, customary law, and locality, while the opposite of empowerment is monoculture, individuality and competition, scientific rationality, commerciality, globalisation, and the state (Duile, 2017: 124).

Thus, each network of actants gives *adat* groups a certain identity and interests through the process of engagement and enrolment. In this process, NGOs try to position themselves as spokespersons (Horowitz, 2011: 19–20), or as "companions". The result is a narrative featuring "the simultaneous production of knowledge and construction of networks of relationships in which social and natural entities mutually control who they are and what they want" (Callon, 1986: 59). To be adopted by individuals and groups, each identity must appear natural, that is, as an identity independent of other identities. Such identities in post-structural theory are described as transcendental signifiers or centres of symbolic order: They govern the order of symbolic meaning, as the

meanings of all other elements in the symbolic order of language seem to depend on that centre. Of course, this idea is inaccurate; although they appear to be central, independent symbols, as symbols in language structure they are inexorably dependent on other terms and symbols within the structure (Derrida, 1997 cited in Duile, 2017: 123). Instead of relying on one contesting centre, the Modang Dayaks have conducted discourse. They have not rejected development or markets. Rather, they have rejected the tendency for outsiders to take too much while leaving them with too little.

Generally, the Dayaks of Kalimantan—including the Modang Dayaks—have relied heavily on livelihood diversification. The cacao boom of 2012–2014 in Long Bentuq provides a contemporary example. In 2014, the 2,530 hectares of cocoa plantations in Busang District (home to Long Bentuq) produced 1,940.85 tonnes of pods. It was thus one of the most productive sub-districts in Indonesia (Urano, 2014: 6). During this boom, the land in Long Bentuq was first commodified, exchanged, and traded. Land cleared for cultivation was quickly transformed into cocoa fields (field note, 12 March 2019).

An important lesson from the cocoa boom is that the destruction of the subsistence base is not always the result of the development of state-supported market capitalism. Swiddeners in Long Bentuq were fully aware that the cocoa boom would destroy their subsistence base. However, the interviewed swiddeners said that the risks were commensurate with the benefits. It was only during the cocoa boom that the Modang Dayaks could buy things like televisions and washing

machines, or new clothes for their children to wear to church.

Another swiddener said that cocoa cultivation did not interfere with their autonomy, as production factors such as land and labour remained completely under their control. The work was relatively easy, paid better, and was easy to learn. As Dagog (pseudonym) said: "The convenience of cocoa [is that] we manage it ourselves; the pods are not difficult and caring for them is also easy. If there is a problem, we call the Bugis." In the palm oil industry, conversely, these communal practices are fully under the control of the company. Oil palm agribusiness transfers control of land, labour, and cultivation knowledge from households to the company. Consequently, the expansion of commercial plantations has led to the widespread and rapid demise of upland agriculture (Cramb, et. al., 2009: 328).

Instead of curbing their enthusiasm for becoming involved in the market, since the burst of the cocoa bubble, the Modang Dayaks have begun actively growing crops that are desired by the market. Driven by the need to earn money, they have reoriented their modes of production; they have planted bananas and durians, developed aquaculture, made wallets, raised pigs, and created other commodities that the market is interested in. However, many still view swiddening as their main source of livelihood. The Modang Dayaks refer to such diversification of livelihoods as *teweus hiang* (field note, 25 April 2019). Scholars, meanwhile, call it a dual or composite economy (Eghenter, 2006; Dove, 2011; Lounela, 2007) involving semi-subsistence (Potter, 2011; Rigg, 2005), extended subsistence (Gönner, 2017), or

flexible livelihood strategies (Höing & Radjawali, 2017).

