'WE ONLY WANT TO PLANT OIL PALM": AN ETHNOHISTORY OF ILLEGAL PEASANT’S OIL PALM PLANTATIONS IN MUARO JAMBI, JAMBI PROVINCE, INDONESIA

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'WE ONLY WANT TO PLANT OIL PALM': AN ETHNOHISTORY OF ILLEGAL PEASANT'S OIL PALM PLANTATIONS IN MUARO JAMBI, JAMBI PROVINCE, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT
The increasing global demand for vegetable oils and biofuels is a determining factor in increasing oil palm expansion in Indonesia. The current studies of Indonesia's oil palm expansion focus on companies' large-scale land acquisition. In this process, often called land grabbing, small peasants are excluded from the acceleration of oil palm expansion. This research focuses on the rarely discussed topic of the participation of small peasants in the palm oil production chain. Employing ethnohistory, this research unfolds the impact of oil palm expansion on small peasants and indigenous people, especially those who expand their plantations into the forest in Jambi Province. This research aims to show how peasants and indigenous peoples respond to the commercial crops boom in Indonesia.

KEYWORDS: Small-Scale Oil Palm Plantations, Forrest Occupation, Ethnohistory, Jambi-Indonesia

INTRODUCTION
Palm oil plantations in Indonesia have become one of the most essential economic commodities for state revenues and local communities. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2022, Indonesia is the largest palm oil producer in the world, supplying more than 50% of global palm oil (BPS, 2022). This commodity contributes significantly to the national GDP and creates millions of jobs for the community. Oil palm has become an increasingly attractive crop for Indonesian farmers due to its high economic value and potential to generate regular income streams (Dharmawan et al., 2020) (Pasaribu et al., 2020). The government's promotion of oil palm development, mainly through smallholder schemes, has further incentivized its adoption (Chalil et al., 2019). However, the uncontrolled expansion of oil palm plantations has often come at the expense of forests and local communities, leading to ecological and socioeconomic impacts (Dharmawan et al., 2020).

The rapid expansion of oil palm cultivation in Indonesia has complexly impacted rural communities, particularly those engaged in small-scale plantations. In the province of
Jambi, Sumatra, the growth of the palm oil industry has presented both opportunities and challenges for local peasants, including those who have established plantations on illegal land such as forests (Gatto et al., 2017)(Dharmawan et al., 2020). One of them is in an area known as Hutan Harapan in Jambi. In Jambi, the proliferation of small-scale oil palm plantations, including those on illegal land, has been complex and nuanced. Smallholders' responses to the spread of oil palm have varied depending on factors such as the local ecological setting, the presence of an existing plantation economy, the capacity of smallholders to diversify their economic activities, and their exposure to external economic activities (Dharmawan et al., 2020).

In the last 15 years, the phenomenon of smallholder oil palm plantations has become more prevalent in Jambi. However, the farmers, who mostly come from outside the Jambi province area, are forced to plant oil palm on land without official legality due to various factors, including a lack of legal land and dissatisfaction with existing agrarian policies. Berenschot and Dhiaulhaq (2023) note that many farmers in Jambi feel marginalized by policies that favor large companies, so they seek to acquire other land to expand their plantations. Most of the land control resulted from land occupations carried out after the Soeharto regime fell. In this period of political transition, land occupation movements in different parts of Indonesia emerged as a means for marginalized communities to reclaim land, challenge land dispossession, and demand agrarian reforms. (Bachriadi and Lucas, 2000; Lucas and Warren, 2003; Fauzi, 2003; Afiff et.al, 2008; Bachriadi, 2010).

By itself, many oil palm farmers in Jambi do not have official land certificates, making them vulnerable to eviction and exploitation. According to Muchtar Habibi (2023), this legal uncertainty causes conflict between farmers and companies and between farmers and local governments. The uncertainty creates a situation where farmers feel they have no other choice but to continue illegal oil palm plantation practices, even though they are aware of the risks involved. Therefore, it is essential to understand more deeply the experiences and challenges oil palm farmers face in Jambi Province.

