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### Navigating Investment and Dispossession: Gendered Impacts of the Oil Palm 'Land Rush' in East Kalimantan, Indonesia

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## Abstract

In Southeast Asia, oil palm has played an important role in driving 'land deals' and in providing a focal point for activist and advocacy responses to this phenomenon. In Indonesia, and particularly on the island of Kalimantan, investment in oil palm has been associated with accelerated forms of land acquisition and investment, and the dispossession of small-scale farmers and indigenous people, signalling far-reaching implications for well-being and equity. To date, limited attention has been paid to the gender dimensions of oil palm investments, despite there being clear links with parallel debates on gender and land rights, and despite recent calls to centre labour (productive and reproductive) in land grab analyses. In this paper, we use a feminist political ecology optic to explore the dynamics of gender within the current oil palm-led 'land rush' in Indonesia, with the aim of unsettling overly simple dualisms such as those around foreign and domestic land grabs; smallholder and plantation modes of operation; and migrant and 'local' communities; male capacities and female vulnerabilities. The paper draws on data from an ongoing study of the gendered impacts of investments in oil palm in five communities in East Kalimantan which have been substantially affected by large scale plantation development as well as smaller scale investments in oil palm by migrant entrepreneurs. Here, a simple land grab narrative is complicated by contrasting experiences and responses of different kinds of land users, and conflicts within communities. Together, these point to the ways oil palm becomes one of the technologies that simultaneously changes the meaning of land, legitimates particular forms of exclusion and produces particular forms of gendered agency amongst both investors and the dispossessed. Our study points to the importance of bringing a material and materialist feminist perspective to bear on the analysis of the global land rush in a context where local communities are not singular, where the social qualities of land reflect gendered histories of resource investment in the context of socio-political change and where oil palm's agency and effect is wrought through its gendered socio-political history in this context.

## INTRODUCTION

In many parts of Indonesia, investment in oil palm has been associated with accelerated forms of land acquisition, signalling far-reaching implications for well-being and equity for smallholders and forest peoples in rural communities (Obidzinski et al., 2010; Potter 2011; Jiwan 2013, White et al., 2010). Whilst early analyses equated oil palm expansion with large scale corporate-led dispossession, debate around oil palm is increasingly nuanced by recognition that its expansion involves a diverse range of differently positioned actors, and that the social impacts of this crop vary between types of land holder and modes of incorporation into oil palm systems (Obidzinski et al., 2010, McCarthy 2010). Even within any particular setting, incorporation may involve large scale corporate land acquisition and the forging (at times, quite literally) of smallholder leasing/contract schemes, coupled with the arrival of migrant contract workers. At the same time, smallholders may themselves readily convert their fields to oil palm where resources allow. Such structural variations are what makes it possible to simultaneously identify on the one hand cases of accumulation by dispossession, accompanied by conflict and resistance (Colchester et al. 2006; McCarthy 2010; Li, 2010), and cases of smallholder 'enthusiasm' for oil palm, that attract policy responses aimed at facilitating production and market access (Rist et al. 2010; Rival and Levang 2014).

Whilst oil palm has played an important role in driving large scale 'land deals' in the form of private sector oil palm concessions, and in providing a focal point for activism and advocacy framed around a narrative of dispossession by large scale corporate agriculture, this is a crop which is also central to the emergence of a class of smallholder investors, whose incremental land acquisitions for oil palm may indeed signal entrepreneurialism and rural dynamism, but also bring complex patterns of agrarian differentiation and dispossession (McCarthy et al., 2012; Hall 2012). As one of Indonesia's important boom crops, oil palm has engendered each of the four powers of exclusion identified by Hall et al (2011): regulation, the market, force and legitimation.

There is an emerging literature around the gender dimensions of oil palm, which links with parallel debates on gender, land rights and large scale land deals more generally (Behrman et al., 2012, Daley and Pallas, 2014) and that in some measure echoes recent calls to cite labour (productive and reproductive) in land grab analyses (Li, 2011; Razavi, 2003, Tsikata and Golah 2010). Beyond Indonesia, gender-focused studies of oil palm include work by Koczberski (2007) on gender relations in smallholder schemes in Papua New Guinea, Yong in Sarawak (in press), and by Piacenza (2012) on gendered impacts of corporate oil palm expansion in Uganda. Other studies explore women's role in small-scale red palm oil production and trade in pre-colonial and colonial West Africa (e.g. Maier 2009). In Indonesia, an explicit focus on gender impacts is provided by Julia and White (2012), and by Li (2015), both focusing on the impact of oil palm companies in West Kalimantan, whilst Elmhirst and Darmastuti (2014) investigate the interplay between smallholder oil palm investments, emerging multilocal livelihood practices and migrant women's remittances in Lampung province. Each of these studies highlights the ways in which women's role within prevailing and emergent gender divisions of labour, women's lack of formal recognition in relation to emerging property rights, and women's limited engagement in *public* decision-making ensure the social, economic and environmental impacts of oil palm are differentiated by gender.

In this paper, we build from the insights these studies have provided in order to explore the dynamics of gender in oil palm investments in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. Oil palm development in East Kalimantan started in 1982 with the then Indonesian New Order government's Project NES (PIR), a nucleus-plasma scheme managed by the state-run plantation company PTP VI. Investment has accelerated rapidly in recent years, led by the private sector. Whilst East Kalimantan is not among the country's leading oil palm producing provinces, the total area under oil palm was recorded in 2012 as having reached 961,802 hectares, of which the bulk (717,825 ha) comprised private estates, 17, 237

ha of state-run plantations, and the latter comprising with 226,765 ha as ‘smallholder’ oil palm (Dinas Perkebunan Propinsi Kalimantan Timur 2013).

The oil palm transformation is the latest phase in the production of East Kalimantan’s landscape, the history of which has been marked since the colonial era by successive waves of large scale resource extraction (timber, coal mining and timber plantation) and the opening up of transmigration resettlement sites (Deddy 2006; Gönner 2011; Haug 2014). This, coupled with the changing modalities of resource governance that underpin such transformations, has changed lives and livelihoods of the region’s various communities, in many cases, beyond recognition. These communities include Dayak swidden cultivators, Malay smallholders, and migrants whose families originated from various regions beyond Kalimantan (state-sponsored Javanese transmigrants, migrants from South Sulawesi and from Nusa Tenggara Barat and Timur). The practices and interactions of these groups have themselves contributed to changing resource dynamics in East Kalimantan.

