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Green Economy, Oil Palm Development and the Exclusion of Indigenous Swidden Cultivators in the Philippines

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Abstract

Current trends in land control have been associated with “green economy” programs in the global South. Many of these programs involve agro-industrial development projects in upland frontiers to ostensibly produce “low-carbon” commodities from food, fiber and fuel crops. With the concurrent intention of attaining “inclusive” economic growth, green economy programs specifically target marginalized populations, which in many cases include indigenous smallholders that continue to practice traditional forms of agriculture. This trend is particularly evident in the Philippine frontiers, where green economy programs for growing biofuel crops, oil palm and rubber are increasingly engaging and affecting indigenous swidden cultivators. Drawing from ethnography in the Philippine province of Palawan, this paper reports the micro-level political ecology of green economy programs (specifically oil palm development) in ancestral domains, particularly the processes by which indigenous smallholders are excluded from access to fallow land for swidden cultivation. It was evident how the persuasive powers of discourses on upland environments and identities, together with the coercive forces of land price escalation, enclosure and conflict, have become important interrelated factors contributing to the conversion of fallow lands into monoculture cash crop plantations. This systematic land-use conversion then erode reciprocity systems (borrowing of fallow lands) that allow indigenous smallholders to continue practicing traditional forms of swidden cultivation, especially in communities where land has already been distributed either through land reform or some other upland tenure arrangement. This situation then creates pressures for indigenous smallholders to either relocate to remote areas in the uplands or to intensify or drastically curtail swidden cultivation, which they are reluctant to do due to cultural and subsistence reasons.

Keywords: Swidden; Oil Palm; Contract Farming; Exclusion; Indigenous smallholders; Palawan; the Philippines

INTRODUCTION

In the past five to six years, there has been an emergence of literature on “global land grabbing” or “large-scale land acquisition” in the global South. The literature highlights powerful transnational corporations, national governments and private actors purchasing and leasing land in distant countries on a large scale for the production of food, fuel and fiber crops (Borras et al. 2011). Earlier reports suggest the massive extent of these land deals (usually on the order of thousands of hectares) in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, raising concerns regarding local peoples and communities losing access to land for food production (GRAIN 2008; Cotula et al. 2009). In a recent special issue in *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Borras et al. (2011) called for a more in-depth and systematic inquiry into this phenomenon. Although academic inquiry has thus far focused on policy and macro-level analysis, recent publications underscore the need for more investigations of the local dynamics of land grab projects (Hall 2011). This paper aims to contribute to scholarship on local dynamics of land control and processes of exclusion in the context of the green economy. It does so by focusing on oil palm contract farming involving indigenous swidden cultivators in the Philippines. More specifically, the paper examines links between discourse, market, conflict, regulations, environmental change and exclusion.

Oil palm for production of foodstuff and biofuels has increasingly been promoted by governments, markets and even some scholars in the global South as a green economy agro-industrial project, due to its promise of alleviating poverty while simultaneously delivering a feedstock that potentially offsets large quantities of fossil fuels and mitigate greenhouse gases (Shuit et al. 2009; Sumanthi et al. 2008; Villoria et al. 2013). In countries like the Philippines, for example, oil palm is aggressively endorsed not just as a biofuel crop, but also a form of “reforestation” tree crop that rehabilitates “idle,” “degraded,” and “denuded” lands. Hence, as long as oil palm development is concentrated on these “marginal” lands and does not encroach on forestlands, its potential as a green economy crop is maximized.

However, oil palm has also been associated with the global land grab discourse (GRAIN 2008; Li 2011; von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009). Although in development for several decades now, oil palm plantations have rapidly expanded in the tropics in the turn of the millennium, with more than 60 percent of growth in plantation areas from 10 to 16 million hectares between 2000 and 2011 (FAO 2013). Palm oil is already one of the leading vegetable oils produced and traded globally, but its global production is expected to increase further due to the growing demand from the biofuel industry (Zhou and Thomson 2009). In addition to Malaysia and Indonesia, in the past 10 years oil palm production areas have doubled in many other countries throughout the world, such as Brazil, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Thailand, and the Philippines (FAO 2013). The expansion of oil palm in many of these countries has been facilitated mainly by corporations associated with investments from Malaysia and Indonesia.

The rapid expansion of oil palm production has been accompanied by numerous studies raising concerns about the social and environmental impacts of such development. In particular, oil palm development has been criticized for contributing to deforestation and biodiversity loss and negatively impacting smallholders, particularly indigenous peoples (Fitzherbert et al. 2008; Koh and Wilcove 2008; Majid Cooke 2002).¹ Many scholars have associated oil palm development with state- and private-sector-led coercive and deceptive schemes that dispossessed smallholders of their access to customary land and traditional livelihood practices, such as swidden cultivation (e.g. Colchester 2011;

¹ Smallholder farming is defined as a “small-scale” farm managed by a household with limited hired labor (World Bank, 2007). For this study, the author adopts the Philippine government’s definition of smallholder farmers as individuals or households dependent on small-scale subsistence farming as their primary source of income (Republic Acts 7607 and 8435).

Colchester et al. 2006; Majid Cooke 2002; 2012; McCarthy and Cramb 2009; Montefrio 2011).² Colchester et al. (2006), for example, provided a vivid account of the land displacement, dispossession and erosion of cultural traditions the Dayak people experienced due to the expansion of oil palm in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo).³ While the friction between oil palm development and swidden has been documented, a few scholars have reported the persistence of swidden cultivation amidst expanding oil palm plantations in Indonesia and Malaysia (Cramb et al. 2009; Mertz et al. 2013; Potter 2007).

The impact of oil palm on smallholders remains an important issue, and discussions and initiatives are underway to ensure that smallholders involved in and affected by the oil palm industry benefit from such development (RSPO 2012; Vermeulen and Goad 2006). A manifestation of the industry's response to this issue is the burgeoning establishment of oil palm production regimes (henceforth referred to as oil palm contract farming), which attempt to integrate smallholders as "partners" of the industry.⁴ In spite of these initiatives, however, there are scholars who remain concerned about oil palm contract farming's propensity to marginalize and exclude smallholders (Majid Cooke 2012; McCarthy 2010).

Drawing from ethnography in the Philippine province of Palawan, and building on Derek Hall, Philip Hirsch, and Tania Murray Li's (2011) analytical framework, *Powers of Exclusion*, the present study illustrates that exclusion of indigenous smallholders from land for swidden cultivation is driven by local land control processes primarily involving non-indigenous smallholders.⁵ Such processes include: i) legitimation by upland development discourses favoring oil palm; ii) the escalation of land prices accompanying expansion of local land markets; iii) increased conflict and threats of violence; and iv) regulations re-defining boundaries and land-uses. These four, interconnected processes in turn contribute to environmental change – i.e. the conversion of fallow land into monocrop oil palm plantations – diminishing the capacity of indigenous smallholders to borrow and lease fallow lands for swidden cultivation. Smallholders who decide to participate in contract farming or sell their land to prospective oil palm growers contribute to the reduction of fallow land in the community, further excluding indigenous smallholders. Thus even if indigenous smallholders are resistant to and oppose oil palm contract farming, such local processes exert pressure on the already-challenged access to fallow land for swidden. It is not yet clear, however, whether local processes of exclusion and associated environmental changes ultimately diminish or end Pala'wan smallholders' swidden cultivation practices.