This study further explores the social and economic dynamics influencing illegal oil palm plantation practices in this region. Understanding the historical and social context behind illegal oil palm plantation practices is hoped to provide a comprehensive picture of the dynamics in Hutan Harapan, Jambi Province.

This study will analyze how local history, agrarian policies, and social relations influence farmers' decisions to engage in these illegal practices. In addition, this study also aims to analyze the social and political dynamics that affect oil palm farmers. In this context, it is crucial to understand how government policies and interactions with large companies shape the conditions faced by farmers. A study by David E. Gilbert (2020) shows that agrarian policy changes often fail to consider the needs and rights of smallholders, which in turn worsens their situation. By exploring these ethnohistorical experiences, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of agrarian conflicts in Indonesia and highlight the importance of a more inclusive approach to agrarian policy. This is in line with the view expressed by Tania Murray Li (2021) that agrarian reform must involve the active participation of local communities to ensure social and economic justice.

**METHODS**

This study uses ethnography to understand the social and economic dynamics surrounding oil palm plantations managed by Hutan Harapan, Jambi Province farmers. The ethnomethodological method was chosen to explore the experiences of individuals and groups in their social context. This was done to understand the class dynamics in agrarian change in Sumatra. Using this approach, oil palm farmers' motivations, challenges, and
Hopes can be explored, which are often overlooked in the broader discourse on the oil palm industry. Data triangulation was carried out to avoid bias, namely combining various sources of information to obtain a more comprehensive picture. This process involves interviews with farmers, participant observation, and document analysis. In this way, the study does not rely on only one type of data. However, it integrates various perspectives to provide a more holistic understanding of the situation oil palm farmers face in Hutan Harapan.

Hutan Harapan in Jambi Province was chosen as the research location because it is one of the areas most affected by the expansion of oil palm plantations in Indonesia. This area has a long history associated with natural resource exploitation and agrarian conflict. According to Jonas Hein et al. (2016), Hutan Harapan is a clear example of changes in land ownership structures and access due to pressure from the palm oil industry. In this context, this study seeks to understand how local farmers adapt and respond to these changes. Hutan Harapan also has high biodiversity but, at the same time, faces severe threats from land conversion to oil palm plantations. This creates a dilemma for farmers who want to increase their incomes and maintain environmental sustainability. Data from Berenschot and Dhiaulhaq (2023) show that oil palm companies are often involved in land tenure practices that are detrimental to smallholders. Therefore, this research location is very relevant to explore the dynamics between farmers, companies, and the environment. Thus, Hutan Harapan is a strategic location for this research and a reflection of broader issues related to agrarian, land rights, and environmental sustainability in Indonesia.

Data collection in this study included three main methods: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with oil palm farmers to explore their experiences, views, and expectations related to oil palm plantations. This method allows researchers to obtain rich and in-depth data on the social and economic contexts. As Santoso et al. (2024) stated, in-depth interviews can provide insights that cannot be obtained through quantitative surveys. In addition, participant observation is also an integral part of this data collection technique. Researchers are directly involved in the daily activities of farmers, so they can observe their agricultural practices, social interactions, and the challenges they face. This process provides empirical data and helps researchers build better relationships with local communities. This is important for building trust and facilitating more effective data collection. Historical documents and archives were also analyzed to provide additional context to the data obtained from interviews and observations. These documents include legal records, government policies, and non-governmental organizations’ reports focusing on agrarian issues. By analyzing these documents, researchers can understand how broader policies and practices affect the lives of farmers in Hutan Harapan. The use of a combination of data collection techniques is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the situation faced by oil palm farmers. This study seeks to avoid bias by integrating various data sources to make the results more credible and reliable. This aligns with the approach proposed by Cramb and McCarthy (2016), who emphasize the importance of data diversity in agrarian research.