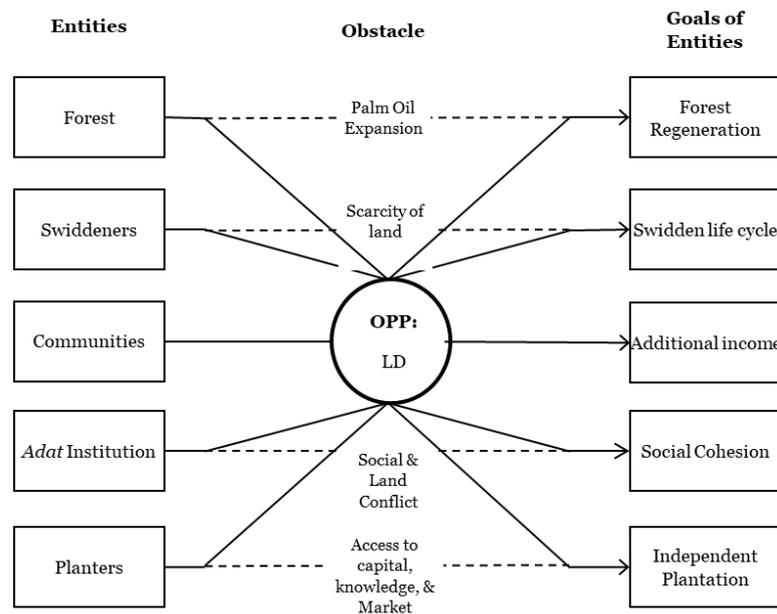


Figure 3. Livelihood Diversification Networks  
 OPP = Obligatory Passage Point; LD = Livelihood Diversifications

The history of land use in Long Bentuq shows that, no matter how strong the structural pressures, farmers are not passive victims of circumstance (Schneider & Niederle, 2010: 387). Rather, they are innovative actants who wish to use and modify new practices for accumulation (Ruiters, 2002: 405). The most basic principle of translation is that individuals are never limited to the choice of rejecting or passively accepting power; rather, they are active agents who can transform power into other forms depending on their needs (Latour, 1986). Humans have their reasons for accepting rules and, in their journey, translating them into new forms (Latour, 1986). From this perspective, rules are reshaped and transformed from within the networks of power, rather than being challenged from without, and politics becomes "a much more open process of contestation and engagement" (O'Malley, 1996: 312).

### Conclusion

This article shows that political reactions to oil palm expansion are not sufficiently explained by resistance. As in the case examined in this study, the scarcity of land and the need for income prompted the Modang Dayaks to redefine their relationship with nature. In contrast to the classical romantic view that is prevalent in resistance discourse, *adat* is a dynamic practice that is always in the process of becoming. In this context, the decision to become actively involved in the market cannot be seen as falling victim to capitalism, but as a creative strategy to actively benefit from the opportunities offered by palm oil without sacrificing swiddening practices. In this context, too, it can be explained why local struggles often fail. In contrast to the actor-based explanation, this study found that local struggles failed due to the differences in knowledge between the focal actants who



represented and those who were presented.

The Modang Dayaks' use of livelihood diversification strategies in response to palm oil expansion has theoretical implications for the exercise of

power, which goes beyond the binary narratives described in resistance theory. Existing studies have yet to explain livelihood diversification as a political reaction from below, specifically as a form of political translation.