The following sections provide a brief review of current research on land control and the powers of exclusion, discuss methods employed in this study and the background of the research site. The paper then presents and discusses findings on various local processes of exclusion in Palawan. The main points of the paper are summarized in the final section.

² Brookfield et al. (1995) proposed a broad definition of swidden cultivation as a wide range of farming practices in which fallow is the main source for maintaining productivity. Mertz et al. (2009) define swidden in Southeast Asia as "a land use system that employs a natural or improved fallow phase, which is longer than the cultivation phase of annual crops, sufficiently long to be dominated by woody vegetation, and cleared by means of fire." The staple crop is often upland rice, sometimes with maize, and can include secondary crops such as cassava, bananas and other annual and perennial crops" (p. 261).

³ The Dayak peoples in the study included the Tinying, Mayau and Hibun indigenous peoples of the Sanggau District.

⁴ This type of oil palm production regime has many variants, but the terms commonly associated are outgrowers systems, joint venture, production partnerships, Nuclear Estate-Smallholders (NES) schemes, and contract farming.

⁵ In this study, indigenous refers to the ethnolinguistic groups of Pala'wan who have claimed ancestry in many regions of southern Palawan since time immemorial. Non-indigenous smallholders, on the other hand, are commonly those who have migrated from other provinces within the Philippines to Palawan. These include mostly Christians from the Visayan regions (referred to here as Bisaya) and Muslims from the Mindanao regions.

LAND CONTROL AND THE POWERS OF EXCLUSION

Although the term “land grab” has been used for decades, the global land grab literature emerged only in 2008. This began with reports from think tanks and non-government organizations of observations (or speculations) of widespread land deals for production of food, fiber, and more recently fuel, in the global South. These land deals involve transnational corporations and state actors that spur production of these commodity crops, often in developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, for export elsewhere (Borras et al. 2011). As a nascent area of scholarship, scholars have identified urgent questions that need to be addressed in the land grab issue. Many of the proposed questions relate to concerns about the possible implications of global land grab on local land relations and local peoples’ access to land. The following are relevant questions that Borras et al. (2011) proposed for further inquiry: What is the nature and extent of rural social differentiation – in terms of class, gender, ethnicity – following changes in land-use and land property relations as well as organizations of production and exchange? What have been the socially differentiated impacts on livelihoods by class, gender, and ethnicity? Have development-induced displacement and dispossession occurred?

In a 2011 special issue of the *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Nancy Lee Peluso and associates endeavored to contribute to the global land grab literature by focusing on what they refer to as *new frontiers of land control*. They defined land control as the practices that fix or consolidate forms of access, claiming, and exclusion, which include, among others, processes of enclosure, territorialization, legalization, force and violence (Peluso and Lund 2011). In the same issue, Derek Hall (2011) focuses on the literature on critical perspectives (political economy and political ecology) of contract farming involving crop booms (e.g. rubber, cacao, and oil palm) and how this literature can contribute to current understanding of land grabs and control. He emphasizes that scholars need to pay attention to smallholders as “agents” of land grabbing and posits that “smallholder-driven crop booms often involve, at the micro-level, processes that are surprisingly similar to those that characterize the land grab at the level of tens or hundreds of thousands of hectares” (p. 838). He builds on his recent work with Li and Hirsch (Hall et al. 2011) to further this argument in relation to processes of exclusion and land control.

Exclusion in the context of land relations is associated with a condition of inequality where there is a highly skewed distribution of land among individuals and groups in a given space (Borras and Franco 2010). Exclusion relates to the concept of access, which Ribot and Peluso (2003: 153) define as “the ability to benefit from things.” Hall et al. (2011: 7) then define exclusion as a process wherein “people are prevented from benefitting from things (more specifically, land).” These authors describe exclusion to be ways in which people who have current access to land lose it, and people who lack access to land are prevented from getting it. While the concept of exclusion relates to other commonly used concepts (i.e. enclosure, primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession) to describe land relation in the global South, Hall et al. distinguish the former particularly in the context of land relations in Southeast Asia. The concept of exclusion underscores the role of new actors (e.g. environmentalists, NGOs, ethnic groups, and smallholders) who are implicated in enclosing land and dispossessing others. Moreover, dispossession and enclosure can be motivated by a myriad of objectives, which can include normatively conflicting endeavors, such as enclosing land for biofuels production or creation of conservation areas for climate change.

Hall et al. (2011) describe four main powers that shape exclusion. First is *regulation*, which are formal and informal rules that determine boundaries, acceptable uses of land, and the kind of ownership. The second is *force*, which can imply outright violence (or threats of violence) and other implicit forms. The latter entail possession of means of violence, which creates a climate where actual violence is not needed to dissuade individuals or groups from opposing or resisting. The third is *market*, which emphasizes price of land as an important determinant of exclusion and access. The last

is *legitimation*, a type of power that uses justifications and appeals to values and normative understandings as means to support different forms of exclusion. In discussing the four powers of exclusion, the authors highlight three important particulars about the framework. First, there are other forms of powers (e.g. environmental change, knowledge and technologies, and political relationships) that operate in addition to the four described above. The authors, however, did not develop these other forms of power in their text. Second, the four powers operate together and do not exist separately. Thus, these powers are inextricably connected in many contexts. Third, these powers do not unfold in a frictionless space. This means that actors on the ground actively engage in negotiations and various forms of resistance as they reproduce and/or encounter these powers of exclusion.

The present study contributes to the global land grab scholarship through inclusion of environmental change in the analysis and illustrating how this relates to market, force and regulation in driving exclusion of indigenous peoples. As mentioned above, Hall et al. (2011) recognize environmental change as one of the powers of exclusion, but they did not include and develop this in the framework. This paper also provides an empirical study of oil palm development in the Philippines, a case that has not been investigated in the literature. To date, most of the cases studied focus on Indonesia and Malaysia. The Philippine case offers analysis of the processes of exclusion in the context of smallholder-integrated oil palm contract farming in its nascent phase of development.

METHODS

This study is based on ten months of field research in the Philippine province of Palawan conducted from July 2011 to June 2012, with emphasis on three months of ethnography in one community currently engaged in oil palm contract farming (henceforth referred to by the pseudonym, *Buri*). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to learn the experiences and perceptions of smallholder farmers and landowners regarding oil palm development in Buri, as well as their understandings of how such development affects their environment, livelihoods, and identities. A responsive interviewing model was adopted, in which guide questions were used but the actual interviews were allowed to be dynamic, iterative and explorative, with emphasis on stories and narratives (Rubin and Rubin 2005). A total of 59 smallholders and landowners were interviewed, which included 31 indigenous (Pala'wan) and 28 non-indigenous (18 Christian Bisaya and 10 Muslim) representatives. Selection of interview participants was based on purposive sampling, with attention to representativeness according to ethnic group, location and current stage of engagement in oil palm contract farming (i.e. those who were already participating, those who have intentions of participating but were not able to do so, and those who were invited but were resistant to participate.) Interviews also were conducted with six provincial and local government officials and two representatives of the oil palm company, lasting between one to two hours each and audio recorded when permission was granted.