**DISCUSSION**

**Trajectory of land and Forest Governance in Indonesia**

Land conflicts in the Harapan rainforest are related to Indonesia’s forest and land tenure governance. This section investigates the dynamics of regime change affecting forest and land governance in Indonesia. The explanation of the dynamics is divided into three parts. The first part compares policy changes made during the Soekarno era, the second part explains policy in the New Order period and decentralization period, and the
The laws governing the control of land and forests after the Indonesian independence were Basic Agrarian Law (BAL) 1960, designed to eliminate the legal dualism since the colonial period: Agrarische Wet and Customary Law. BAL 1960 is a national agrarian law covering land and natural resources management. This framework derived from customary territorial rights (Hak Ulayat) and converted to a national principle: "the land, water, and atmosphere, including natural resources within them controlled by the state at its highest, as the organizational authority of all the people" (Lucas & Warren, 2013). This principle is the state's right to control (Hak Menguasai Negara). Based on this principle, the State may issue several land rights. However, the State can also take over the land if the person who controls it can not show proof of ownership.

The spirit of BAL 1960 is to protect and guarantee the rights of the people, especially people experiencing poverty, on land and the utilization of natural resources as an effort to create social justice. This law explicitly states that agrarian justice is the basis for a national economy leading to social justice. That is why land reform is the main focus of the BAL 1960 policy. The land reform agenda aims to provide a solid foundation for the agricultural activities of the people of most rural inhabitants whose lives depend on agricultural activities. One of the most essential parts of the Land Reform program is land redistribution to tenant farmers and landless peasants. In other words, BAL 1960 leans on the 'land to the tillers' idea. (Safitri and Moeliono, 2010; Bachriadi and Wiradi, 2011). This idea was then rearticulated by the agrarian movement organizations, such as the Indonesian Peasant Union, to reclaim the 'unproductive' land or forest.

The land reform framework is set in chapters 7, 10, 13, and 17 of BAL 1960. Chapters 7 and 17 describe the limitation of land ownership and control; Article 10 affirms the obligation of self-employed farmland and the prohibition of absenteeism, while Article 17 affirms the obligation of the government to promote agricultural enterprises, especially the people's agriculture and to prevent the occurrence of monopoly in the agrarian field. On the subject of the land reform implementation, there were government regulations that regulated the land distribution. In practice, land reform and redistribution programs systematically stalled following the change of power regime from Soekarno to Soeharto. Gradually, BAL 1960 functioned only to take care of the land affairs that amounted to about 30% of the entire mainland of Indonesia. Meanwhile, nearly 70% of Indonesia's land is declared a state forest area based on the Forest Law issued in 1967. Under this law, the state controls all rights to control, manage, and use forests.

BAL 1960 also contradicts indigenous peoples' rights to control land and natural resources. Although it is based on the territorial conception of hak ulayat, this regulation does not automatically recognize indigenous peoples' rights. Their rights will be recognized if they meet the criteria of indigenous peoples and, more importantly, if their rights/interests do not conflict with national interests (chapter 3 BAL 1960).

Land and Forest Governance under the New Order Period

When Soeharto took over power in 1966, land and natural resources were considered a state revenue source to finance national development. This change of orientation significantly changed the forest and agrarian policy in Indonesia. Prominent features of this period were the liberalization of forest exploitation, the transmigration program to facilitate the exploitation of natural resources, and the change in the land reform policy into land registration (Bachriadi & Wiradi, 2011). Using the conception of

1 P.P. No.56 / PRP / 1960 and P.P. No.224 / 1961
the State's Right to Control, the agrarian law politics of the New Order regime developed a process of marginalizing the role and position of UUPA 1960 and developing other laws such as Forestry Law (U.U. No.5 / 1967). Consequently, sectionalism emerged when controlling the land and other natural resources. The state forest laws are also entitled to negate the rights of the people, especially the rights of indigenous peoples living in the forest.