The research discussed here began with the proposition that the social and gender impacts of oil palm reflect an interplay between historically and ecologically-embedded gender norms and the ways in which communities have been incorporated into oil palm systems. The study is linked in part to the CGIAR’s global study of gender norms and agency in agricultural and natural resource management innovations, which was designed in line with an approach to gendered agency that is embedded in a liberal economic framework emphasizing the boosting of agricultural productivity through women’s empowerment. However, in this paper, we diverge in part from this framing to use a conceptual framework developed from feminist political ecology, a subfield of political ecology which, in its explicit commitment to tackling gendered inequality and injustice, directs attention towards gendered processes underpinning the politics of resource access in the context of accumulation, enclosure and dispossession, whilst at the same time, attending to the gendered agency of those struggling for justice and fairness in the face of transformation.<sup>1</sup> Our aim is to develop a better understanding of variations in the impact of oil palm investments on differently positioned communities and on different actors within these.

We draw on the framing offered by Daley and Pallas (2014) in their study of gender and commercial pressures on land which we see as relevant to the gendered impacts of oil palm investment in East Kalimantan. They suggest that women’s vulnerability is attributable to (i) systemic discrimination in relation to access to and control of land, (ii) systemic discrimination in socio-cultural and political relations that limit voice, choice and participation in decision-making at all levels, (iii) discrimination that underpins income poverty in terms of lower cash wages and contractual precarity, and (iv) gender-based violence and the physical vulnerability of women. We suggest that how these dimensions unfold depends on historical, cultural and political context, and on the socially-produced qualities of oil palm that give a gender dimension to its symbolic and material effects. We therefore link Daley and Pallas’s framing to FPE in order to produce a multi-layered conceptual framework that highlights in turn:

- (i) The importance of historical and ecological context for the reproduction of gender norms and dynamics. We draw here on the concept of socio-natures to mark the social qualities of natural resources generally (land, forest) and of oil palm in particular, which are continually produced through material and meaning-laden processes of commodification and enclosure (Nevels and Peluso 2008). Understanding the impact of oil palm requires an understanding of its insertion into the socio-political dynamics of East Kalimantan’s political forest (cf Vandergeest and Peluso 2001), where different formations of tenure, property and resource access are of key importance. Contrasting community histories may give shape not only to gender norms and

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<sup>1</sup> See Elmhirst 2015 for an overview of feminist political ecology.

gender relations around resource access, but also to variations in the material and meaning-laden effects of oil palm investments and modes of incorporation. Our analysis therefore begins by outlining these variations in the study communities, selected to represent a contrasting configurations of enclosure and commodification, and of gender, class and ethnicity.

- (ii) Interlocking dimensions of gendered resource access and control, labour processes, and social relations of production and reproduction and how these link with the specific unfoldings of gender norms within different communities. Our analysis is loosely drawn from a combination of feminist political economy (Razavi 2003) that highlights gender dynamics in productive and reproductive spheres, and theories of access in order to extend analysis of agrarian and forest change into the reproductive sphere, and thus bring into view care activities that contribute to the reproduction of human life (child and elder care, domestic labour), and the relationships through which such activities are accomplished (family, community social networks) (Razavi 2011, Colfer and Minarchek 2013). In line with an earlier anthropology literature (Tsing 1990; Colfer 2008,), we suggest that the socio-cultural specificities within the study communities have shaped a reconfiguring of the relationship between production and reproduction, and that this is important for understanding the impacts of oil palm investments on livelihoods, practices of care and the ability to realise the benefits of resource access (Ribot and Peluso 2003). The second part of our analysis therefore focuses on these elements and draws out contrasts and similarities across case study communities as each represents a particular resource access history, a specific story of incorporation into oil palm systems and a particular configuration of gender norms and practices.
- (iii) Gender as intersectional: this means attending to the ways in which configurations of gender norms and practices can only be understood by attending to the ways gender, life course stage (age), ethnicity, class, race, sexuality and other socio-political or cultural categories interrelate, and through this interrelationship, shape how subordination is experienced and lived in particular geographical and historical settings (Lykke 2010). The starting point here is that a single categorical analysis cannot sufficiently reflect the heterogeneity of lived experience, and thus investigation is needed of the dynamics of intersecting positions which can reveal what kinds of social difference come to matter in particular settings, and the norms and practices that follow from (and contribute to) these (Nightingale 2011). In the context of East Kalimantan resource politics, ethnic and to an extent, religious differences carry particular resonance, whilst landscape and livelihood transformation has elaborated the significance of generation/age differences, and has contributed to accentuated class differentiation. In the final part of our analysis we suggest that in particular these categories of difference (gender, age, ethnicity, class) need to be held in play for fully understanding the dynamics of gendered agency in relation to oil palm investments, and for making sense of patternings of agency, exclusion and inclusion in decision-making, political participation and social change across different spaces.

In combining these FPE elements, we seek to illuminate the processes that account for variations in the gendered impacts of oil palm investments, and how these take shape in specific historical and geographical settings across East Kalimantan. We see this method of analysis as a crucial first step for clarifying the terrain on which interventions to tackle the impacts of oil palm on communities might be constructed (whether through liberal tools such as CSR and codes of conduct, or through transformative, transparent and equitable forms of governance at national and more localised scales).

This paper draws on primary data from five communities in East Kalimantan where livelihoods have been affected by corporate (and to a lesser extent, smallholder) oil palm investment, which in all

cases, began within the last 10 years. The communities selected reflect a range of modes of incorporation into oil palm systems, migration and settlement history, and varying natural resource contexts (upland, mid-watershed and coastal), i.e. they have contrasting socio-natural histories. In addition, the communities include a number of different ethnic groups, which, whilst broadly sharing the relatively egalitarian gender relations frequently identified with the Southeast Asian region (Atkinson and Errington 1990), nevertheless have distinctive gender dynamics that are associated in turn with each community's social and ecological history. Four of the communities are in the district of Berau, whilst one is in East Kutai. The table below outlines the principal characteristics of these sites: names of the communities have been anonymised.