Participant observation was also conducted to understand further the lived experiences and behaviors of indigenous and non-indigenous smallholders and landowners, particularly in regards to their interaction with each other and with their environment. This included living in the homes of several smallholders, attending community events and gatherings, engaging in casual conversations with community members, sitting in cooperative meetings and public forums, and visiting plantation sites, swidden fields, and surrounding environs. Field notes were prepared whenever possible.

The interviews were partially transcribed and field notes prepared in electronic format. Public documents (e.g. government records, maps, minutes of meetings of the Cooperative in Buri) were also acquired during field research. Qualitative thematic analysis was employed in coding interview transcripts, field notes and documents, with attention to the powers of exclusion, environmental changes, and other relevant themes that emerged from the analysis.

BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH SITE

The province of Palawan is one of the country's remaining ecological frontiers and a priority area for conservation (Conservation International/DENR/ Haribon Foundation n.d.; PCSO 2010; Sopsop and Buot 2009). The province is also the home of several ethnolinguistic groups who continue to rely on subsistence forms of livelihood, such as swidden agriculture, fallow land management, hunting and gathering, and artisanal fishing. In the past few decades, Palawan has become highly diverse, as migrants from other provinces have flocked to Palawan to take advantage of what many perceive as *vast, inexpensive, and idle* land areas. With the growing population, the Philippine national and Palawan provincial government and private firms have also promoted Palawan as a promising area for (green economy) agro-industrial development. One of the many crops aggressively promoted in Palawan is oil palm, in which the Philippine government has identified around 200,000 hectares of land appropriate for oil palm plantation in the province (Interview with Provincial Agricultural Officer, December 2, 2011). Oil palm development in Palawan began in 2003, when the provincial and municipal governments invited a Filipino-Singaporean-Malaysian owned company (henceforth referred to as the *oil palm company*) to explore prospects of growing the palm oil industry in the province. The oil palm company began its official operations in January 2006 and since then has established at least 4,500 hectares of oil palm plantations in seven municipalities in the southern part of the province (Figure 1). This figure is expected to grow, as the oil palm company projects to expand its operations to at least 10,000 hectares in the future (Interview with oil palm general manager, June 22, 2012). Increasingly, it is being promoted as a green economy crop that has the potential to develop and rehabilitate "idle" and "degraded" lands in southern Palawan. The lands used for these plantations were either leased for 25 years mostly from beneficiaries of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP)⁶ or secured through a tripartite contract farming between the oil palm company, a smallholder cooperative and the lending institutions. In the latter, the oil palm company assists smallholders in developing their land, provides production inputs, manages the plantations, and collects the harvested fruits for processing in the local mill facility owned by the company.

⁶ The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP) is a national policy enacted in the Philippines' during the late 1980s. It holds that the following lands be redistributed to farmers: alienable and disposable lands of the public domain; and lands owned by the government and private sector devoted to or suitable for agriculture. Each beneficiary may own no more than 3 hectares of formally titled land.

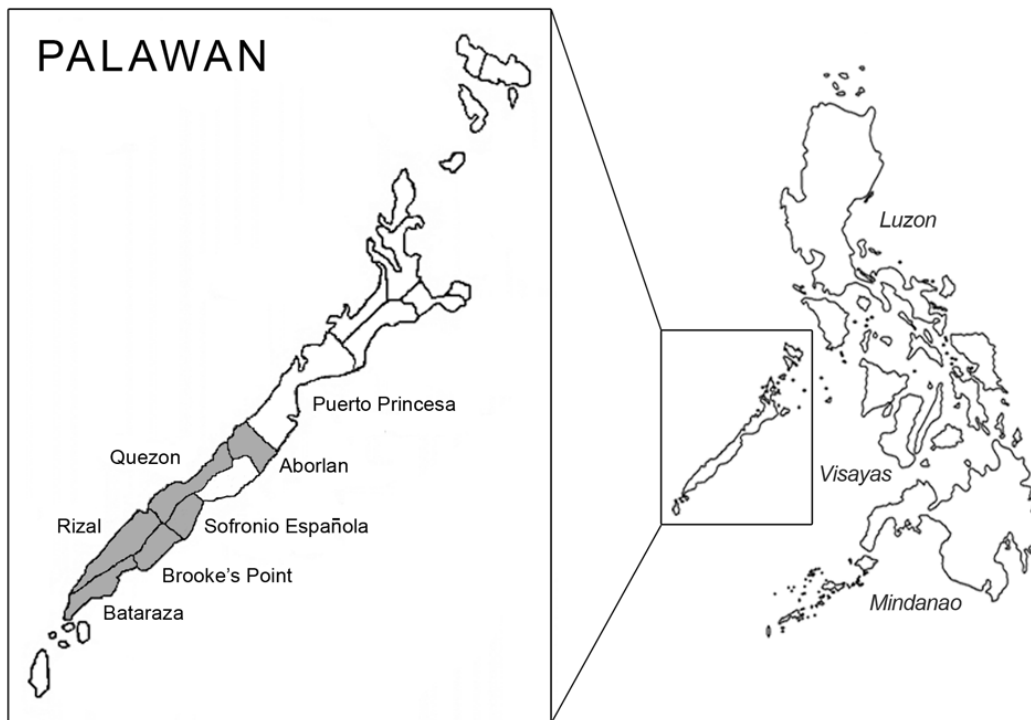


Figure 1 Map of research site and municipalities currently producing oil palm.
 ■ refers to municipalities with oil palm plantations.

The community selected for this study (henceforth referred to as Buri) is one of the first communities to be involved in oil palm contracting in Southern Palawan. Buri has a population of approximately 3000 (based on 2010 census) individuals, with about 55 percent indigenous (Pala'wan), 30 percent non-indigenous Christian (Bisaya or Kristiyano), and 15 percent non-indigenous Muslim smallholders. More than 80 percent of the non-indigenous Christian smallholders are from the Visayan regions, while non-indigenous Muslims are mostly from the Mindanao regions, particularly from the Muslim-dominated islands of Mapun and Pangutaran. At least 60 percent of the Pala'wan people have been Christianized, but they still distinguish themselves from their Christian counterparts by referring to themselves as *nitibo* or *katutubo*.⁷

Buri is classified as a farming community. In 2010, at least 25 percent of its population identified themselves as *farmers*, less than 8 percent reported gaining access to wage labor and employment, either in companies, government offices, or schools, and less than 0.5 percent reported owning his/her own businesses (e.g. convenience stores and rice mills) in the community.⁸ A majority of the Pala'wan smallholders interviewed continue to depend on subsistence livelihood (i.e. swidden cultivation and home gardening of vegetables), where most of the produce is consumed in the household rather than sold. Swidden cultivation is common among Pala'wan smallholders. They typically plant upland rice, sweet potato, and corn in their swidden fields, which range between a quarter to one hectare in area. Many of them also manage their fallow land by planting perennials, such as banana and cassava, and harvesting *buho* (bamboo) for crafts making or house renovations. The age of fallow land before cultivation for swidden ranges from 2 to 7 years, depending on whether smallholders own enough land or are able to find or borrow land. A few smallholders also engage in wage labor with the oil palm cooperative and nickel mining company, production of coconuts and banana for sale, and cultivation

⁷ Estimates for ethnic populations were derived from 2010 data of the community health center.