The critical concept in Forestry Law is dividing the so-called "forest area" into "non-forest area." The Ministry of Forestry determines "forest area" by establishing the Agreement on Forest Use Agreement, which states the size and location of the areas of land declared as forest areas throughout Indonesia. The total area of land declared as "forestry" currently covers about 62.6% of the total land area in Indonesia. In this area, the BAL 1960 is not applicable.

Forest Law describes that "forest area" means a particular area designated by the government to maintain its existence as a permanent forest. Furthermore, it shall be declared 'all forests within the territory of the Republic of Indonesia including the natural resources contained therein controlled by the State for the greatest prosperity of the people,' and authorizes the government to regulate and administer all matters relating to the determination of the status of territories called forest areas or non-forest areas; everything related to forest products; and setting legal relationships between people and forests.

Meanwhile, 'non-forest areas' are where land tenure, utilization, and use arrangements are subject to BAL 1960. These "non-forest areas" include urban areas, settlements, agricultural lands, and large plantations. Developing a large plantation area within a "forest area" requires excluding the planned area from the forest area. In return, there has to be a placement of land originating from "non-forest areas" to be included as part of "forestry." Interestingly, the areas of smallholder agriculture within the "forest area" are often reckoned as part of "forestry." In many places in Indonesia, especially outside of Java, many communities still work on agricultural activities in a brazen way called shifting cultivation. Agricultural activities using rotating fields are close, both in physical and cultural terms, to the existence of an area of the so-called forest. This often leads to prolonged conflicts within forest areas between local communities and companies that have acquired Forest Management Rights (HPH or HPHTI), as well as governments establishing agricultural fields, often even villages, as state forest areas.

In order to accelerate economic growth, the New Order government issued a policy inviting as many domestic and foreign capital owners as possible to invest their capital in Indonesia. At this time, investors were given forest rights concessions for forests outside Java, especially in Sumatra and Kalimantan. Since the 1970s, HPH has flourished unhinderedly. Until 2000, forest areas managed by forest concession companies accounted for 60 million ha of forest to logging companies for more than 30 years, with the total number of companies reaching the number of HPHs increased by about 600 (Barr, 2001; Awang, 2006; Hidayat, 2016).

In the 1970s, by granting forest concessions, the forestry sector accounted for the second largest foreign exchange after the petroleum sector. In 1974, foreign exchange earnings increased to 564 million U.S. dollars (U.S.) compared to 1968, which was only 6 million U.S. dollars. At the end of 1968, Indonesia became a major log producer, more significant than the rest of Africa and Latin America, contributing 2.1 billion dollars (about 40 percent of the global log market). In 1985, log export was banned by the government because the government wanted to make a policy to integrate the utilization of forest resources from upstream to downstream by building Plywood. Since Plywood's policy is successful, the government plans to establish a pulp and paper industry. The consequence of this policy is that the government promotes Industrial Plantation (HTI).
In the late 1980s, the government planned to open 1.5 million hectares of HTI crops and even 4.4 million to 6 million hectares by the 2000s. However, up to 1998, only 2.4 million hectares of HTI were cleared (Hidayat, 2016).

Since the 1970s, the New Order government has had an extensive transmigration program. This program can be traced back to the colonial period called 'Kolonisatie,' which was launched in response to the need for labor due to Dutch plantation expansion and also part of the opening up of new frontier in less densely populated (Levan, 2003). The government of Indonesia considered this program as a rural development program to utilize the agricultural potential of less populated areas by providing labor for agricultural expansion (Hardjono, 1977). Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Papua are the leading destinations for the transmigration program. Usually, the government has provided two to five hectares of land for each migrant household, sufficient for subsistence cultivation and financial support until they can live independently.