## Bibliography

- Borras, S. M., & Franco, J. (2012). Global land grabbing and trajectories of agrarian change: a preliminary analysis. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 12(1): 34–59. DOI: 10.1111/j.1471-0366.2011.00339.x.
- Borras, S. M., & Franco, J. (2013). Global land grabbing and political reactions 'from below'. *Third World Quarterly*, 34(9): 1723-1747. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2013.843845.
- Borras, S. M., Franco, J., Gómez, S., Kay, C., & Spoor, M. (2012). Land grabbing in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(3–4): 845–872. DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2012.679931.
- Borras, S., & Franco, J. C. (2010). Contemporary discourses and contestations around pro-poor land policies and land governance. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 10: 1–32. DOI: 10.1111/j.1471-0366.2009.00243.x.
- Brookfield, H., & Padoch, C. (1994). Appreciating agrodiversity: a look at the dynamism and diversity of indigenous farming practices. *Environment*, 36(5): 37–43.
- Callon, M. (1986). Some elements of the sociology of translation: domestication of scallops and the fishermen of St Brieuc Bay. In J. Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge?* (pp. 196–233). London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Chin, C., & Mittelman, J. H. (2000). Conceptualizing resistance to globalization. In B. K. Gills, *Globalization and the Politics of Resistance* (pp. 29-45). New York: Palgrave Mcmillan.
- Colfer, C. (1983). Change and indigenous agroforestry in East Kalimantan. *Borneo Research Bulletin*, 15(1): 70-87.
- Cooper, D. (1994). Productive, relational and everywhere? Conceptualising power and resistance within Foucauldian feminism. *Sociology*, 28(2): 435-455.
- Cramb, R., Colfer, C., Dressler, W., Laungaramsri, P., Le, Q. T., Mulyoutami, E., Wadley, R. (2009). Swidden transformations and rural livelihoods in Southeast Asia. *Human Ecology* 37: 323-346. DOI: 10.1007/s10745-009-9241-6.
- D'Andrea, C. (2013). *Kopi, adat dan modal*. Yayasan Tanah Merdeka, Tanah Air Beta, and Sajogyo Institute: Palu, Yogyakarta, and Bogor.
- Dove, M. (1985). *Swidden agriculture in Indonesia: the subsistence strategies of the Kalimantan Kantu'*. Mouton: Berlin.
- Dove, M. (1993). Smallholder rubber and swidden agriculture in Borneo – a sustainable adaptation to the ecology and economy of the tropical forest. *Economic Botany* 47(2): 136–147.
- Dove, M. (2011). *The banana tree at the gate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Duile, T. (2017). Being Dayak in West Kalimantan: constructing indigenous identity as a political and cultural resource. In C. Arenz, M. Haug, S. Seitz, & O. Venz (eds.), *Continuity under Change in Dayak Societies* (pp. 123-140). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Eghenter, C. (2006). Social, environmental and legal dimensions of adat as an instrument of conservation in East Kalimantan. In F. M. Cooke (ed.), *State, Communities and Forests in Contemporary Borneo* (pp. 163-180). Canberra: ANU Press.
- Escobar, A. (1995). Whose knowledge, whose nature? Biodiversity, conservation, and the political ecology of social movements. *Journal of Political Ecology* 5: 53-82. DOI: 10.2458/v5i1.21397.
- Fel GM. (2019, 17 July). Detail perizinan Kaltim yang lebih luas dari daratan provinsi dan membuat murka pimpinan KPK. *kaltimkece.id*. Retrieved from <https://kaltimkece.id/warta/lingkungan>: <https://kaltimkece.id/warta/lingkungan/detail-perizinan-kaltim-yang-lebih-luas-dari-daratan-provinsi-dan-membuat-murka-pimpinan-kpk>.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Powers and strategies. In C. Gordon, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (pp. 134–145). New York: Pantheon.
- Gellert, P. K. (2015). Palm oil expansion in Indonesia: land grabbing as accumulation by dispossession. *Current Perspectives in Social Theory*, 34: 65–99. DOI: 10.1108/S0278-120420150000034004.
- Gönner, C. (2017). Changing tides – waves of opportunities on a sea of oil palms? In C. Arenz, M. Haug, S. Seitz, & O. Venz, *Continuity under Change in Dayak Societies* (pp. 47–72). Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Hall, D., Hirsch, D., & Li, T. (2011). *Powers of exclusion: land dilemmas in Southeast Asia*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Höing, A., & Radjawali, I. (2017). Flexible livelihood strategies coming to an end? The case of forest-dependent communities in Central and West Kalimantan. In C. Arenz, M. Haug, S. Seitz, & O. Venz, *Continuity under Change in Dayak Societies* (pp. 73–96). Wiesbaden: Springer VS.
- Horowitz, L. S. (2011). Translation alignment: actor-network theory, resistance, and the power dynamics of alliance in New Caledonia. *Antipode*, 44(3): 1–25. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00926.x.
- Ministry of Forests. (2009, 29 May). *SK Pencadangan No. 324/menhut/VI/2009*. Jakarta: Ministry of Forests.
- Kurniawan, N. I. (2016). *Local struggle, recognition of Dayak customary land, and state making in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia*. University of Melbourne: Asia Institute, Faculty of Arts.

- Latour, B. (1986). The powers of association. In J. Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief* (pp. 264-280). London: Routledge & Kegan.
- Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (1993). *We have never been modern*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Latour, B. (1996). On actor-network theory: a few clarifications. *Soziale Welt*, 47(4): 369–381.
- Latour, B. (2001). Gabriel Tarde and the end of the social. In *The Social and Its Problems* (pp. 117–132). London: Routledge.
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network theory*. United States: Oxford University Press.
- Law, J. (1992). Notes on the theory of the actor–network: ordering, strategy, and heterogeneity. *Systems Practice*, 5(4): 379–393.
- Lefebvre, H. (2013). *Rhythmanalysis: space, time and everyday life*. Translated by S. Elden & G. Moore. London: UK: Bloomsbury.
- Li, T. M. (2002). Keterpinggiran, kekuasaan dan produksi: analisis terhadap transformasi daerah pedalaman. In T. M. Li (ed.), *Proses Transformasi Daerah Pedalaman di Indonesia* (pp. 3–74). Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- Li, T. M. (2012). *The will to improve: perencanaan, kekuasaan, dan pembangunan di Indonesia*. Tangerang: Marjin Kiri.
- Lounela, A. (2007). Continuity and change in Central Kalimantan: climate change, monetization of nature, and its bearing on value orientations. In C. Arenz, M. Haug, S. Seitz, & O. Venz (eds.), *Continuity under Change in Dayak Societies* (pp. 97–122). Wiesbaden: Springer.
- McCarthy, J. F. (2010). Processes of inclusion and adverse incorporation: oil palm and agrarian change in Sumatra, Indonesia. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 37(4): 821–850. DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2010.512460.
- Ortner, S. B. (1995). Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 37(1): 173–191. DOI: 10.1017/S0010417500019587.
- Polletta, F., & Jasper, J. (2001). Collective identity and social movements. *Annual Review of Sociology* 27: 283–305.
- Potter, L. (2008, July). *Dayak resistance to oil palm plantations in West Kalimantan, Indonesia*. Retrieved from <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/36699>.
- Potter, L. (2011). Agrarian transitions in Kalimantan: Characteristics, limitations and accommodations. In R. D. Konick, S. Bernard, & J. Bisonnette, *Borneo*