⁸ This might be a conservative estimate, given that individuals who report being “housekeepers” and “students” may very well participate in farming activities.

of wet rice. Most of the non-indigenous Christian and Muslim smallholders interviewed, on the other hand, rely more on wet rice cultivation, coconuts and livestock production, retail business (usually convenience stores), and off-farm wage labor (including in the oil palm cooperative and mining company). Some of these non-indigenous smallholders have referred to their permanently cultivated lands as swidden agriculture, even if they no longer leave the land fallow.

Buri has 6125 hectares of land, with about 30 percent designated to irrigated rice, 20 percent to forests (broadly defined), and 30 percent “open area, brush land, or grass land” (which may include swidden fields and fallow land in various stages).⁹ Much of the remaining residual forests have been declared protected and off-limits to any form of exploitation, including swidden cultivation (as a result of antagonism of the government towards such practice). Currently there are about 250 hectares of land currently planted with oil palm as part of the contract farming regime. Tenure is mostly formal titles through CARP and a few lease contracts with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for timberland management, either in the form of community-based forest management agreement (CBFMA) or social forestry.

LOCAL LAND CONTROL AND OIL PALM CONTRACT FARMING

The case of oil palm contract farming in Buri illustrates that indigenous (Pala’wan) smallholders have, to a certain extent, agency to decide whether to engage their own land for oil palm production or not. It was observed that while a few Pala’wan agreed to participate in oil palm contract farming, as they recognize its potential in providing wage labor and diversifying sources of livelihood in the community, many others oppose it. As reported elsewhere, most of the Pala’wan smallholders interviewed expressed unwillingness to participate in oil palm contract farming as compared to non-indigenous smallholders. Moreover, it is evident in the cooperative’s membership roster that Pala’wan smallholders constitute only 18 percent of the total membership and own only 10 percent of the total oil palm production areas in the community. The reasons for the difference in participation are multifaceted, which include social, cultural and economic rationales. As reported elsewhere, for instance, it was argued that in addition to socio-economic factors, smallholders’ social construction of the environment and discourses on the environmental impacts of oil palm are significant influences on land-use decision-making (Montefrio, forthcoming).

Further scrutiny of the membership roster also reveals that certain non-indigenous families own significantly larger plots of oil palm plantations than others. For example, at least two Bisaya families own more than 30 percent of the total land committed for oil palm production in Buri. This trend raises questions about how non-indigenous families have been able to accumulate so much land for oil palm production in an agrarian reform community and whether there has been a propensity for Pala’wan smallholders, even those hesitant to participate in oil palm production, to give up their land to (prospective) oil palm growers. Field research in Buri suggests that several local processes may be contributing to non-indigenous landowners’ accumulation of land for oil palm production and the exclusion of indigenous peoples from access to land for swidden cultivation. Such processes affect indigenous smallholders’ lives, even if they are reluctant to commit their land to oil palm contract farming.

Building on the *powers of exclusion* framework, this paper explores interconnections among the following local processes: legitimation through upland discourses, escalation of land prices, increase in conflict, regulation and land enclosure, and conversion of fallow land (Figure 2). The latter underscores the role of environmental change in exclusion and how this relates to Hall et al.’s (2011)

⁹ These figures are based on statistics obtained from the local government of Buri.

four powers of exclusion – legitimation, market, force and regulation.¹⁰ These processes are associated with coercion as well as with persuasion; their intensification will likely compel Pala’wan smallholders to give way to oil palm expansion even if they are inclined to resist. As Hall et al. explain, the different powers of exclusion are inextricably linked and can operate together. In the case of oil palm contract farming in Buri, environmental change (i.e. the conversion of fallow land) is closely linked to upland discourses, land price escalation and increases in conflict, regulation and land enclosure. Continued conversion of fallow land into oil palm plantations increases land values as well as threats of enclosure/exclusion. These processes are discussed in detail below.

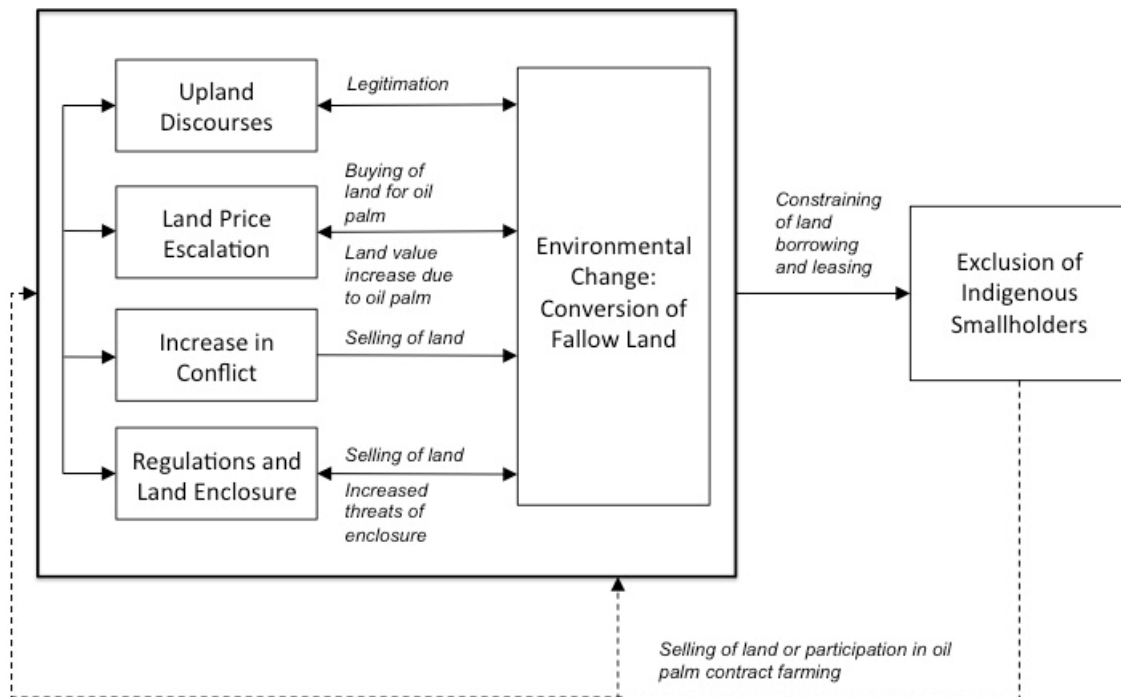


Figure 2 Processes of exclusion of indigenous smallholders in the context of oil palm contract farming in Buri.