Since then, the government of Indonesia has created different types of transmigration to fulfill labor for the plantation and forest industries. In 1985, the government initiated the Transmigration Industrial Plantation (HTI Trans) program to develop industrial timber plantations with a partnership pattern between private companies and transmigrants (Nawir et al., 2003). The government also created Nucleus Estate Transmigration (Trans PIR) for the expansion of palm oil or rubber plantations they created. In Jambi, the location for the palm oil plantation transmigration is in Sungai Bahar, up north of the Harapan rainforest.

In the New Order era, Indonesia lost 40 million hectares of forest because it was converted to oil palm, transmigration areas, HPH and HTI concessions, agricultural expansion, and illegal logging practices (Hidayat, 2016). Since 1983, efforts have been made to repair forest destruction. The government divides forest restoration into two categories, namely reforestation and afforestation. Reforestation is focused on state forest areas, while reforestation is carried out on non-forested land areas (outside state forest areas). The funds to repair forest destruction come from the government and donors. Since 1970, funds from donors have been financing rehabilitation projects on the island of Java, and in 1981, rehabilitation projects outside Java were begun. However, generally, donor funds are not used for forest rehabilitation purposes by the Forestry Department (Nawir, 2008)

Decentralization Period

The post-New Order period was marked by a change in the political system from centralization to decentralization. Decentralization means transferring political, financial, and administrative authority from the central government to the regions (districts or municipalities) so that the government can provide and guarantee better public services for the community. Changes in governance are often interpreted differently by local governments. In the forestry sector, several local governments have interpreted decentralization as a complete freedom to do whatever they want with forest resources in their areas. As a result, forests are treated as a source of timber that generates the local revenue needed for local development. Inevitably, the situation will result in an increasing rate of deforestation (Barr, 2006; Siswanto & Wardojo, 2006). This period they also marked the increase of conflict in forest areas. Indigenous people who feel disadvantaged by the New Order government demand forest management to be returned to the community. This conflict occurs mostly between indigenous communities and logging concessions (Awang, 2006).

This period also shows a new tendency to overcome deforestation and forest degradation through the REDD scheme. The government of Indonesia believes that REDD + is a potential way to protect forests and effectively reduce the impact of climate
change. Thus, REDD + can help save forests and help Indonesia obtain financial benefits from carbon trading. From this perspective, REDD + can provide development funding sources without destroying forests (Indrarto et al., 2013). Therefore, certain forest rights that prevent deforestation, including Ecosystem Restoration concessions, are considered as part of this scheme.

The latest effort to regulate forest rights issues for communities is implemented through Social Forestry. The social forestry program will be conducted by allocating state-controlled forest resources as regulated in the Minister of Environment and Forestry Regulation No. 83 of 2016 on Social Forestry. This regulation asserts that social forestry is a "sustainable forest management system carried out within state forest areas or forest rights/customary forests implemented by local communities or Indigenous and tribal peoples as critical actors to improve their welfare, environmental balance and socio-cultural dynamics in the form of Village Forest, Community Forest, Community Plantation Forest, Community Forest, Indigenous Forest, and Forestry Partnership. This policy is expected to be the means to create and accelerate the access and distribution of forest resources assets, resolve tenure conflicts in forest areas, reduce poverty, and improve the welfare of people living in and around forest areas.

Small-Scale Oil Palm Plantation in Muaro Jambi

Oil palm plantations in Jambi have a long and complex history, starting with the Indonesian government's policy of encouraging the development of the agribusiness sector to improve the national economy. In 1968, the Indonesian government began introducing policies that supported the development of oil palm plantations as part of the agricultural development program. With its adequate land area and suitable climate conditions, Jambi became one of the strategic areas for the development of oil palm plantations.

Over time, Jambi began to attract the attention of local and foreign investors interested in investing in the oil palm plantation sector. In the 1980s, large companies began to enter Jambi, building plantations and palm oil processing plants. Data from the Jambi Provincial Plantation Service shows that in 1990, the area of oil palm plantations in Jambi reached 200,000 hectares. This figure continues to increase to more than 1 million hectares in 2020, making Jambi one of the provinces with the largest oil palm plantation area in Indonesia.