*Transformed. Agricultural Expansion on the Southeast Asian Frontier* (pp. 152-202). Singapore: NUS Press.

- Rigg, J. (2005). Poverty and livelihoods after full-time farming: a South-East Asian view. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 46(2): 173–184. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8373.2005.00266.x.
- Rose, N. (1999). *Powers of freedom: reframing political thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ruiter, T. G. (2002). Transformasi pertanian di dataran tinggi langkat: bertahan hidupnya kaum petani Batak Karo Pemilik perkebunan karet rakyat yang independen. In T. M. Li, *Proses Transformasi Daerah Pedalaman di Indonesia* (pp. 362–412). Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia.
- Schneider, S., & Niederle, P. (2010). Resistance strategies and diversification of rural livelihoods: the construction of autonomy among Brazilian family farmers. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 37(2): 397-405. DOI: 10.1080/03066151003595168.
- Thaler, G. M., & Anandi, C. M. (2017). Shifting cultivation, contentious land change and forest governance: the politics of swidden in East Kalimantan. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44(5): 1066–1087. DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2016.1243531.
- The Jakarta Post. (2005, 18 July). *Government plans world's largest oil palm plantation*.
- Toit, A. D. (2021, 11 April). Adverse incorporation and agrarian policy in South Africa: or, how not to connect the rural poor to growth. [http://repository.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10566/65/duToit\\_Adverse2009.pdf?sequence=3](http://repository.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10566/65/duToit_Adverse2009.pdf?sequence=3).
- Toumbourou, T. D., & Dressler, W. (2020). Sustaining livelihoods in a palm oil enclave: differentiated gendered responses in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 62(1): 40–55. DOI: 10.1111/apv.12265.
- Urano, M. (2014). Impacts of newly liberalised policies on customary land rights of forest-dwelling populations: a case study from East Kalimantan, Indonesia. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 55(1): 6-23. DOI: 10.1111/apv.12042.
- Vos, R. d., & Delabre, I. (2018). Spaces for participation and resistance: gendered experiences of oil palm plantation development. *Geoforum* 96, 217–226. DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.08.011.
- Weber, M. (2006). *Etika Protestan dan spirit kapitalisme*. Pustaka Pelajar: Yogyakarta.
- Webber, R., Faust, H., Schippers, B., Mamar, S., Sutarto, & Kreisel, W. (2007). Migration and ethnicity as cultural impact factor on land use change in the rainforest margins of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. In T. Tschardtke, C. Leuschner, M. Zeller, E. Guharja, & A. Bidin (eds.), *The Stability of Tropical Rainforest Margins, Linking Ecological, Economic and Social Constraints of Land Use and Conservation* (pp. 417–436). Berlin: Springer.
- Weiler, K. (1988). *Women teaching for change: gender, class and power*. New York: Bergin and Garvey Publishers.

- Williams-Jones, B., & Graham, J. (2003). Actor-network theory: a tool to support ethical analysis of commercial genetic testing. *New Genetics and Society*, 22(3): 271–296. DOI: 10.1080/1463677032000147225.
- Wollenberg, E., Moeliono, M., & Limberg, G. (2009). Antara negara dan masyarakat: desentralisasi di Indonesia. In M. Moeliono, E. Wollenberg, & G. Limberg (eds.), *Desentralisasi Tata Kelola Hutan: Politik, Ekonomi dan Perjuangan untuk Menguasai Hutan di Kalimantan, Indonesia* (pp. 3–22). Bogor: Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR).
- Woods, M. (1997). Researching rural conflicts: hunting, local politics and actor-networks. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 14(3): 321–340.