Legitimation by Upland Discourses

It was evident during field research how discourses on upland environments and identities played an important role in legitimizing oil palm development. There were two prominent upland discourses: the “idle land” discourse; and the discourse on “unproductive” and “destructive” indigenous peoples. Oil palm development is then advocated as a convincing solution to these two upland development issues. Under the Aquino administration, national agencies such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Department of Agriculture (DA), endeavored to undertake ambitious programs to develop eight million hectares of “idle,” “denuded,” and “unproductive” lands into oil palm plantations in the Philippines (Lagsa and Antonio, 2014). Indeed, Palawan is one of the targets. Officials of the provincial and local governments and the participating oil palm company advocate oil palm development in the vast “idle lands” of southern Palawan, which include a plethora of land types, such as grasslands, bushlands and even second growth forests (fallow lands). The general manager of the oil palm company in Palawan, Mr. Miguel Delgado, justified the expansion of oil palm in southern Palawan by arguing that there are many grasslands in their area that remain

¹⁰ As mentioned above, the power of legitimation, in particular discourses on environment and development, is discussed extensively in a publication elsewhere.

underutilized. He said, “[l]et’s go to my area, you’ll see where I’m planting palm oil, in grasslands.” Although the oil palm company manager asserted that the “idle lands” they target are just “grasslands,” many other proponents and supporters of oil palm development perceive “idle lands” differently. For example, migrant smallholders perceived fallow land (second growth forests) as areas that are “idle” and need to be “developed.” An example is Jamil, a Muslim migrant and an oil palm cooperative leader who said, “I have that land [points to his oil palm plantation] for a long time. Before palm oil came, it has not been *developed* for 20 years. That’s why I decided to plant palm oil instead” (Interview, January 27, 2012). When asked what he meant by “develop,” he said he wanted the land to be productive and earn money from it, and second growth vegetation “do not earn.”

When talking about grasslands, bushlands and second growth forests in Buri in formal gatherings and informal conversations, local government officials, oil palm company representatives, and even non-indigenous smallholders would often say, “*sayang lang* (it’s a waste)” or “*nakatiwangwang lang* (it is just left there unused).” Such discourses are prevalent in the context of persuading Pala’wan smallholders to convert their “idle” and “unproductive” lands into oil palm production fields. Arnulfo, a recent Christian migrant from Visayas who committed more than 50 hectares of his land for oil palm production in Buri, best captures this discourse: “People here have vast tracks of land [...] but what are they going to do with that much land, if all you find there are *buhô* (bamboo) and *kahoy* (wood trees)?” He continued, “That’s why I always tell them [the Pala’wan] they need to *develop* that, *cultivate* that” (Interview, May 5, 2012).

The analysis of upland discourses revealed a strong pejorative conception of swidden cultivation, a practice that oil palm proponents usually associate with “idle” and “unproductive” lands. Oil palm company general manager, Mr. Delgado, explained why there is a need to convince upland farmers to stop swidden cultivation and urge them to do more productive forms of livelihood. He opined, “[t]he *kaingeros* (swidden cultivators) are worse than the illegal loggers. They just burn what they chop down, which makes it worse because no one takes advantage of the wood that was chopped down. They just burn it. *Sayang lang* (what a waste.)” The discourses of ‘destructive’ and ‘inefficient’ swidden cultivation have been used to justify initiatives to develop the uplands. Mr. Delgado, for instance, promoted oil palm as a solution to weaning upland dwellers off swidden, and thus an effective means to protect and rehabilitate forestlands.

Some non-indigenous smallholders claimed that they understand Pala’wan smallholders’ attachment to swidden and the reasons why they are hesitant to participate in oil palm production. However, they still participate in the process of producing, reproducing and transforming the Pala’wan identity, especially in processes of negotiating land development in Buri. Jamil, for example, has engaged in negotiations with Pala’wan landowners to convince them to participate in the oil palm contract farming. He shared,

It is hard to convince the natives to join. They say if they join they will no longer have land to cultivate swidden. That’s their perspective. I tell them, if you have five hectares of land, they need not commit all to palm oil. Just two or three hectares would do. But they really do not want. I cannot force them [...] but I say to them *sayang lang* (it’s a waste) that their lands cannot be used to earn more income. (Interview, January 27, 2012)

The discourses above all legitimize actions in Buri that aim to not only eradicate ‘inefficient’ and ‘destructive’ swidden cultivation, but also to convert these indigenous smallholders into ‘productive,’ ‘progressive,’ ‘efficient’ and ‘entrepreneurial’ oil palm farmers. The role of these discourses on exclusion is more *persuasive*, but they legitimize and exacerbate the other more *coercive* powers of

exclusion, as discussed below.

Escalation of Land Prices

The expansion of the local land market is one of the processes of land accumulation and exclusion that came out strongly in interviews and participant observation. In both formal and informal conversations, past and recent migrants in Palawan referred to the province as a frontier that offers vast, inexpensive land ready for the taking. When asked to narrate their life stories, non-indigenous participants always referred to the availability of land as the primary reason for their (or their parents') decision to migrate to Palawan. Arnulfo, a Christian Bisaya who came to Palawan five years ago, attested, “[w]e heard that land here in Palawan are vast. That’s why we visited [...] immediately we were able to buy 10 hectares of land. It was so cheap! Unbelievably cheap! [...] 30,000 pesos [approximately 700 US\$ at current exchange rate] for 10 hectares!” (Interview, April 8, 2012).¹¹

Arnulfo’s accounts also illustrated how land is accumulated not only among non-indigenous migrants residing in Palawan, but also those who live in other parts of the country (e.g. the capital city Manila) and the world. He added,

When we bought our first 10 hectares, more and more land was added. My brothers from the United States became interested. One of them said, 'why are we not buying more?! Buy more land!' That’s why I decided to stay here in Palawan to continue finding more land [...] buying more land for them. (Interview, April 8, 2012)

The processes of land accumulation among non-indigenous landowners and outsiders continue in Buri, as land prices escalate. Land sales in the community have become a significant market, with old and recent migrant landowners already engaging in land sales and brokering for other individuals residing in the Philippines and abroad. It was common during field research that several individuals offered to sell their land to the author, thinking that he was primarily there to buy land in the community. As one individual said, “I know someone who can connect you to those who are selling their land” (Participant observation, March 7, 2012). The emerging land market is becoming even more pronounced with oil palm plantations expanding in Buri. Joselito, a Bisaya and a current participant in the oil palm production regime, said,

I, myself, am selling land. I now make it like *negosyo* (business). Price of land here is now going up, especially those that are planted with palm oil. Now, for example, I can sell a hectare of palm oil land for 70,000 pesos [approximately US\$ 1630 at current exchange rate]. I bought it for just 3,000 pesos [...] but it is hard to sell land here in [Sofronio] Española, because only a few can afford that expensive a land here. We usually sell to outsiders, especially to foreigners [...] or to those who are married to foreigners. The person interested in buying my land now, she’s from abroad, married to a foreigner. (Interview, March 15, 2012)

Pala’wan smallholders continue to negotiate the growing number of non-indigenous landowners and outsiders owning land in Buri. Since the entry of the oil palm production regime in the community, many Pala’wan smallholders have been asked and persuaded to sell their land. For example, when asked to talk about his experience of being approached by non-indigenous landowners and outsiders to

¹¹ Pseudonyms were used in the entire paper to protect the identity of the research participants.

buy his land, Gardo, a male Pala'wan, said,

For this land, I think I was already approached about 10 times already, but I really did not want to sell. Many Bisaya wanted to buy. They say they wanted to plant palm oil. First they offered 3,000 pesos, then 7 thousand. Now it's 15 thousand [...] But I still do not want to sell (Interview, April 5, 2012)

The increasing cost of land in Buri and elsewhere makes it even more arduous for Pala'wan smallholders to imagine having to give up ownership of their land. Pamana, a female Pala'wan leader, reasoned, “[i]t is hard to buy land these days. The price of land these days is so high! We do not have that kind of money to buy. Buying fish for a meal is already a challenge for us, how much more if it is land” (Interview, March 14, 2012).