In the early 1980s, the Indonesian government also launched a transmigration program to distribute people from densely populated areas on Java Island to less populated areas, including Jambi. This program not only aims to reduce population density but also to increase agricultural productivity in new areas. One of the commodities favored in this program is oil palm, which is considered to have high economic potential. According to Suhaibe (2021), between 1988 and 2000, many immigrants in Jambi participated in this program and were involved in oil palm cultivation.

Over time, the expansion of oil palm plantations in Jambi has increased. In 2000, the area of oil palm plantations in Jambi reached around 300,000 hectares, increasing to more than 1 million hectares in 2020. According to Kubitza et al. (2018), the expansion of oil palm plantations in Sumatra, including Jambi, was triggered by the increasing global demand for palm oil as a raw material for the food and biodiesel industries. With the increasing investment in this sector, many large companies have started operating in Jambi, which has a significant impact on the local community.

However, this expansion is subject to controversy. Much criticism has been raised regarding the environmental and social impacts of palm oil plantation development. Deforestation to open up land for plantations causes the loss of natural habitat and contributes to climate change. According to a report published by Greenpeace, Indonesia
loses more than 1.1 million hectares of forest yearly, with Jambi being one of the most affected areas.

The Indonesian government has launched a new Ecosystem Restoration program in response to the increasing forest destruction. The Ecosystem Restoration Concession concept was introduced in Indonesia in the early 2000s by the Ministry of Forestry in association with BirdLife International and the British Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The concept of reconstructing forest ecosystems using private enterprises, financial incentives, and market-oriented tools was promoted by transnational conservation organizations to lessen tropical forest deforestation. The Indonesian Ministry of Forestry granted the first concession license to the Indonesian Ecosystem Restoration Company (PT. REKI) in 2005 for the Harapan Rainforest Project in Sumatra. This project was granted permission to administer a 52,170-hectare concession in the province of South Sumatra two years later and a 46,385-hectare concession in the province of Jambi in 2010.

On the other hand, the end of logging concessions in the early 2000s created vulnerable conditions for state forest zones, leading to encroachment and illegal logging. By early 2000, much of the state forest zone was targeted as encroaching by peasant movement, including the Asialog’s logging concession area, which later became the area of Harapan Rainforest Ecosystem Restoration. From that moment on, a growing movement in the Harapan Rainforest of Jambi, Sumatra, has caught the attention of environmentalists and social justice advocates alike. This unique ecosystem, home to diverse wildlife and indigenous communities like the Batin Sembilan, is central to a complex land conflict. We are seeing a clash between conservation efforts, industrial interests, and the rights of local people, highlighting the challenges of balancing environmental protection with community livelihoods.

From the peasant's perspective, participating in the occupation movement in the forest is the way to improve their livelihood. As described in the following two stories:

Aming is a Javanese man who moved to Sei Ikat in 2008 because he wishes to have sovereignty in life. In his opinion, making a living as a farmer is more promising. Before residing in Sei Ikat, Aming tried various kinds of work. He once worked as a driver and unskilled laborer in Medan, West Sumatra. He found difficulties in fulfilling his own needs, let alone starting a family. When he first moved to Sei Ikat, he was 22 and struggled against P.T. REKI. As for now, Aming has succeeded in owning land and a house. He lives in Sei Ikat with his wife – a Palembang woman named Suli – and their little child. So far, Aming has managed to open 2 hectares of land in his backyard. One-third of his land was planted with various plants, such as fruits and vegetables and palawija. Fruits, vegetables, and palawija are planted for consumption. Meanwhile, he will start to plant the oil palm after clearing the land. (Interviewed with Aming, 2018).

Ani, a woman born in Tasik in 1975, previously worked as a laborer in a factory in Tasik and finally became a trader in the diaspora, precisely in Sulawesi. During her trading activities, Ani managed to save money and buy land in her hometown in Tasik. It is recorded that she has bought land twice; the first for 3 million and the second for 5 million. She hopes that her savings can be used for the future. Previously, while living in Sulawesi and Tasik, her life was relatively happy because all her economic needs were met. Ani's previous husband was a relatively well-off, and she had a child with him. Not long after her husband died, Ani remarried a man from Tasik named Kris. They both agreed to move to Sei Ikat in early 2000, hoping to have a large area of land for their garden. Even with the current condition of the land and house where she lives, mainly because there is no electricity and the distance is quite far to get water. In addition, the hot and arid natural conditions around her house sometimes make her feel uncomfortable to stay. However, there is hope for Teh Ai to live there finally, namely the land managed
by her husband and the plan to plant oil palms that will be carried out this year, which provides a glimmer of hope for her future. Ani is a diligent person. Even though her current condition is complex, she remains steadfast and accepts her fate with an open heart. She believes that everything depends on her husband's blessings as long as she, as a wife, is always obedient. Every morning to evening, she always takes care of her fields tirelessly. Slowly, she pulls out the grass and weeds behind the house until the land is clean, and little by little, she plants it with secondary crops and various fruits such as kale, beans, cucumbers, chilies, papaya, and cassava that can be used as daily food. She works in her fields without the help of her husband, who works as a wage laborer outside the home and always comes home late at night. (Interviewed with Ani, 2018)

The two stories above show that smallholder farmers in Jambi have strong motivations to own land and plant oil palm. One of the main reasons is the high economic potential of this commodity. Social factors are important in smallholder farmers' decisions to plant oil palm. In many communities, owning oil palm land is considered a symbol of status and success. Smallholder farmers are looking for financial gain and want to improve the quality of life for themselves and their communities. McCarthy (2010) noted that the growth of the oil palm industry is often accompanied by improvements in infrastructure and public services in the area, which improves the community's quality of life. However, as stated by Pramudya et al. (2017), many smallholders operate on land that does not have official certificates, making them vulnerable to eviction and land conflicts. This means that they have to fight not only for economic sustainability but also for their land rights.

Social relations in the farming community.

Social relations among farmers in Hutan Harapan play a vital role in their experience growing oil palms. In this context, interactions between farmers are not just about working relationships but also reflect the values of togetherness and solidarity. Farming communities often help each other in planting and caring for oil palm plants. For example, when the planting season arrives, farmers gather to help each other prepare the land and plant seedlings. This activity speeds up the farming process and strengthens social ties between them.

According to research by Seminar et al. (2018), solidarity among farmers is crucial in facing their challenges. Cooperation between farmers is essential in situations that are often difficult, such as unpredictable weather or pest attacks. They share knowledge and experiences and support each other emotionally. This shows that strong social relations can be a valuable resource for farmers. Helping each other increases productivity and builds a more profound sense of trust and solidarity among community members.

However, social dynamics within this community can also be affected by tensions that arise from competition for access to land and resources. When large companies enter an area, there is often conflict between farmers who want to maintain their land rights and companies seeking to expand their plantations. This tension can create an uneasy atmosphere within the community, where farmers feel threatened by the presence of large companies that could change the way they farm.

This can cause divisions within the community and reduce previous solidarity. In such situations, farmers may have to choose between maintaining their rights or compromising for short-term gain. McCarthy (2010) notes that processes of inclusion and exclusion in the agrarian context often create deep inequities among farmers. These inequities can worsen social relations within the community, where some farmers may feel marginalized or have no say in decisions that affect their lives.
Tensions arising from competition for resources can also change the way farmers interact with each other. In some cases, farmers who previously supported each other can become more competitive and suspicious of each other. This can lead to internal conflict that undermines the solidarity and cooperation that has been established. As a result, once strong and cohesive farming communities can become fragmented, existing social relationships can become increasingly fragile.

In facing these challenges, farming communities need to find ways to strengthen their social ties. One approach that can be taken is to establish discussion forums where farmers can share experiences and strategies to overcome existing challenges. In this way, they can support each other and strengthen existing solidarity. In addition, advocacy for farmers' rights is also critical so that their voices are heard in the context of broader agrarian policies.

Overall, social relations within the farming community in Hutan Harapan are complex and dynamic. While solidarity and cooperation can increase productivity and welfare, tensions arising from resource competition can threaten these relationships. Therefore, it is important to continue to seek ways to strengthen social ties among farmers so that they can more effectively face common challenges.

Unresolved Land Rights Issues

One of the biggest challenges faced by farmers in Hutan Harapan is land rights and land disputes. This problem has become complex and multifaceted, involving not only legal but also social and economic aspects. In this context, many farmers plant oil palms on land they consider theirs. However, they often do not have solid legal evidence to support their ownership claims. This uncertainty creates a vulnerable situation for farmers, affecting their survival.

Berenschot and Dhiaulhaq (2023) show that large companies often exploit the unclear status of land ownership. These companies can quickly evict farmers from land that they consider theirs. This practice not only creates injustice but also causes prolonged conflict. Confrontations between farmers and companies often last for a long time, creating tensions that affect not only individuals but also the community.

This prolonged conflict disrupts farmers' daily lives and creates an atmosphere of uncertainty. When farmers feel threatened with losing their land, this can cause prolonged stress and significant psychological impacts. In addition, uncertainty about land ownership status can also hinder investment and sustainable agricultural development. In the long term, this issue can decrease productivity and farmer welfare.

These land disputes impact farmers' economic and social well-being. When farmers lose access to their land, the impact is far-reaching. They not only lose their source of livelihood but also the identity that has been woven into the land. Land is not just a place to plant but also an integral part of farmers' social and cultural life. Losing access to land can damage social relationships that have been built over many years, which in turn can affect community cohesion.

CONCLUSION

In agrarian studies, it is essential to understand the dynamics that occur in the field. In Jambi Province, Indonesia, oil palm plantations managed by local farmers are often seen not only as economic activities but also as part of their social struggles and cultural identities. According to Jonas Hein et al. (2016), access and land ownership relations, such as in Muaro Jambi, are greatly influenced by agrarian policies implemented by the State.

Data shows that in 2020, the area of oil palm plantations in Jambi reached 1.5 million hectares, making it one of the provinces with the most extensive oil palm
plantations in Indonesia (Berenschot & Dhiaulhaq, 2023). However, behind these numbers, there are stories of farmers struggling to gain rights to their land. In this context, understanding local history and agrarian practices is crucial. Farmers are fighting to maintain their land and secure the sustainability of their lives and cultural identities amidst the rapid flow of modernization.

The struggles of oil palm farmers in Jambi cannot be separated from the broader social dynamics in Indonesia. Muchtar Habibi (2023) revealed that agrarian changes in Sumatra, including in Jambi, often involved complex class conflicts. Small farmers are often trapped in a dependency relationship with large companies, resulting in exploitation and injustice in resource access. In this context, many farmers feel marginalized by policies that are more beneficial to large companies. For example, in Jambi, many farmers do not have formal access to land, so they are forced to work as farm laborers on oil palm plantations owned by large companies. David E. Gilbert (2020) shows that transforming farmers into laborers is not only an economic problem but also reflects changes in the social structure and power relations in society.

This study also shows how oil palm farmers in Jambi build social networks and solidarity. Santoso et al. (2024), in their study of the farmer movement in Cipari, for example, shows how local communities can unite to fight for their rights. This reflects that agrarian struggles are not only individual but also collective, influenced by the social and cultural relations that exist in the community.

Finally, this study seeks to provide in-depth insights into how oil palm farmers in Jambi adapt to the social and economic changes that occur, facing challenges to create more effective survival strategies.

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