	<b>Community characteristics</b>	<b>Livelihood</b>	<b>Mode of incorporation</b>	<b>Oil palm companies<sup>2</sup></b>
<b>Community A, subdistrict Segah, Berau District</b>	Gaai Dayak community in upland area of Segah river basin.	Swidden rice, rattan collection, hunting, mixed trees cultivation (kebun), gold mining, wage work on nearby oil palm plantations.	Corporate ‘leasing’ of community land under inti-plasma model; <sup>3</sup> compensation for forest products from incorporated land is distributed amongst community.	PT Malindo Mas (8089 ha) PT Natura Pacific Nusantara (4335 ha) PT Berau Karetindo PT Mulya Inti Perkasa
<b>Community B, subdistrict Segah, Berau District</b>	Neighbourhood known locally as Kampung TKI (acronym for migrant workers) – Indonesian returnees from Malaysian oil palm work, of various ethnic origins. Neighbourhood established on edge of Gunung Sari, upland community on Segah River.	Food cropping, oil palm cultivation, wage work on nearby oil palm plantations.	Independent smallholder investment in oil palm on land acquired from local community.	PT Malindo Mas (8089 ha) PT Natura Pacific Nusantara (4335 ha) PT Berau Karetindo PT Mulya Inti Perkasa PT Hutan Hijau Mas (7305 ha)
<b>Community C, subdistrict Segah, Berau District</b>	Transmigration settlement est. in 1982, close to Gunung Sari. Mostly Javanese and Sundanese origin, migrants from Nusa Tenggara Timur.	Rain-fed rice fields, mixed food cropping, small animals, wage labour on oil palm plantations.	Some independent smallholder investment in oil palm, proposed plasma-inti arrangements.	PT Malindo Mas (8089 ha) PT Hutan Hijau Mas (7305 ha) PT Agrindo Berau.
<b>Community D, subdistrict Talisaayan, Berau District</b>	Community comprising a mix of Baloy Dayak, Bugis (South Sulawesi) and Timor (Flores) people in a coastal area.	Swidden rice, tree crops (kebun), kemiri (candlenut), peppers, cocoa and maize, wage labour on oil palm plantations.	Corporate ‘leasing’ of community land. Some independent smallholder investment in oil palm, partially implemented plasma-inti arrangements.	PT Tanjung Buyu Perkasa (7274 ha)
<b>Community E, subdistrict Telen, District of East Kutai</b>	A Kenyah Dayak ‘resettlement’ community established around 1962 following downstream migration from up river.	Swidden rice, rubber, tree crops (kebun), wage labour on oil palm plantation.	Corporate ‘leasing’ of community land. Some independent smallholder investment in oil palm, partially implemented plasma-inti arrangements.	PT Bukit Subur (2000 ha) PT Tapian Nadenggan (800 ha in community E itself )

<sup>2</sup> Based on field surveys, August 2014.

<sup>3</sup> The ‘plasma’ model, or plasma-inti rakyat now involves 20% of the plantation area distributed back to community members as planted plots from which they receive profits once fees and costs have been deducted.



Data collection was undertaken in the five communities between August and November 2014, using a qualitative methodology comprising focus group discussions with group members selected according to gender and age (youth being men and women aged up to 23).<sup>4</sup> Key informant interviews were undertaken with community leaders in each case, and a series of individual interviews conducted with selected men and women to explore life stories and the relationship between poverty dynamics and oil palm investments of various kinds. Questions focused particularly on the impact of oil palm and peoples' engagement with this crop, whilst simultaneously exploring shifting gender norms and gender dynamics within the communities. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, then subjected to thematic analysis using in part an open coding system but also analytical codes developed from the theoretical framework.

## LANDSCAPE HISTORIES AND MODES OF INCORPORATION

East Kalimantan has a long history of large scale resource extraction, from colonial interests in coal and other resources, to more recent corporate interests in minerals, timber and commercial tree crops such as oil palm. From the 1967 onwards, with the enactment of the Basic Forestry Law No. 5 of 1967, access to and control of land resources was profoundly shaped by the state's authority over areas classified as *kawasan hutan* (forest zone), through which areas were divided into land use categories that included production forest (mainly for timber extraction and timber plantations), protection forest (known as *hutan lindung*; mainly for the purpose of ecological protection), conservation forest (which include national parks and nature reserves), and convertible forest, which is forest conversion into industrial scale agricultural land and other purposes (transmigration, mining, infrastructure development, etc). On this basis, concessions for timber extraction in production forests have been granted (*Hak Pemungutan Hasil Hutan* or *HPHH*), whilst other forms of state resource control include conversion of forest area to land for agriculture, principally through state-run commercial plantations and the associated development of transmigration resettlement schemes. The resource geography of the study areas in Berau and East Kutai presents a mosaic of resource concessions, controlled and granted originally by the central government. In the era following the demise of Soeharto's New Order, new decentralization laws rescaled the capacity to approve the first three steps of the application process of the concessions of commercial plantations to private companies from central government in Jakarta to district governments (while the concessions will still be granted by the central government), accelerating the rapid expansion of oil palm plantations principally on former timber concession areas (Colchester et al. 2006, Urano 2014). This phase of rapid expansion corresponds with the period when oil palm was established in the study sites.

State control of resource access overlies customary (*adat*) resource control and tenure systems associated with the different ethnic groups living in and around state forest areas. Generally, in Dayak culture, concepts of land access involve a combination of individual rights (over certain kinds of 'point' resources such as rattan or honey), usufruct rights for the establishment of fruit gardens and rotating swiddens, and uncultivated lands often subject for common access (for hunting and gathering of forest products). This has resulted in a complex coexistence of collective rights (*hak ulayat* or communal rights) and de facto individual entitlements in Dayak areas (Semedi and Bakker 2014). As is the case elsewhere in Indonesia, the relationship between state and customary resource control is unequal as laws continue to be interpreted in ways that prioritise 'national development' over customary rights, even in circumstances where these are acknowledged. This continues to facilitate the allocation of

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<sup>4</sup> Following short visits to each of the communities by Elmhirst and Siscawati in July 2014, interviews and focus groups were conducted between August and November 2014 by a field team comprising Muhammad Fajri, Musdahliah Handayani, Samuel Hatsong, Hulyana and Deden Setiadi.

concessions or development permits by the state, in which both local and national governments have different roles within the granting process of the concessions and permits, over and above community interests.

A further dimension to the socio-political history of resource access and control in East Kalimantan concerns the role of migration and resettlement in land acquisition, tenure and resource control. The relationship between migration and resource control is multi-faceted. The establishment of state-sponsored transmigration settlements comprising settlers mostly from Java brought tenure systems based on individual household ownership of land resources as transmigrants were allocated two hectare plots for food and tree cropping through the scheme. Other forms of migration have also been apparent, including the settlement of Dayak swidden cultivators into 'resettlement villages' in the early 1960s, ostensibly to facilitate the delivery of state services to remote communities, and the arrival and settlement of migrants from South Sulawesi and elsewhere, propelled by engagement in logging and, more recently, the oil palm boom. Whilst these migration forms are different in many ways, overall, each has contributed to the development of a market for land, a growing recognition of the value of private property and alienable rights, and shifts in gender norms across all communities.

The study communities represent contrasting landscape histories, modes of incorporation into oil palm systems and from this, varied gendered impacts of oil palm. Whilst the study communities are, for the most part, geographically close, their particular histories have set in train particular gendered experiences with oil palm.

### *Community A*

This is a community that until recently was remote, and where relatively gender-egalitarian forms of resource access characterised swidden livelihoods. Compared to the other communities, there has been relatively limited impact of migrants from other ethnic groups. Timber extraction began the process of reworking men's and women's relationship with land, and with that, the gendered resource access and control, and this has continued as the social meaning of land and forest is changing in gendered ways. The community was founded in the 1960s by Ga'ai Dayak swidden cultivators who had moved from up river to settle on the edge of the Segah river, a location seen as more favourable for livelihoods. Resource access and control involved a mixture of communal and usufruct access processes negotiated within communities through customary mechanisms. In the late 1980s, the arrival of timber companies began the process of resource commodification, bringing wage work opportunities for men, and the arrival of some migrants (mostly Bugis from South Sulawesi). A relative abundance of land relative to community size has meant limited conflicts around access *within* the community or with other neighbouring communities: according to a former community official, most households maintained access to plots for cultivation of fruit trees and were able to access communal areas to collect gaharu, resin and rattan. Prior to the arrival of oil palm companies, a relatively small number of migrants had 'bought' land from community leaders (without any formal recognition), and this set in train the individualisation of property 'rights' for parts of the community. Emulating individualised land practices elsewhere in Indonesia, there is no formal restriction on women holding these rights, but the de facto position is for this to be male-dominated. Focus group discussions suggested also that decisions to sell were done within families, whether this was a woman's land or that of a man.

Since decentralisation, more attention by local government has been paid to this area as it has been incorporated into a land use planning scheme which distinguishes areas of KBK (forestry cultivation area) and KBNK (non-forestry cultivation area). People would clear lands within forest zone (*kawasan hutan*) for cultivation independently, without waiting for an allocation from the state or for an inheritance. When oil palm companies began taking an interest in the area, the Nature Conservancy Council, an NGO that had been active in developing a project introducing rubber to halt

deforestation, facilitated an agreement between five villages (of which community A was a signatory) to resist incorporation. In response, companies, working in tandem with representatives from local government, sought to win the hearts and minds of the community by taking them to oil palm areas in West Sulawesi, paid for by PT Berau Karetindo. According to one respondent, he had gone as a representative of the *adat* customary community. 'I told what I saw to the people in the village. Many people rejected it but I kept trying to convince them. Finally they could accept it.' Thus, the community withdrew from the earlier agreement and gave the go ahead for the oil palm company. From thereon, oil palm companies began the process of acquisition in 2006 and after some failure, this was finally realised in 2010. Now there are four companies developing nucleus-plasma oil palm estates in the area. This model involves acquisition of land by oil palm companies of which 20% of the total estate area is to be allocated as *plasma* plantations for participating farmers. After establishing the *plasma* estates, the companies would manage certain parts of the granted concession area on behalf of the farmers for 35 years, the latter receiving the remaining portion of the profit after the companies had deducted the repayment of bank loans and company management fees.

In this community, it was when negotiations to distribute 'plasma' allocations within the community began that changes to the social meaning of land came to be felt more intensely. Uncleared forests are now described by some members of the village leadership as 'idle lands', and this kind of discourse has been used to facilitate incorporation into oil palm systems. Whilst initially cash was raised through compensation paid for timber on land being acquired by the company, a market has opened up for buying and selling plasma allocations, with most sales by local people going to those from outside the community. The wait for plasma allocation has begun. So far, oil palm is still considered 'a rich man's crop', but the availability of wage work on the 'nucleus' provides access to cash for both men and women. Some of the comments in interviews suggest that the social meaning of land under oil palm is shifting – oil palm provides a pathway for exiting life as a swidden farmer, but as yet options are limited in this relatively marginalised community. Becoming an oil palm smallholder is beyond the horizon for both men and for women.

### **Community B**

Located downstream from Community A, community B was founded in 2005 by migrants returning from contract work in oil palm companies in Malaysia. The experience of this community demonstrates the profound impact that migrants with a very particular gendered life geography have had on this landscape, as economic, social and natural capital (cash, organisation skills and oil palm seeds) and experience honed in Malaysia have made possible smallholder investment in oil palm on an extensive scale. Thus, community B is emblematic of a very different mode of incorporation to that experienced in community A. Community B, known somewhat pejoratively as 'Kampung TKI' (*tenaga kerja Indonesia* – lit, migrant workers) is made up of a number of neighbourhoods located on the edge of a Ga'ai Dayak 'parent' community that had been changing rapidly following in-migration associated initially with logging and timber concessions, and that has recently been incorporated into the plasma-inti system of the KKK group (the concession was granted in 2004).

Community B has grown up outside the plasma-inti arrangement, although it has benefited from the proximity of the company's oil palm processing factory that is located nearby. Here, smallholder oil palm has been created through an arrangement that emulates that used by oil palm companies, but goes further in producing individualised property forms. Community B was initiated by a Bugis trader and broker, originally from South Sulawesi, but now running a business in the district capital Tanjung Redeb. At one time, he had worked in Malaysia. He negotiated acquisition of communal land from the leadership of the 'parent' community, and went on to distribute two-hectare plots to migrant returnees, most of whom originate either from South Sulawesi or from Nusa Tenggara Timur, and who have

followed kinship networks to this area, known as a location for oil palm migrant workers. Settlement began with the arrival of men, who cleared remaining bush and secondary forest, and they were then joined by women. In some instances, women migrants had also come ahead of husbands (often in tandem with a male relative) but had been able to negotiate access to land themselves. A new hierarchy has emerged within this independent smallholder community which reflects the area of land acquired by returning migrants combined with the ability to access capital and to manage labour through personal networks (for example kinship networks). Women from this emerging 'elite' play a critical role in managing labour and post-harvesting activities.

None of the allocations made to migrants has formal recognition by the state, and none are included in the oil palm company's plasma allocation but this has not prevented these smallholders from going ahead and planting their fields using capital acquired during their stint as migrant workers. The tenuous nature of land access arrangements is apparent in the reluctance migrant interviewees had when it came to discussing such questions, and in the hopes expressed by some respondents had that they might receive certification for their land. At the same time, land arrangements and links with the processing company are regulated by a cooperative (farmers' group) involving migrants, in ways that chime with Timmer's observation of the ways Bugis non-state actors emulate the governmentality of the state (Timmer 2010). The apparent 'success' of migrant smallholder oil palm entrepreneurs has had a profound effect on the landscape elsewhere in Segah, particularly in areas where migrants (and their descendants) predominate, such as Community C, described in the next section.

### *Community C*

Further contrast is offered by Community C, a transmigration settlement located close to the parent community of Community B. The settlement was created in the mid-1990s through the Indonesian government's transmigration resettlement programme, through which settler households were provided settlers with a small plot of land (ratified with a certificate), a house and some support for the first year. Transmigrants came from Java in 1997 during the El Nino drought, and faced difficulties associated with crop failure, poor soils and a lack of infrastructure linking them to marketing centres. As with transmigration settlements across Indonesia, the landscape was quite rapidly reworked to provide wet rice fields (*sawah tadah hujan*), whilst home gardens were created for growing fruit and other food crops. A second wave of migrants came in 2000 from Nusa Tenggara Timur and Nusa Tenggara Barat, drawn by the possibility of wage work in logging and, more recently, the nearby oil palm company (KLK Group). In terms of gender relations, transmigration has brought on the one hand gender norms that valorise women's position as manager of household finances and decision-making, whilst at the same time, land allocations were granted to a male household.

Transmigrants were not permitted to sell their certificated land for 10 years following their arrival, but more recently, the sale of land to new migrants is apparent, and the withdrawal of oversight by government has led some in the community to describe the land situation as 'less controlled' than it had been. As yet, the community has not been incorporated into the oil palm company plasma: instead, oil palm features as a smallholder crop, enabled by with strong social and economic links with migrant entrepreneurs in community B. A key element in this community is the role of in-migration and changes this has brought to the dynamics of resource access and control. Migration means that the community is ethnically diverse, and the presence of large numbers of wage workers or smallholders with limited subsistence opportunities has revitalised interest amongst land owners in growing easily marketable food crops, a role readily taken up by women in the community. As with the previous communities, in the face of growing individualisation of property relations, there is no formal restriction on women inheriting, buying and selling land, but there is a tendency to regard women's access as relational – via a husband or male household head. Growing demographic pressures has

meant that the social meaning of land is tied closely to processes of commodification and competition for resources. Moreover, there are many conflicts in the area over disputed boundaries (the settlement map issues by the province and that issued by the district are different), with disputes apparent between the neighbouring community (which claims some areas as customary or adat land). In describing the jostling for position that has ensured, one respondent from the transmigration settlement put it thus: 'In Segah all lands are under dispute, whether with a friend, the concession, anyone'.

### *Community D*

In community D, a Baloy Dayak community on Berau district's coast, pre-existing pressure on land resources and resultant disputes have given shape to the experience of oil palm incorporation in this community, just as oil palm investments have gone on to amplify conflicts. The community was founded in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when Dayak swidden cultivators from upstream settled in the area. Commodification and enclosure began with the arrival of logging companies in the 1980s followed by large scale investment in cocoa cultivation. The community has been affected in the past by the opening of a neighbouring transmigration settlement. The diversion of streams for the construction of wet rice fields by Javanese transmigrants created water problems for the Dayak community. This experience appears to have shaped a general wariness towards what is perceived as the resource-accessing ambitions of other ethnic groups, and compared to the other communities in this study, awareness of ethnic identity and its role in the division of resource allocations within the community is quite marked. Thus, there are separate areas of the village allocated for Dayak, Bugis and Timor migrants. There is a shortage of land generally as the area is flanked by transmigration settlements on one side and the sea on the other.

Decentralisation and regional autonomy have brought a renewed awareness of the concept of *adat* land, which can be cultivated but not owned: however, local leaders have worked to ensure that such usufruct entitlements are limited to Dayak people. In 2003 a lease was granted for oil palm through a plasma-inti arrangement, and in 2007 planting began. The company had leased concession land understood by community leaders as *adat* land, with a commitment on the part of the company to provide 20% of planted area as 'plasma'. The plantation also includes a contract work force housed in barracks outside the community, whose presence has prompted the arrival of others in search of land and work opportunities.

Incorporation of this community into oil palm production has been adverse: uneven and conflict-ridden to say the least. Whilst some members of the community received their plasma allocation, the majority have not. Allocations, where they have been made, are by household, and therefore gendered interests have tended to be located at this domestic level (i.e. relational and via a male family representative). The process has been shaped partly by the actions of the company, but also through the actions of some within the community leadership. In the context of there being an acknowledged insufficiency of plasma for the size of the community, discourses around 'fairness' have centred on questions of graded entitlement according to ethnic identity, understood in terms of people being 'native' Dayak. Conflicts even within this group are also evident: respondents described people changing the location of the poles used to mark out the plasma allocations, whilst neighbours have refused to sign documents establishing plasma entitlements. Overall, this is a community where oil palm is seen to bring wealth but only for a few and where there is certainty around land entitlements. The change in the social meaning of land that this has heralded is effectively an extension and intensification of similar processes that have been in evidence in the period prior to oil palm, when transmigration brought commodification, enclosure and dispute.

## *Community E*

A similar landscape history is evident in community E, founded by Kenyah Dayak shifting cultivators who had moved from the interior plateau of East Kalimantan in the early 1960s, prior to the timber boom of the 1970s. In the early 1970s, the community was formally designated as part of a Resettlement Project (*Resetelmen Penduduk*, or *Respen*), effectively to sedentarise and bring government services to a mobile community – the establishment of the village was marked by a visit of the then president Soeharto. Around this time, the community was incorporated into a timber concession (granted originally to US logging company Georgia Pacific, and later taken over by PT Kiani Lestari). Central government also granted the timber company the rights to establish an industrial timber plantation. By the mid-1990s, the 350,000 ha timber concession included a 10,000 ha transmigration site (food and tree crops), a 53,000 ha industrial timber plantation (HTI), and four new communities of special HTI transmigrants (1,200 families) (Colfer 2008). Pressures on the security of access to resources and a shift in the social meaning of land within this community thus predates the arrival of oil palm by several decades, as has a shift towards individualised property and the growing significance of wage work (initially in logging, but now in oil palm) as part of forest livelihoods.

In addition, boundary disputes have been a feature between neighbouring communities, and within the community itself. Oil palm was established across the river from the community by PT Bukit Subur, and PT Tapian Nadenggan on the timber concession area (land designated by the Ministry of Forestry as non-forestry cultivation areas or KBNK): what members of the community describe as ‘their’ KBNK.<sup>5</sup> Some participants in the study pointed out that land had been taken by the latter company without compensation or even information being divulged to the community, and this was now being sought. The investment model for these companies is similar to that of companies in the other communities, i.e. plasma-inti, with 20% of the plantation area distributed back to community members as planted plots from which they would receive profits once fees and costs had been deducted. This allocation has yet to be realised, confirming the worst suspicions of those who had opposed oil palm, and setting in train further conflicts around perceived injustices regarding the distribution of benefits and risks. In all, there has been a strengthening of local consciousness with regard to the importance of their individual entitlements.

In the next section we consider how the contrasts and commonalities in the landscape histories of the five case study communities as described above have contributed to gendered experiences with oil palm since its introduction to this part of East Kalimantan a little under 10 years ago.

## **GENDERED EXPERIENCES WITH OIL PALM: IMPACTS ON RESOURCES, LABOUR AND LIVELIHOODS**

Analysis of gendered experiences with oil palm across the five communities in this study reveals contrasts and similarities that reflect specific configurations of gender norms and practices within the livelihood systems evident in each one, and the relationships that men and women have with forest and land resources more broadly. Thus, amongst the Dayak groups that form the majority of population in cases A (in Segah subdistrict), D (in coastal Talisayan subdistrict) and E (in Telen subdistrict, East Kutai), gendered experiences with oil palm echo patterns found by Julia and White (2012) in a Hibun Dayak community in West Kalimantan, where oil palm had dispossessed communities of their swiddens (crucial for rice-based food security and an important domain for women both in material terms and for reinforcing Dayak gender norms), forest lands (a crucial

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<sup>5</sup> KBNK (*Kawasan Budidaya Non Kehutanan*), land designated as non-forestry cultivation areas under Ministry of Forestry land use categories

resource in which women sourced forest vegetables and materials for handicrafts), and introduced wage labour opportunities for women where previously off-farm work had predominantly been the domain of men (in logging camps or through temporary migrations).

In predominantly Dayak communities, like community A, D and E, where there is relatively limited gender asymmetry and a degree of fluidity in gender roles within the household, large scale investments in oil palm had brought a new layering of gender inequality and disadvantage, particularly for those outside community elites, where women were not involved in public interfaces with oil palm companies and other outside agents. In the 'sosialisasi'<sup>6</sup> that were conducted by oil palm companies in conjunction with District and sub-district officials and the local military, there was no normative restriction on women attending the meetings, but as is conventional, households tended to 'send' a representative, usually male. If women were present, they could be quiet, in line with Tsing's observations of public dispute resolutions amongst the Meratus Dayak (Tsing 1990), where men's dramatic customary (*adat*) 'performances' involved women only as audiences.

At the same time, gender norms that maintain women's centrality of swidden rice cultivation in material and symbolic terms have not subsided, despite the practical difficulties of combining this with child and elder care when oil palm encroachment meant their swiddens were at considerable distance from their houses. Although within communities A, D and E there is considerable flexibility in gender roles around domestic work, there remains an expectation amongst men that this domain is ultimately women's responsibility, even as women expressed a desire for men to participate in domestic work alongside their agricultural work. Combining agriculture and domestic work has meant in many cases that motorbikes are needed in order to get to the fields. Cash wages from plantation work and easy access to credit (available in Indonesia specifically for purchasing motorbikes) have enabled even relatively modest households to make such a purchase. However, their use is gendered. There are no restrictions as such on women riding motorbikes to their swiddens, but difficult terrain makes this a challenge, and particularly older women are therefore dependent on men as drivers. Norms associated with women's competency in securing material well-being independently of men are therefore challenged further by new forms of dependency associated with the realities of getting to distant swiddens. Gendered impacts on rice farming has also introduced some anxiety about the next generation, and a need to 'protect' this aspect of the livelihood system, whilst simultaneously seeking to invest in girls' education so they can find jobs that pay well enough to keep rice fields within the family, even if the family itself is not providing the labour. Amongst young women themselves, their future was viewed through the lens of having access to education, and if possible, an office job relating perhaps to oil palm (rather than a move to the city). Loss of forest and swiddens did not appear to have the same emotional resonance as it did for older people.

In community D, where pressure on land resources was more acute, and where there was also a greater impact of in-migration by people from elsewhere in Indonesia (notably South Sulawesi, Nusa Tenggara-Lombok and Nusa Tenggara-Flores), the importance of rice fields for Baloy Dayak households had given way somewhat, and this also related to the fact that distribution of plasma was now taking place, with 'native' Dayak households being prioritised as recipients.<sup>7</sup> For relative newcomers to community D, the impact of oil palm did not reflect an interplay with a gendered swidden rice farming system: instead, oil palm investments presented as an obstacle (less land available, not being included in the plasma allocation) or possible opportunity (the possibility of wage work, of being able to 'experiment' with planting smallholder oil palm) within a more diversified

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<sup>6</sup> The Indonesian term, *sosialisasi*, refers to a process whereby people are informed of and persuaded (sometimes forced) to accept policies made higher up in the government.

<sup>7</sup> This was done on the basis of drawing a distinction between Dayak and non-Dayak ethnic groups: in a community comprised largely of Baloy Dayak it was not apparent from interviews that distinctions were being drawn between different Dayak groups.

wage work/cash crop livelihood dynamic in which men and women responded to opportunities as they arose, with Nusa Tenggara-Lombok women reporting that they ‘supported’ their husbands, and in which the possibility of ‘moving on’ (either together as a family or in sequence) was always in the background.

The removal of forest itself has also affected the community and gender relations – in communities A, D and E there are now limited options for hunting or gathering of forest herbs/vegetables, and this came through particularly strongly in FGDs and interviews in community A and E, where oil palm is a relatively recent phenomenon. Prior to the arrival of oil palm, the forest served the function of improving food security enabling nutritional and livelihood diversification, particularly for women. Women said the loss of the forest meant diets had been affected as there was less pork (*babi hutan*, hunted by men) and fish was also a problem. In his research with Benuaq Dayak in nearby Kutai Barat, Gönner (2011) also found that the forest provided “waves of opportunities” for communities who would frequently switch from one income source to another, depending on resource availability, market prices, seasonality and so on, and that this was a resilient strategy for coping with external shocks. In these communities, as oil palm has taken over the landscape, women’s relationship with the forest has altered as opportunities such as the production of handicrafts using rattan, bamboo and other forest products have gone, and this has particularly been felt by older women even as these skills are lost to a younger generation. Other kinds of tree crops (e.g. rubber, cacao) have fallen in and out of favour, depending on markets and susceptibility to pests). It should be noted, however, that there are very different relationships between oil palm and forest-based livelihoods in other Dayak communities: in the Dayak ‘parent community’ where community B (‘kampung TKI’) is located, plasma allocation has been completed and many people now purchase rice (using wages from oil palm labour and revenue from their plasma oil palm). ‘People don’t hunt any more. They also don’t collect gaharu anymore.<sup>8</sup> Three years ago, people still collected gaharu. Our generation now don’t want to stay too long in the forest’.<sup>9</sup>

Whilst the centrality of swidden rice farming as a safety net has remained, at least in community A and E, ‘diversification’ has taken on a new and rather singular meaning, that is, swidden livelihoods augmented by off farm wage work at nearby oil palm plantations. As the plantations were being established, there was daily wage work for both sexes in order to clear the land, and undertake planting. Demand for labor meant the capacity to earn cash wages was vastly increased. For the most part, this work is casual daily work, and women combine this with their other responsibilities by working until 2pm, after which they resume their domestic and subsistence activities. During times of labor demand on their swiddens, wage work at the plantation is abandoned in communities A and E, suggesting norms of women’s key role in household rice self-sufficiency have not been superseded by the demands of oil palm. As one woman put it ‘I work as a daily-based labourer at the oil palm company. I also cultivate the field. I didn’t want to make fields but upon seeing other people make fields it just didn’t feel right.’ In focus discussions with men, attitudes towards women’s wage work were generally relaxed. Wage work was fine to help the household economy as long as women didn’t leave their ‘obligation’, i.e. their rice fields and their domestic responsibilities. When asked the same question, women suggested that wage work enabled them to ‘help their husbands’. There is, however, some ambivalence around the impacts of availability of wage work on youth transitions, and in particular, for young men. There is a strong association, in peoples’ minds at least, between young men’s withdrawal from school and the availability of work – in a context where access to cash and masculine respect are somewhat aligned.

In Community B the returning transnational migrant community comprising farmers originally

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<sup>8</sup> Agarwood, a fragrant resinous wood that commands high prices.

<sup>9</sup> From key informant interview with community leader, community B, August 2014.



from South Sulawesi, the gendered impacts of oil palm played out rather differently, reflecting the relationship the community had with oil palm, the establishment of livelihoods based on clearing forest to establish smallholder oil palm (thus signalling a very different relationship to the forest as an element in livelihood provisioning), and gender norms that differed in some respects to those in the predominantly Dayak communities described above. In community B, the gendered impacts of independent smallholder oil palm cultivation might be seen as the latest episode in a long engagement with oil palm, that had taken most of these people to Malaysia (as oil palm labourers) and enabled them to invest in their 'own' smallholder oil palm cultivation. Gender disadvantages in terms of wage differentials on oil palm plantations and difficulties associated with security in a cross-border context were viewed in tandem with the social, cultural and economic capital women regarded themselves as having gained as a result of their sojourn. 'When we came here from Malaysia, we brought skill with us. It only took a year of maintenance [to get the oil palm established], the seeds sprouted....In Malaysia we lived close to the factory. That's the only thing we knew for a living. Even if we had documents on the land, the Malaysian government would still claim the land. We were not allowed to combine oil palm with anything. Now we can grow rice and sell fruits to increase our income'.<sup>10</sup>

This common experience appeared to iron out any strong differences between ethnic groups within the community, and also appeared to supplant hierarchical notions of gender commonly associated with both Bugis groups in relation to men's and women's roles, opportunities and constraints.<sup>11</sup> Whilst there remains a strong sense that primary responsibility for domestic activities falls on women, there was some flexibility expressed around this, particularly around men 'helping out' (even if this was not realised in practice). According to one of the men in a FGD, 'If she [my wife] helps me on the farm, I will help her in the house'. Investment in oil palm seems to have been undertaken in line with both prevailing and emerging gender norms. Women described themselves as 'spirited' and encouraging men: 'women give support for men's plan and encourage them. So if we couldn't help them with our power at least help them to think about it'.<sup>12</sup> Tracing the establishment of smallholder oil palm, however, gender dynamics are revealed as reinforcing norms that regard men as the public face of the household, with women behind the scenes, managing finances. Women described how negotiation to acquire the land from the local Dayak community had been undertaken by men: 'but when it comes to payment, they would ask us'. As smallholder farms were created, an oil palm farmer's group was established (Koperasi Perkebunan Sawit Mandiri) to help selling the oil palm, along with an informal group Toddopuli Tamallara farmer group (translated roughly as inseparable/united). There were no restrictions on women's participation, but usually men attended, representing the household as a whole. However, as noted earlier, the emergence of a smallholder elite within this community meant that those women who had been able to acquire large areas of land and mobilise kin-based labour networks meant there was a divergence of gendered experience that linked strongly to class differentiation. As the investing migrant population began to include returnees from other ethnic groups (e.g. originally from Lombok), and as kinship networks mapped on to ethnic identity and community of origin, this gendered class dynamic was also shaped by ethnicity.

In community C, the transmigration settlement, the impacts of oil palm reflect the direct and indirect impact of the 60,000 hectare investment in the area by oil palm company (Hutan Hijau Mas, or KLK Group) and also adoption of oil palm as an independent 'smallholder' crop. Prior to the arrival of oil palm, livelihoods were largely derived from rain-fed irrigated rice, vegetable and fruit cultivation, and a limited amount of wage work. For this largely Javanese community, the impacts of

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<sup>10</sup> Focus group participant, women's group from Community B, August 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Amongst Bugis groups, Islam is more marked, and commonly these are groups that are described as having more rigid gender differentiation than would be found, for example, amongst Dayak communities. Moreover, Bugis groups are described as markedly socially hierarchical (Accialioli 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Participant in women's focus group discussion, community B, August 2014.

large scale oil palm investment relate not to the acquisition of transmigrant land (this has not been the case, rather, land has been acquired from state forest belonging to nearby Dayak communities. Women's roles within the transmigration settlement mimic those found in similar settlements elsewhere in Indonesia. Whilst land is allocated to male household heads, and men are regarded as main breadwinners, women take care of household finances, are responsible for domestic care activities (with some flexibility as there are no particular taboos on men taking part in these), and women deriving status from their success in augmenting agricultural livelihoods by diversifying into marketing or small-scale processing, for example, making kerupuk (crackers), tempeh (with soya beans bought from outside the area) and other snacks to sell. The impact of large scale oil palm investment has been significant with regard to this element of women's livelihoods as the local market for such products has grown rapidly.

Oil palm wage work has produced a growing population comprising both transmigrants and newcomers drawn to the area in search of wage work, who have cash wages and but have not access to their own subsistence production. This population provides a ready market for smallscale trade in processed goods and agricultural surpluses via the kiosks that are found in most communities. Transmigrants have benefited from the fact that access to the district capital Tanjung Redeb is still problematic, especially during wet weather, meaning for the moment at least, there is a local market for goods produced on their farms and little competition from elsewhere. These agricultural and marketing practices are simultaneously supported by and reinforce gender norms around women's financial capability and relative autonomy within Javanese households, and cement their material contribution.

Following the successful establishment of independent smallholder oil palm amongst some households in neighbouring Community B, this practice was also adopted in the transmigration community. The social networks that enabled the establishment of smallholder oil palm were predominantly male, involving Bugis leaders from Community B. They made contact with male heads of household in the transmigrant community: women were not involved. This had caused some disquiet, but also responses signal the relative power of women to speak out. Early resistance within the community is indicative of gender norms: some women were concerned that husbands were spending money that should have been used for school fees on obtaining the planting materials required to get established. According to one (male) research participant: 'My wife didn't agree with me because she didn't know how much oil palm could generate. I bought fertilizer and seed secretly, she got angry when she found out what I did . Now that they know how much oil palm can generate, they all agree with me.' He went on to explain how they did get established, and this again signals a continuity with prevailing gender role complementarity and women's generally high levels of economic empowerment (within the confines of a transmigration context). 'Although we didn't have any money for capital, we had to be creative. While [I was] raising cows and buffalos my wife opened a small sembako<sup>13</sup> kiosk . During our early days we did anything. I also worked at the saw mill too'.

Smallholder investment in oil palm in the transmigration settlement is displacing rice cultivation, however, and this carries with it some implications for gender dynamics, given women's close association with wet rice cultivation. Issues for rice cultivation come about as oil palm is a more valuable crop and wet rice fields offer the chance of successful oil palm investment. Moreover, households in the transmigration community reported difficulties in recruiting labour in rice fields at times of peak labour demand owing to the growth of wage work opportunities associated with the plantation, at least during the establishment phase. At the same time, young people were moving away from engaging in subsistence-oriented food crop agriculture, particularly amongst young women who were instead taking up educational opportunities wherever possible, with a view to exiting direct

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<sup>13</sup> Sembako means everyday grocery items for daily needs.

engagement in agriculture.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, we return to the proposition that the social and gender impacts of oil palm reflect an interplay between historically and ecologically-embedded gender norms and the ways in which communities have been incorporated into oil palm systems. By combining an analysis that looks at questions of gendered production and reproduction, and gendered impacts on resource access across five very different communities, we have been able to tease out some of the processes that underlie variations in the gendered impacts of oil palm investments in different locations in East Kalimantan. Our research sought to adopt an intersectional approach in order to see how gender must be understood through ethnic and life course differences and hierarchies. Our argument here is that such intersections contribute in part to the differences and commonalities we are able to see in these cases. However, we also need to add landscape history and modes of incorporation into oil palm systems into our framing of the multiple dimensions of subordination (and privilege) that form gendered experiences in this context.

Looking across the five study sites, a number of points emerge. First, whether through corporate or smallholder investments, oil palm has been introduced into a changing socio-natural landscape in which a growing awareness of the importance of individual property relations is already present. There is a continued acknowledgement that men and women are entitled to own and inherit property, and this is the case across ethnic groups, but in practice, individualisation has meant 'household', and for the purposes of public recognition, this may mean a de facto masculinisation of resource access and control. Currently, this is less apparent in communities dominated by migrant entrepreneurs. Secondly, the relative impact of these processes is most marked in ethnically diverse settings where there is already pressure on resource availability, and where acquisition and the distribution of oil palm benefits are uneven and perceived as unjust. Thirdly, the introduction of oil palm has opened new opportunities for wage work across all of the communities, albeit in different ways and with different gendered implications for productive and reproductive livelihood strategies. Finally, oil palm has its own agency as it carries different meanings in the communities. On the one hand, amongst migrants and smallholder investors, oil palm is a harbinger of wealth and progress with which individuals have to muster the will to succeed, whilst on the other, oil palm is a rich man's (literally) crop, emblematic of a kind of economic power that is out of reach for most. To this extent, oil palm has played a critical role in reinforcing contrasts amongst differently positioned actors, and between differently positioned communities. At the same time, some gender norms are seen to hold a remarkable fixity in the face of profound social, economic and environmental change, and indeed have facilitated and enabled the pathways oil palm investments have taken in different settings.

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### About the Author

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