Increase in Conflict

There are a few cases in which Pala'wan smallholders were compelled to sell their land due to perceptions of conflict and threats of violence. Although cases directly associated with oil palm expansion were not documented, discussing this concern underscores the behavior of some Pala'wan smallholders when they respond to land-based conflict. There is a possibility that conflicts may escalate as the value of land increases, more non-indigenous smallholders and landowners buy land, and existing social relations change. Casual conversations reveal how cases of smallholder-induced land encroachments are common in Buri. These forms of encroachment can manifest in terms of gradual shifting of property boundaries and assets to someone else's property. In most cases, disputes are settled through customary means (in the presence of Pala'wan leaders) or through local government mediation.

There are recorded cases, however, of Pala'wan smallholders being threatened. Interviews suggested that the immediate response of some indigenous smallholders is to sell their land to avoid further conflict. For example, Vilma, a female Pala'wan smallholder, said, “Before we had this land and our Bisaya neighbor was slowly moving his boundary into it. We sold that land for a low price *para maiwasan nalang yung gulo* (just to avoid conflict)” (Interview, April 2, 2012). Pamana also illustrated this type of case using her sister's situation,

Some Pala'wan sell their land because it is being encroached by Christians (Bisaya) [...] *kapag inaagaw yung lupa* (when they grab land). That happened to my sister. I remember our parents telling us not to sell our land, because our children will no longer have a place to live. My sister sold her land [...] she experienced someone coming in with a gun to threaten them. That is why my sister was forced to sell her land, because she did not want her children getting harmed. She just sold it for a very low price and moved to another community. (Interview, March 14, 2012)

Pamana continued that the non-indigenous Christian who threatened her sister is now planting oil palm on her sister's land. There were other cases, but several Pala'wan interviewees were reluctant and wary to share experiences of conflict and threats of violence.

Regulations and Land Enclosure

Several formal regulations that re-define boundaries and land-use have contributed to oil palm

expansion and land accumulation in Buri and elsewhere in southern Palawan. With the original intent of redistributing land to smallholders, CARP established formal titling in the uplands, including Pala'wan smallholders who continue to practice swidden cultivation. It has also been part of CARP's mandate that land development opportunities be brought to agrarian reform communities (ARCs) in order to increase the productivity of the land and improve the lives of beneficiaries. As mentioned by one municipal agrarian reform officer, one of the motivations and justifications for bringing in oil palm to Palawan was because of the ARCs and what has been perceived as "unproductive and idle agrarian reform lands" (Interview, June 21, 2012). The parceling of land through CARP also affected the customary and communal tenure system of the Pala'wan, effectively forcing the indigenous population to adopt a private land ownership system and partially restrain swidden cultivation in patented land. A relevant regulation (law originating from the colonial period) is the outlawing of swidden cultivation in protected old growth and residual forests, which restrained swidden cultivators in what is defined by government agents as "forests that were already opened to swidden." The combination of these two regulations ensured that Pala'wan smallholders cultivate swidden only in the land they own (or lease from the government) or in patented lands owned by others through borrowing or leasing (see next section.) As Dante, a Pala'wan elder, opined,

Na-parteparte na kasi yung lupa [the lands were already parceled]. If you do not have a suitable land, you just have to request others to lend you, if they will allow. If they don't, you will have no choice but to cultivate your own land. Paikot-ikot ka nalang sa sarili mong lupa [you just go around and round within your own land]. (Interview, March 16, 2012)

Related to the re-establishment of land boundaries and re-defining of land-use are the less formal regulations (or smallholders' perceptions thereof) associated with land enclosure. About 12 Pala'wan smallholders interviewed in the course of this study expressed their concerns regarding the implications of their land being enclosed or surrounded by oil palm plantations. Some smallholders articulated these implications in attempts to convince Pala'wan smallholders to sell their land. A case in point is Sita, a female Pala'wan who recounted her experience of being advised by other smallholders:

Many offered to buy our land, because the land next to us was bought for palm oil already. Even the one further up [points to other land next to theirs] was bought too. Looks like the next [points to another direction] will be bought soon, too. Those who already sold their land advised us to sell ours as well, because our land will eventually be trapped in the middle of palm oil [plantations]. (Interview, April 2, 2012)

In some cases, officials of the oil palm contract farming regime are the ones who articulate the implications of land enclosure to Pala'wan leaders. Sumbilang, a male Pala'wan leader, disclosed how the manager of the oil palm company warned him about possible implications of being enclosed by oil palm plantations. He said,

If your land gets surrounded by palm oil, your movement will be restricted. In the future landowners will become stricter and not allow people to pass through the palm oil [plantations]. That is what the manager of the palm oil company told me. He said if I did not sell my land or have it planted with palm oil, I might not be able to pass [the plantations] anymore if the trees begin to bear fruit. (Interview, March 8, 2012)

According to Pala'wan interviewees, being enclosed by oil palm plantations may not only restrict their movement, but also their livelihood practices. For example, a few Pala'wan smallholders were anxious that they might accidentally set adjacent oil palm plantations on fire during the process of burning felled vegetation for swidden cultivation. "We are afraid to use that land [points to a nearby fallow land next to an oil palm plantation] for swidden [...] we might accidentally burn the palm oil. *Pananagutan pa namin yan kung masunog yan* [that becomes our liability when that gets burned down]!" said the male Pala'wan, Bato (Interview, April 5, 2012). Diman, another male Pala'wan smallholder, expounded on these perceived liabilities: "[i]f we cultivate our swidden and the palm oil next to the land gets burned down, for sure they will imprison us! We won't have money to pay for the damages. We are afraid that might happen!" (Interview, March 22, 2012). Several Pala'wan smallholders did emphasize their fear of imprisonment if they accidentally damage adjacent oil palm plantations. "Prison, that's where we'll end up. Surely, they will imprison us!" as stressed by the male Pala'wan, Nording (Interview, April 2, 2012). For some, it is already given that one should not clear land for swidden if it is adjacent to an oil palm plantation. Jimmy, a Pala'wan, said, "it is no longer possible to clear for swidden next to palm oil [...] *masyado na delikado* (it is too dangerous)" (Interview, April 1, 2012). Where these ideas have come from is not clear, but a number of Pala'wan smallholders espouse this concern as if they self-regulate themselves.

Although there was not a Pala'wan smallholder interviewed who was convinced to sell his/her land for the aforementioned reasons, there are those who articulated intentions of doing so in the event that their land gets surrounded or enclosed by oil palm plantations. A case in point is Renata, a female Pala'wan smallholder who expressed with concern, "[w]hat others say is that if we do not sell our land, we will be trapped in the middle. If our land gets surrounded by palm oil, we might consider selling it eventually. If there are no longer fallow lands next to us, we will sell this land" (Interview, March 9, 2012).

Fallow Land Conversion

Renata's last comment above reflects the most salient concern among Pala'wan smallholders. The expansion of oil palm plantations in Buri and other communities in southern Palawan has converted a plethora of land types, which officials of the provincial and local governments and the oil palm company claim as "unproductive" and "idle" grasslands, bushlands and second growth forests. Many of these "unproductive" and "idle" areas, however, were *old fallow lands* Pala'wan smallholders deem as valuable sites for swidden cultivation. Several Pala'wan smallholders witnessed the clearing of old fallow land in Buri. Bato recalled, "I remember the *buho* (bamboo) and the *kahoy* (trees) to be old and thick when we were clearing land. Some *buho* were as old as 20 years" (Interview, April 5, 2012). Vilma also shared, "I worked for the palm oil company before, clearing land for about a month. We experienced clearing old fallow land where the trees were already thick. We had to climb large vines just to be able to chop down branches" (Interview, April 4, 2012).

All the 31 Pala'wan smallholders interviewed raised concerns about conversion of fallow land, particularly the mature ones, into oil palm plantations and how such environmental changes affect their ability to continue practicing swidden cultivation. Their concerns reflect not just their reluctance to commit *their own* land to oil palm production, but also land they *do not own*. As Radya, a female Pala'wan smallholder, shared, "[w]hen we go out of our house and the first thing we see are palm oil [plantations], the question that comes in our mind is, 'how can we still cultivate swidden [...] looks like there's no more land available for swidden'" (Interview, March 8, 2012). The male Pala'wan, Chad, explained why it is important to maintain even the fallow land they do not own:

If [oil palm] is planted on fallow land, we won't be able to cultivate them for swidden. We would have to find land elsewhere [...] far away. If the owner decides to cultivate that [points at an old fallow land], what else can we do? We won't be able to *borrow* that land anymore. (Interview, March 21, 2012)

The borrowing of fallow land from relatives and acquaintances is central to the concerns of Pala'wan smallholders in Buri. When population increased, lands were parceled into individual household lots (either as formal titles through the agrarian reform program, tenure contracts with the government, and informal rights), and swidden cultivation was outlawed in protected communal timberlands (see previous section), the borrowing of fallow land became an important practice among swidden cultivators. In the past, a smallholder farmer was able to borrow old fallow land from another smallholder following a reciprocity system. Gardo explained, “[o]ur practice before was that you could borrow *gubat* (old fallow land) from others [...] like when my land reaches a mature age, you can cultivate that for swidden. You can just borrow [...] then I can borrow from you in the future” (Interview, April 5, 2012).

Pala'wan smallholders claimed that the system of borrowing fallow land is now being constrained, and many attributed this to the expansion of oil palm plantations. As one Pala'wan smallholder, Lito, shared with us, “[i]t is harder to borrow land for swidden these days. Before there were extensive lands that we could borrow for swidden [...] when palm oil was not here yet. Now these lands are planted with palm oil” (Interview, March 17, 2012). Quite a few experienced not being able to borrow land anymore from those they had regularly gone to because these were either already committed to the oil palm contract farming or sold to prospective oil palm growers. Liban, a male Pala'wan smallholder, recalled, “Donel and Lukring [other smallholders] [...] we used to borrow land from them. Now not anymore [...] they already sold their land to palm oil [growers]” (Interview, April 3, 2012). Many other Pala'wan who used to borrow from the Bisaya family that owned vast tracts of land in Buri were also affected by the latter's commitment to oil palm contract farming.

While a few others are still able to borrow land from relatives without expected returns, Pala'wan smallholders also observed that instead of borrowing, renting land increasingly has become a norm. As the Pala'wan, Maya, remarked, “[b]efore we did not have to rent land. Before we just borrowed land without anything in exchange. Now you need to pay the landowner one to two sacks of rice for every hectare of land borrowed” (Interview, March 16, 2012). Pala'wan smallholders attributed this shift to the expansion of oil palm plantations as well. Liban attested, “[w]hen palm oil was not here yet, we were not renting land to swidden [...] we just borrowed. Before we could just borrow land, even from the Bisaya. Before they didn't rent it out, they just allowed us to borrow” (Interview, April 3, 2012). As Liban explained, the rent paid could be significant, but they persist to swidden nonetheless: “It is still a burden to pay one sack [...] especially when the yields are low. Sometimes we only get 10 sacks per harvest, and when you have a family that is not enough [...] but we rent anyway just so we can continue swidden” (Ibid).

Even renting of land has been perceived to be increasingly difficult. Nording claimed, “It is also difficult to find land *to rent* these days. It is now hard to find old fallow land.” Reman, a male Pala'wan smallholder, also attested,

It is hard even to *rent* land nowadays, because most areas here are now planted with palm oil. Now there are only a few lands left to cultivate for swidden. Before we could still find fallow lands that are at least five years old. But now there's really not much to cultivate [...] almost all are now palm oil plantations. (Interview, March 21, 2012)

The difficulty of borrowing and renting fallow land has left many Pala'wan smallholders with no choice but to stay within their own land and continue cultivating it for swidden even with very short fallow periods (e.g. one to three years). This results in either very expensive production (i.e. necessitating the use of commercial herbicides and fertilizers) or very poor swidden yields. Radya argued, "[i]f we cannot borrow or rent fallow lands anymore, sometimes we have no choice but to go back to our own land, even if it is just two years old" (Interview, March 8, 2012).

The realities of dwindling availability of land for swidden has also necessitated a growing number of Pala'wan smallholders to rely on fallow lands that are far away from where they reside. Nenita, a female Pala'wan smallholder, provided a convincing account of the distance her husband has to travel to be able to continue swidden and how such change affects their household:

We can no longer find nearby areas to cultivate for swidden. We had to buy land from afar, so that we can continue our swidden. To get to our swidden field we have to walk about four hours. The land we cultivated before was just about an hour away [...] we went there in the morning and came back in the afternoon. (Interview, March 4, 2012)

She added,

[My husband] now would have to stay there for weeks to take care of the field. It does not make sense for him to go back and forth every week because [the swidden field] is just way too far. Most of the time I am left here with the children to take care of them. It is much more difficult for me [...] also difficult for him to work that hard and be away from his children. (Ibid.)

Land as Livelihood, Identity and Legacy

It is an important issue for Pala'wan smallholders to be excluded from access to fallow land and be unable to practice swidden cultivation. Land for Pala'wan smallholders is both a source of livelihood and a symbol of their identity and legacy. They see the importance of maintaining fallow land and their swidden practices as a form of insurance, especially when wage labor becomes an unreliable source of income. In justifying the need to preserve swidden, many of the Pala'wan smallholders interviewed said that their swidden fields were able to provide food for their families in times when wages from the oil palm or mining company were delayed. Reman elucidated,

If you do not cultivate swidden, you will no longer have anything to eat. Even if you have a job, but the wages get delayed, just like in palm oil, you will not have money to buy rice. What if you did not cultivate swidden that year? You won't get to eat anymore. You will go hungry. (Interview, March 21, 2012)

Moreover, Pala'wan relate land to the future of their children, more importantly their children's ability to get a decent living from land if they fail to find work for wages. As Nording shared, "I do not want to sell my land. I have many children and they also have no work [for wages]. That might be the only source of livelihood they will depend on, our land" (Interview, April 2, 2012). Such concern comes with the risk perception that they will not be able to buy land in good locations anymore due to escalated prices in Buri and in many other communities in southern Palawan.

Many Pala'wan smallholders expressed to us their hesitation to sell their land and live elsewhere not only because of the prohibitive cost of buying a new plot of land, but also because they are

attached to the place they were born. Nording articulated, “[t]his is where I was born. This is where my children were born. This is where they will grow up” (Interview, April 2, 2012). Their attachment to land is also indicative of the relationship between swidden and Pala’wan identities and legacies. For some Pala’wan smallholders, maintaining swidden is associated with life-long experiences and legacies of Pala’wan ancestors. Several Pala’wan smallholders interviewed believe that they are destined to cultivate for swidden because they grew up doing so. Many also associate their identities with the practices of their ancestors. Pamana shared, “[w]e have already cultivated swidden from the moment we were born and opened our eyes in this world (*namulatan*) [...] this is what we, natives, have been doing since all the way back to our ancestors” (Interview, March 15, 2012). Legacies also connect to the perceived need to preserve heirloom seeds of local varieties of upland rice. At least five Pala’wan smallholders expressed the importance of maintaining and preserving heirloom seeds. As Sonya, a female Pala’wan smallholder, emphasized, “[w]e will not stop swiddening. Even if it is just a small plot of land, whatever happens we will find a way to continue just so that we do not lose our *binhi ng palay* (heirloom seeds of rice)” (Interview, March 18, 2012).

Although field research suggests that there already are Pala’wan who have abandoned swidden and sold their land for off-farm employment elsewhere, those who remain in the community still depend on this source of livelihood. Swidden remains persistent amidst the presence of social, economic and biophysical factors that would suggest its demise. For example, all Pala’wan smallholders interviewed now recognize the deteriorating soil condition, proliferation of pests and weeds, and declining production yields of upland rice in their community. They have reduced their swidden fields and adopted commercial herbicides and insecticides as attempts to continue swidden cultivation. Yet, many of them continue and intend to endure practicing swidden cultivation in Buri.

CONCLUSIONS

The development trajectory of oil palm contract farming in Buri thus far suggests processes of land control and exclusion of Pala’wan smallholders from access to fallow land for swidden cultivation. Building on the analytical framework, powers of exclusion, this paper has illustrated how legitimation (by means of reproduction of pejorative upland discourses), market (escalation of land prices and increased activity of selling of lands), force (conflict and threats of violence), and regulations and land enclosure (re-defining of boundaries and land uses) relate to environmental change (conversion and decline of fallow land for swidden), which affects the capacity of Pala’wan smallholders to borrow or lease land for swidden cultivation. It is argued in this paper that environmental change (or the perception of change) is an important factor in the exclusion process. Hall et al. (2011) recognize that the four powers are not exhaustive and that there could be other powers operating in certain contexts, such as environmental change, knowledge and technologies, and political relationships and alliances. In the analysis, environmental change can be considered as another form of power or just an intermediary condition that connects the powers from the actual exclusion. Either way, it is part and parcel of the processes of exclusion.

As illustrated above, oil palm contract farming has driven land prices up in the community, encouraging prospective oil palm growers to buy more land and expand the plantations. Both indigenous and non-indigenous smallholders, especially the latter, sell fallow land to immediately take advantage of the elevated land prices or engage in contract farming in the hopes of increasing the value of the land and selling it in the future. Conflict also compels smallholders, especially the Pala’wan, to sell their land even at a low price. Although this has not been widely documented in the case of oil palm, there were a few cases of land sold because of conflict, which incidentally are now committed to oil palm production. Finally, threats of land enclosure also compel Pala’wan smallholders to eventually consider selling their land to prospective oil palm growers. As more fallow

land gets converted into oil palm plantations, more smallholder properties are exposed to threats of enclosure. All of these processes contribute to the conversion of remaining fallow land to oil palm plantations, thus compromising the capacity of Pala'wan smallholders to borrow and lease land for swidden. Hence, even if Pala'wan smallholders are resistant to commit their own land to oil palm contract farming, they are still affected by overall decline of fallow land in the community.

The combination of the agrarian reform and the outlawing of swidden in protected forest areas have necessitated Pala'wan smallholders to limit swidden cultivation in either their own land or someone else's through land borrowing and leasing. Thus borrowing and leasing of land are essential coping mechanisms that allow smallholders to continue practicing swidden amidst re-defined boundaries and land uses (i.e. parceled and titled lands and protected forests). Erosion of these mechanisms through conversion of remaining fallow land (and the other powers of exclusion that drive this environmental change) will have considerable consequences on smallholders' capacity to continue swidden cultivation.

Figure 7.2 suggests that the processes of exclusion can have feedback components. Further conversion of fallow land to oil palm plantations, for example, will inevitably decrease fallow periods and contribute to costlier production and/or lower swidden yields. The current state of conversion in Buri still show persistence among Pala'wan smallholders to practice swidden cultivation and resist committing their own land to oil palm contract farming. It is still uncertain, however, how further land-use conversion would ultimately affect Pala'wan smallholders' capacity to resist and negotiate with the powers of exclusion. It is probable that if swidden yields in the community further decline to a dismal level, Pala'wan smallholders might be persuaded (or coerced) to abandon swidden and participate in the oil palm contract farming or sell their land to prospective oil palm growers. Further empirical research is needed to monitor environmental change, changes in exclusion patterns, and changes in the way Pala'wan smallholders negotiate and resist the processes of exclusion.

Finally, this paper highlights the importance of understanding land grabbing beyond the macro-level and of paying more attention to local level dynamics of land control. Arguably the networks of State and multi-national companies involved in green economy agro-industrial projects, such as oil palm, indeed play a significant role in the conversion of ancestral lands into monoculture commercial plantations. However, only in examining local-level dynamics do we realize the significance of the relations between indigenous and non-indigenous smallholders. In this way, global land grabbing in the name of green economy is not only the project of powerful state and market entities. Smallholders themselves become agents of dispossession and exclusion, as their actions contribute to environmental changes that ultimately constrain the opportunity spaces of other smallholders.

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About the Author

Marvin Joseph Montefrio is currently associate professor at the Political Science Department of De La Salle University (DLSU) in Manila. He will be an assistant professor of environmental studies at Yale-NUS College in Singapore beginning July 2015. Marvin's broad research agenda examines the political ecology of and decision-making processes associated with contemporary environmental issues, in particular climate change and frontier land development. His current work focuses on analyzing discourses on Philippine upland environments and identities in the context of multi-level climate change governance (i.e. the "green economy" and "low carbon" development programs). His findings thus far have been published in *Society and Natural Resources*, *Ecological Economics*, *International Migration Review*, and the *Bulletin of Science, Technology and Society*. Marvin holds a PhD in Environmental and Natural Resources Policy from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry.