



Women, Gender and Protest Emergence
Contesting Oil Palm Plantation Expansion in Sambas
District, Indonesia

Miranda Morgan

LDPI
Working
Paper **49**

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by Miranda Morgan

Published by:

The Land Deal Politics Initiative

www.iss.nl/ldpi

landpolitics@gmail.com

in collaboration with:

Institute for Development Studies (IDS)

University of Sussex

Library Road

Brighton, BN1 9RE

United Kingdom

Tel: +44 1273 606261

Fax: +44 1273 621202

E-mail: ids@ids.ac.uk

Website: www.ids.ac.uk

Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies (ICAS)

International Institute of Social Studies (ISS)

P.O. Box 29776

2502 LT The Hague

The Netherlands

Tel: +31 70 426 0664

Fax: +31 70 426 0799

E-mail: iss.icas@gmail.com

Website: www.iss.nl/icas

The Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS)

School of Government, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

University of the Western Cape, Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535, Cape Town

South Africa

Tel: +27 21 959 3733

Fax: +27 21 959 3732

E-mail: info@plaas.org.za

Website: www.plaas.org.za

The Polson Institute for Global Development

Department of Development Sociology

Cornell University

133 Warren Hall

Ithaca NY 14853

United States of America

Tel: +1 607 255-3163

Fax: +1 607 254-2896

E-mail: ta12@cornell.edu

Website: polson.cals.cornell.edu

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Published with support from the UK Department for International Development (DfID), Atlantic Philanthropies, Inter-Church Organization for Development Cooperation (ICCO), Ford Foundation and Miserior.

Abstract

In Indonesia large-scale land acquisitions, fuelled in particular by the desire for developing oil palm plantations, are leading to dispossession, particularly for vulnerable populations. But this is not without contention; as oil palm plantations have spread, so have instances of land-related resistance. Gender power relations influence not only the distribution of costs and benefits of large-scale land tenure changes for men and women, but also condition the political opportunities that men and women have to influence such changes. Drawing from a case study in Sambas district, this study demonstrates that rural women can and indeed do participate in protest, even if their participation is rarely acknowledged, and it explores the conditions that lead to their unlikely participation. It finds that gender relations are integral to shaping the motivations and political opportunities that lead to women's decisions to participate in protests around land. But it also reveals that gender relations are not fixed. Individual actors are able to play an influential role in opening up new political opportunities for otherwise apolitical women. Despite dominant gender relations that tend to exclude women from politics and even public spaces, then, the presence of women in protest indicates that these are being negotiated. This opens up the possibility that rural struggles around land and dispossession, though ostensibly free of explicit gender concerns, may simultaneously serve as sites of struggle over gender as well.

About the Author

Miranda Morgan is currently a Post-Doctoral Fellow (Gender Specialist) at WorldFish, a member of the CGIAR consortium. She completed a PhD in Human Geography at the University of Manchester (UK), where her research was funded by the Brooks World Poverty Institute and the Overseas Research Student Awards Scheme. She also holds a MSc in Nature, Society and Environmental Policy (University of Oxford, UK) and a BA Honours in Political Studies and Development Studies (Queen's University, Canada). Some of Miranda's most formative professional experiences have included working at the Democratic Dialogue Project (UNDP Guatemala), LEAD International (London, UK) and the Ministry of Community and Social Services (Ontario, Canada).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank LDPI for funding this paper and in particular Jun Borrás for his suggestions and kind support. I am grateful to all who contributed to the PhD research that preceded this paper, especially to my research assistant Ridho, my translator Kate Stevens, my supervisors Noel Castree and Erik Swyngedouw for their invaluable guidance and to the Brooks World Poverty Institute and the Overseas Research Student Awards scheme for providing funding. Finally, I would like to thank the communities in Sambas for their hospitality and time, and especially the women protesters for their warmth and openness.

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1 Introduction

On June 24 2008, up to 7,000 people participated in a protest unprecedented in the small capital of Sambas district in the province of West Kalimantan, Indonesia.¹ They demanded that the *Bupati* (the head of the district) withdraw plantation permits to their land which he had earlier granted to two companies. One of these companies, PT Sentosa Asih Makmur (PT SAM), had started to make advances to establish an oil palm plantation on a 16,000 hectare concession.² Smallholders from across three affected sub-districts united to fight against their imminent dispossession. When the Bupati finally met with protesters, he announced that he was withdrawing PT SAM's permit to the land,³ ending the threat of dispossession for these smallholders. Among the protesters present that day were a significant number of otherwise apolitical women who, for the first time, turned to protest to defend their land.

The Sambas protest is not unique. Rural people across the world are being forced off their land by contemporary processes of dispossession (Araghi 2009; Li 2010; De Schutter 2011; Walker 2008; White and Dasgupta 2010; Zagma 2011). The rapid expansion of the oil palm crop, driven by rising global demand for both food and biofuel, is a notorious contributor to these political-economic processes that separate (mostly smallholder) agrarian producers from their land. Already the world's largest producer of the crop, Indonesia leads the push for dispossession via oil palm with far-reaching and fast-paced expansion plans driven by economic liberalisation and private capital (McCarthy 2010; McCarthy and Cramb 2009; Colchester 2011; Li 2011; Wakker 2005; Eilenberg 2009). These plans continue in spite of the well-documented environmental and social consequences of oil palm development, which are often suffered most by vulnerable populations dispossessed of their land (Arrighi et al. 2010; Borras Jr. and Franco 2010a, 2010b; Borras Jr. et al. 2007; Dauvergne and Neville 2010). But not everybody is accepting infringements on their land passively.

As oil palm plantations expand and spread throughout Indonesia, so have instances of oil-palm related protest and conflict (Afrizal 2007; Casson 2000; Collins 2007; Marti 2008; McCarthy and Cramb 2009; Potter 2008; Pye 2010; Siraït 2009). As of 2008, Sawit Watch was monitoring over 500 active conflicts between communities and oil palm companies, though some believe the actual number of conflicts may be double that (Marti 2008, 39). Lacking access to formal political spaces, a few communities have attempted engaging with more informal or non-institutional forms of politics. This includes the development of farmers' organisations and workers' unions, for example, as well as shorter-term contentious events, like street protests and occupations. In Indonesia there are instances of oil palm smallholders, plantation labourers, local NGOs and international advocacy organisations, among others, organizing to resist and contest both private companies and local political officials to prevent dispossession, or to demand better tenure arrangements, wages or benefits.

The presence of women at the Sambas protest is also not unique, though the role of women and gender has largely been obscured in the politics of large-scale land acquisitions. While rarely discussed in the literature until now, gender is increasingly understood as one of the key axes of

¹ A local journalist estimated 5,000 protesters, while NGO workers and protesters said there were at least 7,000 people (Nova 2008a). For a series of local newspaper articles preceding and following the protest, see Nova 2008b, 2008c, 2008d.

² This research study focuses exclusively on PT SAM and its proposed oil palm plantation, but it is important to acknowledge that the Sambas protest was shared with another major protest group (people from the sub-district of Jawai demanding that the Bupati withdraw the permit he had given to another private company to harvest industrial forests.

³ The Bupati revoked both the Location License and Plantation Business Permit of PT SAM.

differentiation affecting the distribution of opportunities and costs from large-scale land acquisitions (Behrman et al. 2012). Yet discussions on the relationship between social differentiation and large-scale land acquisitions rarely extend beyond identifying who is most vulnerable or victimized to consider the ways in which differentially located people exercise agency and shape their futures vis-à-vis land.

In the debate around oil palm expansion in Indonesia, for example, the literature nods to the possibility that unequal gender relations result in disproportionate consequences for women (see Hertomo 2009 in Colchester 2011; Marti 2008). White and White (2012) provide a dedicated analysis of the gender disaggregated impacts of oil palm expansion. However, they only briefly mention the participation of women in protest against the local oil palm company and the overall lack of women in the local oil palm farmers' union. In other case studies of oil palm resistance, the presence of women is again mentioned but the nature of their involvement is left unexplored (Colchester 2011; Collins 2007; Gerber 2011; Sirait 2009). This oversight is not only wrong, in that it fails to represent the reality of women's participation and diversity within rural political movements (Bernstein 2008; Wolford 2009), but it is also dangerous, as it serves to facilitate existing conceptions of women as victims of agrarian change – rather than agents – to persist.

The presence of women in the Sambas protest demonstrates that rural women can and indeed do participate in protest, even if their participation is rarely acknowledged and seemingly contradicts conservative gender norms and practices. The interesting question, then, is not if women participate in the politics around large-scale land acquisitions, but what conditions lead to their unlikely participation. Meyer and Reyes (2010) find that people are more likely to protest when they are (a) presented with a threat that they believe requires action (protest motivation) and (b) faced with expanding or constricting political opportunities that lead them to view protest as a feasible 'potentially effective' option (Klandermans 2003; Meyer 2004). Previous studies have demonstrated how by infusing motivation and/or political opportunities, gender inequality serves as an integral force in women's decisions to participate in protest.

Einwohner et al. (2000) discuss how gender can be a kind of 'cultural resource' that actors mobilize to further their goals. They state, "gender can be used by social movement participants who wish to construct their image in a certain light, frame an issue in a particular way, or claim legitimacy as actors in a given arena" (680). For example, Beckwith (1996) discusses how a women's group indirectly involved in the fight against mine closure gained legitimacy in a man's movement by using their positions as miners' wives and mothers to legitimize concerns about their families, class and communities. Their position as wives and mothers also protected them in action against certain kinds of reprisals. This shows how the framing of traditional gendered motivations and roles such as motherhood may be empowering in certain circumstances, and act as a powerful motivator for protest. As Corcoran-Nantes (1993) explains, in settings where women's status comes from their reproductive role, utilizing this image can strengthen and legitimate their political involvement (140).

Agarwal (2000) has noted that having a stake in an issue is not a 'sufficient condition' for catalyzing action. Due to gender-specific constraints related to political action, there is a disjunction between women's interests and their ability to act on them (300). Gendered political opportunities condition if women act and through what political channel, whether formal, informal or some combination. For example, an open institutional context may allow or facilitate protest just as an apparent closing of institutional access may lead people to extra-institutional mobilization (Perreault 2008). Women's exclusion from formal politics can actually be productive in terms of informal or grassroots mobilization. In a rural village in Malaysia Hart (1991) found that women actually had a greater capacity to organize collectively and overtly challenge large landowners because of their marginal relationship to official politics whereas poor men were far more deferential due to their location in

subservient political patronage relations with local party bosses. Agarwal (2000) finds that while there is a 'dearth' of women in formal decision-making bodies (related to forest protection) in India, women are noticeably more present in informal groups and in 'agitational' collective action (300). Ferree and Mueller (2003) also argue that because women are excluded or disadvantaged on 'men's' terrain (spaces of formal or institutional politics), they are more likely to organize outside of this. Taylor and Van Dyke (2003) note that people participate in movements because they lack access to political institutions or find it more difficult to participate in more 'conventional' means of influence. As a demonstration is a relatively low risk and low effort action in terms of time and energy (McAdam 1986, as cited in Taylor and Van Dyke 2003), it may offer a more feasible means of political action than formal politics. Women's oft exclusion from formal politics, then, may actually serve to produce their participation in protest.

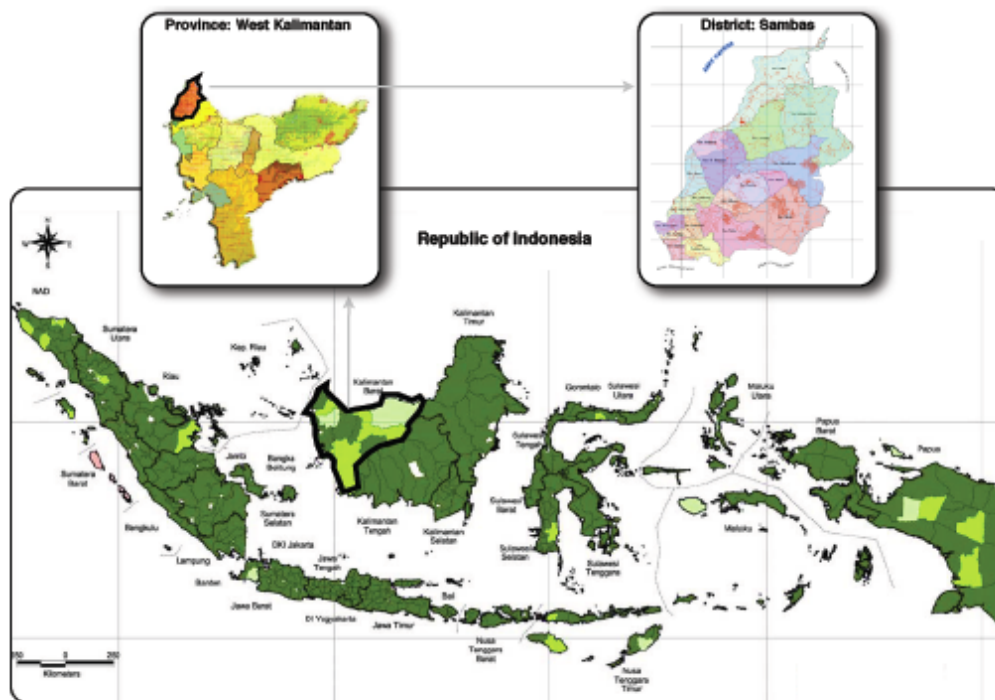
The above discussion depends on an analytical separation of formal / state-centered and informal / contentious / non-institutional political spaces. While helpful in explaining the dynamics between formal and informal politics, in actuality this separation is false. As Hassim (1999) argues, "formal and informal spaces are not self-contained sites of politics but porous, each shaping the other" (in Miraftab 2006, 205). Miraftab points out that these spaces are not mutually exclusive but overlapping, and grassroots actors move between them as required. Recognizing how formal and informal politics inform and shape one another is key to conceptualizing the factors that facilitate or impede the mobilization of women in any one context.

Drawing from these previous studies, this paper aims to explore the ways in which gender power relations shape the motivations and political opportunities, and thus the participation, of women in rural politics. At the heart of this study are the voices and experiences of 42 women protesters, the "movement participants" whose stories help us to undo the myths of a 'coherent' social movement as told through one (often male) movement leader (Wolford 2009). Primary data was obtained during a period of field work in 2009 using a mix of research methods, which were mostly qualitative (focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and participation observation). It also involved collecting and interpreting secondary quantitative data.

2 The Case Study Site

The district of Sambas is literally in a corner of Indonesia, in the north-west of West Kalimantan, in the north-west of the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo. Approximately 84 percent of the total population is rural, which is a much higher proportion than that of the province and Indonesia. Sambas is time and again listed as one of the poorest and most vulnerable districts in Indonesia, lagging behind both provincial and national averages in indicators such as average life expectancy (WFP Indonesia 2009), food insecurity and vulnerability (WFP Indonesia 2009) and human development (UNDP et al. 2004).

Figure 1: Locating Sambas district in Indonesia



Sources: World Food Programme 2009, BPS Provinsi Kalimantan Barat 2009, BPS Kabupaten Sambas 2009

Agricultural production plays a central role in the lives and landscapes of Sambas. The economy is heavily reliant on agriculture. Rice is far and away the most important food crop in Sambas, as in Indonesia, but the district also produces a considerable variety of vegetables and fruit. The dominant plantation crop – rubber – has long been produced by smallholders for export (Dove 1993, 1996; Potter 2005). Rubber tends to complement rather than replace existing forms of subsistence agriculture. Thanks to the mutual enhancement of resource use, households with rubber tend to be better off than those without. Rubber enables farmers to “participate in the market economy to a remarkable extent on their own terms as opposed to the market’s, thereby avoiding many of the risks that the latter entails” (Dove 1996, 145).

Like in many other parts of Kalimantan, the agricultural landscape in Sambas is expected to change significantly due to the proposed expansion of oil palm, not only in what types of crops are produced but how. Since 2004, interest in oil palm expansion has soared in Sambas district. There are several proposals for oil palm plantations currently under consideration and, if all were approved, it could potentially result in over 225,000 hectares of land allocated to oil palm development, approximately one-third of Sambas’s total land area. This signifies a potentially massive change in an agricultural landscape where presently oil palm accounts for only three percent of the district’s land area. Plans for oil palm expansion in Sambas could transform Sambas from an area dominated by the rubber plantation crop to that of oil palm.

As future oil palm development in West Kalimantan is predicated largely on the expansion of large-scale plantations,⁴ oil palm would transform Sambas’ agricultural landscape not only in terms of what *types* of plantation crops dominate, but also *how* crops are produced. As in other parts of

⁴ Sheil et al. (2009) find ‘substantial’ differences in smallholder versus large plantation patterns throughout Indonesia, with the relative share of smallholders in newly planted area much higher in Sumatra (51 percent) than in West Kalimantan (‘only’ 15-20 percent) (41).

Indonesia, the recent surge in oil palm features one form of expansion, that of large-scale, even industrial-sized, monocrop plantations (Colchester 2011; Li 2011). This varies significantly from the current dominant plantation crop, rubber, which is exclusively produced by smallholders.

Due to recent political-economic changes introduced in the post-Suharto *Reformasi* period, local districts like Sambas have had significant incentive to encourage large investments, even in the face of known company violations and complaints. In Sambas, the desire of the district government (particularly the head of the district, the *Bupati*) to encourage or be friendly to oil palm investors has caused “irregularities” in the issuance of permits (Milieudefensie et al. 2007, 42). This includes approving permit applications too quickly and/or before the necessary assessments or consultations have been completed. In 2007, a local Sambas newspaper reported that nine plantation companies had been illegally awarded Plantation Business Permits despite not having secured approval from the Environmental Impact Assessment Commission.

From Permit to Protest

In 2006, the company PT SAM, a subsidiary of the Ganda Group, acquired both the Location License and Plantation Business Permit for 16,300 hectares of land to develop an oil palm plantation in Sambas district. However, most of the affected communities did not find out about the company, the plantation proposal or the permits until early 2008. Community leaders reported first being alerted to it by finding signs marked ‘PT SAM’ in land around their communities. Though the company had already received a Plantation Business Permit, it had clearly not carried out the consultations (commonly referred to as ‘*sosialisasi*’) with the community required at earlier stages in the permit process (Sirait 2009). The affected communities blamed both the company and the state for allowing this to happen.

The communities were upset partly because they were not informed or consulted about the proposed development but also because there was little to no ‘empty’ or ‘idle’ land for which to develop a plantation. According to law, local governments are required to clarify that land released to companies is empty or unproductive (no cultivated crops) (Collins 2007, 56). However, in the case of PT SAM, the proposed concession consisted mostly of cultivated land. A member of the Sambas House of Representatives at the time explained that the land may have *appeared* empty on maps due to the lack of legal or official ownership over land in these communities,⁵ but actually the land was very much in use. In these sub-districts, he said, the land “has all been worked already for maybe tens, hundreds of years.” It was not clear whether the district government had not followed the appropriate procedures to find the ‘real’ situation on the ground – that the land was already productive and thus not suitable to oil palm expansion – or that they were but this information was ignored. Regardless, the affected communities felt that the company and the Bupati were willing to overlook the fact that their land was already productive and as plans proceeded to establish the PT SAM plantation on their land, they knew they had to take action to protect their land.

5 Of the households interviewed, only one had an official land certificate issued by the National Land Agency (BPN), that is, their land ownership was officially recognized by the state; the rest of the households held only *Surat Keterangan Tanah* (SKT), that is, Land Information Letters issued by village heads to provide proof of land ownership. The letters prove customary land ownership but are not officially recognized at the state level. Colchester (2011) cites World Bank studies which show that less than 40 percent of all landholdings in Indonesia have formal titles; the rest are held under customary tenure (6). For more on the distinction between non-certificate land through the SKT (customary, recognized locally) versus certificate land (formal, official, recognized by the state), see ADB (2010) and Ngakan et al. (2005). Also see Siagian and Komarudin (2008) on local land claims without written proof of ownership (p 14).

First, community leaders and NGO representatives initiated a long series of community meetings which led to the formation of the first grassroots peasant organisation in this region, which they named the Peaceful Farmer's Union (STSD). Newly united, representatives of the affected communities embarked on a series of hearings at the district-level House of Representatives (DPR) to voice their disapproval at the proposed development. They pointed out that all or most of the land in their communities were already cultivated by smallholders (and thus not appropriate for a large-scale plantation) and provided evidence that PT SAM was already illegally planting oil palm seedlings despite not having the required permit. Over the span of a few months a total of seven hearings were held at the DPR, one of which involved upwards of 300 villagers. But no action could be taken as the Bupati did not attend any of these hearings.

The Bupati finally agreed to meet with the affected communities. According to a local community leader, over a thousand people from 11 villages came to meet with the Bupati on this occasion. The crowd was able to tell the Bupati directly that they rejected the proposed plantation. In response the Bupati promised to withdraw the company's permit. However, the letter that followed outlined the Bupati's plans to temporarily suspend the company's activities in the area, rather than permanently revoke their permit as he first promised. In light of this development, the community leaders decided it was time to try a new strategy. With the help of NGO partners, they organized a protest, rarely if ever seen in Sambas, to push the Bupati to respond to their demands.

On the morning of June 24, thousands of protesters assembled outside the DPR building in the small capital of Sambas. Together, they marched to the Bupati's office and stood outside demanding to meet with the Bupati. When they were told that the Bupati was away, they said they would wait. Many were committed to staying there as long as they had to, even overnight, to resolve the issue. The Bupati eventually arrived in the early evening. He climbed on top of a truck, from where protest leaders had been rallying the crowd, and announced that he was withdrawing PT SAM's permit to the land. For most protesters this was a sign they had successfully defended their land and over one year later, the oil palm company had not returned.

3 Introducing the Women Protesters

In-depth interviews were conducted with 42 women from across five communities that participated in the protest (Sebetaan, Sekuduk, Senujuh, Teluk Durian and Terikembang). Consisting of women young and old, married and single, with children and without, and with varying levels of education and literacy, the group of women protesters is surprisingly diverse. There are also notable differences between these women in terms of land size, land use, sources of income and experiences of poverty, revealing how prevalent differentiation is even within a sample of rural women from a concentrated geographic area. This reinforces challenges that have been previously made to concepts of an essentialist 'peasant' class, let alone a unitary 'rural woman' (Bernstein 2008; Bernstein and Byres 2001; Carr 2008). It also helps to remind us that oil palm is being introduced into already socially differentiated landscapes (Dauvergne and Neville 2010; Pye 2010).

The majority of the women protesters have less than two hectares of land, though there is great differentiation in land size and production across the protesters and between communities. Almost all the women have fuzzy or insecure tenure over the land they claim as their own. There are some women, and some communities, that still grow some or most of their own food for direct use, but more who produce for sale and purchase most or all of the food. Both in terms of shifting prices for selling rubber and purchasing rice and other foodstuffs, these rural women are very much reliant on the market. Selling crops to buy their food does not appear to be a new phenomenon in the area. Many of the women trace their rubber-producing, and therefore more or less market-dependent, livelihoods back many generations.

Several of the women confidently said that their daily incomes were sufficient to meet their household needs, but many others were hesitant. Almost all of the women highlighted the day-to-day nature of their livelihoods and the continuous threat this presents to the women's abilities to meet household needs, even for those who claimed to have sufficient incomes. At any one time the women say they can provide for their household, but changes in their environment, communities, households, and so on easily leads to insufficiency. Several women emphasized the day-to-day nature of their income and lives. For example, Risa (Sebetaan) said, "we live as the little people ... we work hard every day to get results." While most of these women report generally having sufficient income to fulfill household needs, the day-to-day nature of their livelihoods makes them vulnerable to fluctuations.

In this context, it may seem reasonable that some of the women would be open to the promises of "rural socio-economic improvement" (Rist et al. 2010, 1011) offered by the oil palm boom. However, this was not the case. Rather, the women protesters identified a range of possible repercussions from land dispossession, both material and intangible, that informed their decision to resist oil palm expansion in their villages.

4 Women, Gender and Protest Motivation

Due to the existing gendered division of labour in their households and communities, the women interviewed tended to be the ones most responsible for working the land, growing crops for sale and subsistence, ensuring food security and raising future generations – all of which could be compromised by future oil palm development. During interviews, women protesters postulated that a new oil palm development could lead them to suffer especially from: polluted water; infringements on housing; cutting down current crops which could threaten reproduction on a daily (food insecurity) and generational (children's educational prospects) basis; a lack of new labour opportunities for women; and cultural changes in the community. Differentiation among households and communities means that the range of possible consequences discussed would not be evenly experienced in these communities or even across the sample of women protesters. However in general, already existing gender inequalities suggest that women are likely to suffer disproportionately from future oil palm development (with some women even more vulnerable than others).

Throughout the interviews, women drew from their gender roles in society, as mothers and grandmothers, to legitimize concerns about the future of their families and communities due to oil palm expansion and thus justify their decision to protest (Beckwith 1996; Corcoran-Nantes 1993; Silvey 2003). Many of the women protesters chose to mobilize these gendered roles in protest motivation even though by doing so they risk reinforcing the unequal gendered positions that often exclude them from politics in the first place (Einwohner et al. 2000). The women's words clearly show how gender relations infuse protest motivation in Sambas and as such there is always the potential for a seemingly non-gendered struggle over land to simultaneously be about struggles over gender itself (Nightingale 2006).

The women were wary about the risks associated not only with oil palm development itself, but with the prospect of how the land would be controlled and managed, by a company rather than themselves. While their existing livelihoods may not have afforded them material security, at least they felt in charge of key decisions over the land and their livelihoods. They were not willing to trade this in for any promises of 'improvement.' In addition to the material impacts on the women and their families, the women focused on the potential loss of more intangible elements of their current livelihoods, that is, the ability to decide what happens to their land and, thus, their futures.

Land Rights, Control and Power

Aside from the very real material consequences of oil palm development, the women repeatedly mentioned their fear of uncertainty, of a future dictated by others. While the sample of women protesters could hardly be considered a powerful group, their current relations with their land and labour allowed them a degree of agency. They were able to decide what was planted on their land and how. They were also largely in control of how many hours they worked, though certainly household power dynamics must also be taken into account. As such, when threatened with dispossession, several women expressed their concern with losing not just the material land and crops but the control and power they have to make decisions over these resources as well.

At least 26 women in the sample mentioned the implications that the proposed oil palm plantation had for their *hak*, or rights. Most discussed how the plantation threatened not only their land or property rights, but their right to decide what happened on their land and in their communities. The women believed that the land they had cleared, made productive and used every day to grow their crops was their land, regardless of whether their 'ownership' was recognized at local/customary or state/official levels. They believed that because the land was theirs, they had the right to decide what happens to or on the land. Whether it was defending the choice of their day-to-day crops or the long-term future of the land, the women clearly already felt ownership over decisions concerning their land.

However, the actions of the government and PT SAM to agree to initial land permits and physically stake out their land with wooden signs infringed on both the land itself and their right to decide. The women used the terms *merampas* (stolen) or *diambil* (taken) to describe what they feared was happening to their land or property rights. For example, Yana (Teluk Durian) gave the following reason for protesting:

To defend our property rights that will be stolen by PT SAM ... the feeling when PT SAM will enter [makes me] so angry, because our rights will be taken.

One woman in the FGD in Sebetan gave this reason for protesting against the oil palm development:

Actually, it's not that we don't want palm. We just want to defend the rights to our land, that's all ... If the land is taken by the company, it means they have the right. That's why we don't want it.

Despite considering it to be their land, the women were not consulted or considered in the land permit process. Mahsuri (Teluk Durian) describes how she first learned about the proposed oil palm development:

The government came. Previously we went to a meeting in Sepandan at the primary school there. But he [the government representative] didn't do the right thing, he didn't ask. The community wasn't asked whether or not they wanted it. He just said 'there'll be palm oil'. But we were not asked, 'ladies and gentlemen, do you want palm or not?'. That was never asked. Then straight to the government who said a sign had already been made in the forest. He did in fact come with us. We went. But we were never asked whether we wanted it or not. They just put the signs up straight away.

Worse, the women felt the company was taking their land in an overtly secretive or non-transparent manner. According to Siska (Sekuduk):

Their gardens, which were given red signs. There are already signs. We were going to go tap enough to go home. Why is this in the garden? Done secretly ... Tomorrow we go to tap

and already there is a sign there. It is PT SAM, that is what it says on it. Then we were upset with it all. Asked each other when going to tap rubber. What is this sign, we said. It says there were people here, a sign from oil palm here. An oil palm company ... When people put the signs up we do not know. Maybe at night. Do not know. Secretly. Do not ask permission with the head of the village, no. They did not ask permission.

Hirni (Teluk Durian) also said the signs were erected without consulting the people, infringing on their rights to what they own and on their decisions: “our right to fight for this. What we own must be fought for. It must not be taken by force.” For these women, the way in which the government and oil palm company operated provoked serious concern not only for their rights to the land but also their rights to decide the future of the land.

If the land was taken, the women were worried about being subject to the control of the government or the oil palm company rather than being in control of key matters themselves. For example, Nursanti (Sebetaan) said:

If palm oil came in, we would have to follow the company's rules. We'd be getting a wage. But like what we have now, we own it ourselves. This is our produce. We are the ones that decide what to do [with the land]. Like if we want to make rice fields. If we want to make a rice field, we make one. If we want to grow rubber, we do that. What if other people control the land? What about that? We'll have to follow their rules. For now, it's up to us, there are no rules we have to follow.

Siska (Sekuduk) said:

We are not willing for us here to be under the control of the government on our land here. So our yield / income is from only there ... we absolutely do not want to be under the control of the government. In order to be converted to oil palm.

Fitra (Sebetaan) said:

Because we don't want to give our land to be controlled. Because we own a little bit of land. [If palm came] we'd be controlled, that'd be terrible. That's why we didn't want to do it.

Women were clearly scared that losing their land to the government and the company meant losing control over key decisions in their lives.

In addition, the women's current command of their land allowed them to be largely in control of their labour (though this is mediated by household-level gender relations). The women feared that losing their land to the oil palm plantation would change their status from farmers, who are in control of their own labour and the fruits of their labour, to wage labourers subjected to company rules and lower wages. Saleha (Sebetaan) said she wanted to defend their rights as farmers to work on their land:

I defend our rights as farmers. Our work here. How not to feel heartache. Hate. What to do if they take our gardens, our land? Every day we work only on this.

Ryani (Sebetaan) gives insight into her desire to not be under the control of the proposed oil palm company:

The important thing is we love our land and are worried it'd be taken. Even though we produce only a little bit, we still love it. We do not want to become coolies [day labourers]. We still want to use our own muscles to do our work. Even though we produce little by little, we still, still sure we don't want to be influenced like that.

Though their current livelihoods were difficult, at least they were in control of their work.

Being forced into a wage labour market laden with gender bias would not only compromise the current power they derive from deciding their own labour, but may serve to exacerbate existing gender inequalities and further disempower women in their households and communities. Though participation in the labour market is sometimes thought to help women to secure financial and, thus, social autonomy, Gunewardena's (2010) study of women's incorporation into capital-intensive sugar plantations in Sri Lanka shows that it can instead result in "reduced autonomy and decision-making power, increased subsistence insecurity, and social and economic dependence on males" (374). Due to wage differentials between men and women workers, differential placement in the hierarchy of agricultural labor and women's reduced decision-making (as compared to subsistence farming), women's higher participation in agricultural labour markets actually lead to their further disempowerment.

While many women only hinted at matters of decision-making and control, a few women also directly mentioned the term *kuasa*, 'power', as being at stake. For example, Nurul (Sebetaan) said:

We are scared it [our land] is taken. Aware, already taken by the government we cannot again berkuasa [be powerful, masterful]. What about our daily livelihood? ... Anyway, very disappointing for our land. If it is already taken by the government, difficult. Even though now it is difficult. How much more if it [our land] is taken later.

Mardiana (Senujuh) provides her perspective on the danger of having their land and, consequently, decision-making power taken over by the proposed oil palm plantation:

A concern with there being palm is that the right or sovereignty of the people will be destroyed. So because with the existence of palm, the people will already be in a palm environment, in the company's environment. So the people will be regulated by the company. So the people's sovereignty, the community's sovereignty, will be tugged at. Previously the people were free to collect, if they wanted to work there, if they wanted to pass by the region. So with the coming of the company, the company's regulations would have to be followed closely, if we go into the company's area, we have to report. Every time we go in or out, it's compulsory to report. So where is the people's freedom now? ... our area to be controlled by company people? And indeed this is the consequence. That it is the company that is powerful. And so the people no longer have power ... Independence of the community is lost with foreign culture, this is what is feared. Worried.

These viewpoints reveal the women's fear that the oil palm development would signal a significant transfer of control and decision-making power to the company and/or government.

Mardiana (Senujuh) blames the large-scale nature of an oil palm plantation for leading to control over key decisions being transferred from the community to the company. She said:

Not rejecting palm. But rejecting the system. Because palm is a plant too ... we respect it as well because it's a plant. So we accept palm ... It's not palm that we reject, but the system and management. To continue it is indeed not just palm, but the name of a large-scale plantation that is not accepted. Because large plantations will hurt many parties. Even though they promise prosperity ... Because large-scale is only controlled by a few people. So the vast territory is controlled by only a few people. That is the reason to reject [palm] ... So do not accept it because the community's rights to utilize, manage and use land as it was used by generations past, now changes functions. It is no longer the community who manage and use it, but the community there only become characters / actors. Characters below it, if it is indeed already controlled on a large-scale.

Mardiana's perspective is backed up in part by the recent World Bank and IFC report (2011) which found that large monocrop plantations tend not just to deprive people of their mixed livelihood strategies, but can cause the communities to "lose the autonomy and self-sufficiency associated with traditional subsistence practices" (20). Potter (2008) also finds that by reducing communities to labourers or smallholder out-growers, oil palm expansion can restrict local people's capacity for independent decision-making (1).

In many ways, having control over their land provides the women with some degree of agency or decision-making power over daily decisions related to their livelihood, like what crops to plant and how much to work. But, as will be explored in the following section, their ability to exert or exercise influence or decision-making power at any scale beyond their plot is limited and could be further compromised by the introduction of oil palm. White and White (2012) find that when an oil palm plantation was established in a nearby sub-district, women's rights to make decisions over their land or community were undermined. The oil palm company only consulted with community leaders and household heads, all men, who then decided to allow the plantation. Women did not receive knowledge about the proposed plantation nor did they have a way to voice their opinion on it: "the voice of the men was considered to be the unanimous voice of the villagers" (White and White 2012, 1012). Gender-specific norms of leadership and meeting participation meant that women were excluded from the decisions that led to the oil palm development in their community and which has since exacerbated gender inequalities, "undermining the position and livelihoods of women in this already patriarchal society" (White and White 2012, 1015).

As previously mentioned, several women identified themselves as the 'little people,' or in positions of relative poverty and disempowerment. Lastri (Sebetaan) said, "we are the little people that are tread on." However, this section has shown that women's current relationship with the land affords them some degree of decision-making power. As such, when the government (in giving the permits) and the company (in staking out the land) started to infringe on their land, it was an affront to these women's perceived rights over the land and to any control and decision-making power they have on that land, as well as to their livelihoods and futures. In effect, women were just as much concerned about losing the material benefits derived from land as losing the "effective access to, control over, and use of land," what Borrás Jr and Franco (2010b) refer to as 'land sovereignty' (34).

When the women spoke about their rights they talked about them being stolen or taken. But they also discussed protecting (*mempertahankan*), defending (*membela*), claiming (*menuntut*) and fighting for (*perjuangan*, *merebut*) their rights, not only to their land but to make decisions about their land. In doing so, the women made it clear that they did not accept the existing infringement on their land and their rights passively. Rather, for the breadth and depth of the reasons documented here, the women chose to turn to protest for the first time to assert their right to the land.

5 Women, Gender and Political Opportunity

Having sufficient motivation to defend their land, however, does not automatically result in political action. Gendered political opportunities condition if women act and through what political channel. In this case, women participated in the informal sphere, using a demonstration (considered a relatively 'confrontational' tactic of protest) to put pressure on state officials (Taylor and Van Dyke 2003). Considering that these women in Sambas are largely apolitical, it may seem surprising that they chose to engage with this "novel, dramatic, unorthodox and noninstitutionalized" (263) form of political expression. But perhaps it is precisely because they are marginalized from 'normal,' institutional or formal political spaces that they felt they had to engage with unconventional or informal channels of politics like protest to make their demands to those in power.

Women had strong motivation to reject oil palm development, but what political opportunities, formal and informal, did they have to defend their land, livelihoods and communities?

'Formal' Political Opportunities

This study found that women in Sambas are underrepresented in formal political leadership positions (see Table 7.1). A further investigation of women's participation in local decision-making processes showed that among the sample of women protesters few participate and even fewer take an active role in them. Though it is unclear what proportion of women protesters ascribe to gendered norms around who *should* attend village meetings and what they should do there, in reality men continue to dominate village meetings in Sambas (in attendance, leadership and active participation) and, thus, the key decisions in rural communities that impact both the men and women who live there. This means that women are rarely, if ever, part of the formal political processes that lead to the establishment of oil palm plantations in the first place.

Table 1: Women's Representation in Politics in Indonesia (2010)

Institution	Number of women (out of total)	Women as percentage of total population
<i>Houses of Representatives</i>		
Indonesia – House of Representatives (DPR-RI)	101 (out of 560)	18.0%
Indonesia – All provincial Houses of Representatives (DPR Provinsi)	288 (out of 2008)	14.3%
West Kalimantan – Provincial House of Representatives (DPR Provinsi)	4 (out of 55)	7.3%
Sambas – District House of Representatives (DPR Kabupaten)*	3 (out of 40)	7.5%
<i>Leadership</i>		
Cabinet members (Indonesia)	5 (out of 34)	14.7%
Governors (Provincial)	1 (out of 33)	3.0%
Mayors / Bupatis (District)	10 (out of 440)	2.3%
Village Heads (Village)	Unavailable	3.9%

Source: UNDP Indonesia 2010 (except for *)

*Latest data from period 2004-2009 (BPS Provinsi Kalimantan Barat 2009)

Upon receiving information about the proposed oil palm plantation, local community leaders (all men) attempted to resolve the issue through conventional means in typical formal political spaces, that is, via meetings and hearings with political authorities at the village and district levels. Only ten (of 42) women reported attending one of these events. Of the ten, most went to oil palm-related meetings in their communities. Only two went to one of the many hearings at the House of Representatives in Sambas. Despite having what could be considered 'sufficient' motivation to reject oil palm, the meetings and hearings did not seem to offer women opportunities to take political action against the development.

Several women said they did not go to them because they were only meant for men. Women like Maziah (Sekuduk) said her husband went so she did not. Ryani (Sebetaan) said only her husband was invited to the first meetings in the village where "the men heard the information." Later on in the process, Ryani did eventually attend one of the hearings in Sambas but said she was the exception, that it was almost all men there: "only a few of the people who went to the council office were women." While Melati (Teluk Durian) did attend the meeting in her village with the Bupati, she was

clear that it was only men who spoke to the Bupati: “the men here talked with the Bupati.” Lusi (Sebetaan) said she did not go to the hearings because they were mostly meant for men:

Hearing in the Office of Representatives, at that time often men. So not for us to be concerned with. We go to the protest.

In this quotation, Lusi reveals that certain political spaces – like those involving the House of Representatives – are more the ‘concern’ of men, whereas protest seems to be more inclusive.

Considering how the formal political sphere largely excludes or marginalizes women, it is hardly surprising that the pre-protest meetings and hearings, which were held in the manner of conventional or typical formal politics, also largely excluded women. For the most part, women were either excluded from the meetings (or not actively included) by the male organizers or felt themselves that it was inappropriate for them to attend. For the few women who did attend, they report only listening while the men spoke. In another case of threatened dispossession in Sumatra, Ramadhanti (2011) also finds that in grassroots resistance meetings, men dominate the meetings and women rarely attend or, if they do, are not asked to speak. This discussion shows that it is not only in the formal political processes that lead to the establishment of oil palm plantations but also in the formal spaces of politics that attempt to counter or overturn such developments that women are excluded or marginalized.

Is there a relationship between their exclusion from the formal political sphere and these women’s eventual engagement with participation in informal politics? Drawing from previous contributions by Agarwal (2000, 2001), Hart (1991) and others, it appears that exclusion from formal politics provides a kind of ‘push’ factor for women to engage in more unconventional or informal politics. Because women in these communities in Sambas lacked access to or influence over formal political channels, they had few political opportunities other than informal politics (in this case, a demonstration) to defend their land. This section emphasizes the interrelationship between formal and informal spaces of politics, recognizing that women’s engagement with informal or protest politics cannot be understood in isolation but in how it relates to, and is produced by, participation (or nonparticipation) in formal politics.

‘Informal’ Political Opportunities

As opposed to ‘formal’ political opportunities, the way that ‘informal’ political opportunities emerged in Sambas seemed to encourage women’s participation. It could be argued that the unique nature of protest helps to diminish or mediate some of the gendered barriers to participation in the formal political sphere.

One barrier was feeling a lack of legitimacy due to low education and literacy levels. But perceived intellectual or educational barriers are not as significant in a protest as in a meeting. Also, protests tend to be less time-consuming and so women do not have to sacrifice or compromise their household responsibilities to the same extent in order to participate. Although the women who attended the protest said it was difficult to leave their household duties for the protest, it was only for one day. Some even reported completing their tasks first before joining in the protest and a few brought their children along with them. Attending a demonstration is a relatively low risk and low effort action in terms of time and energy (McAdam 1986, as cited in Taylor and Van Dyke 2003), thus making it more feasible for women to participate than the series of meetings and hearings that preceded the protest.

One of the main gendered barriers to women’s participation in the public sphere was that men should be the primary meeting-goers or the sole ‘public’ face of the household. However in regards

to protest, many people expressed the opposite viewpoint, stressing the importance of women attending the protest *in addition to* men; that men could not go in place of or rather than women in protest. Like many of the protesters, Wati (Teluk Durian) said she does not attend village meetings because her father represents her there. However, when it came to the protest she said it was 'important' to go *as well as* the men. Interviewees (women and men, protesters and non-protesters alike) were clear that one of the key elements to making protest a success was involving as many people as possible, demonstrating to all concerned the sheer number of people (regardless of gender) who rejected the oil palm development. As such, women felt encouraged to go in order to bolster numbers in a way without parallel in the formal political realm.

While the unique nature of protest may help to diminish some of the typical gendered barriers to participation, the gender relations that produce marginalization in formal political spaces also condition these informal political spaces. While relatively new, the spaces of informal politics such as protest are hardly empowering in and of themselves. In this case, women decided to participate not because of the mechanisms of protest itself, but because they were specifically invited to do so by key actors.

A typical barrier to women participating in the public sphere was lacking an invitation. In formal politics more generally as well as in the meetings around oil palm, women said they did not participate because they had not been invited to do so. In contrast, the majority of women mention being specifically invited to join the protest in order to enhance the number of protesters. For example, Siti (Teluk Durian) said, "invited to participate so it is busy ... were given orders to make it crowded." Hikmah (Sebetaan) said once she was invited, she felt that she had to go, "invited by my friend to join. If I do not join them it is bad also. Everybody is going, so I go also."

The women protesters said the NGO Gemawan was instrumental in including women in the protest. Titin (Sebetaan) said, "all the women went together to Sambas, because Bang Tomo [Gemawan] said the women should go to Sambas to demand our rights, so they went." Also, Ryani (Sebetaan) said:

Don't agree with palm. So what should we do? Bang Tomo always comes here, Bang Tomo, Bang Syahrial, Bang Fajri, do you know them? [Our] friends from Gemawan ... How can we [women] find a way to be invited, if we want to demo? We want to fight, and so how do we demonstrate? Want to demonstrate, want to know how we can reject palm. They [Gemawan] agreed with the men that us women were already ready, want to go to the protest.

Leviana (Sekuduk) explained how Gemawan suggested that women join the protest in her community as well:

At that time some villages [wanted] a demonstration. So us women because curious. Finally, we also joined in the demonstration. At that time there was also a suggestion from Gemawan. They said, do the women want to make progress? Whereas usually women are only in the back, listening, listening, and listening. Now is the time to go forward. We see the reality, what a demo actually is. Rather than we only watch on TV.

By specifically inviting women, Gemawan and the rest of the protest organizers opened up the opportunity of informal political action to these women.

While informal political opportunities are not empowering in and of themselves, this particular case shows how specific encouragement by protest organizers help to open up protest as a new political opportunity for women. In addition to this, individual women also had to decide to join. Considering the multiple barriers to protest participation in these communities, deciding to protest was hardly

easy or automatic. Women protesters found various ways to explain or justify why they made the unprecedented decision to participate.

The overwhelming majority (38 of 42 women) made it clear that they chose to attend the protest of their own accord, out of their own conscience or because they felt it was right. For example, Seruwati (Teluk Durian) said she joined the protest “because of our own conscience ... from the depths of our hearts.” Melati (Teluk Durian) said it was a “problem of our souls.” That said, a few women said they were forced to attend the protest, in particular by family members. Karima (Terikembang) said she attended because she was following her husband’s wishes:

My husband says to go, I go. If he says no, then no ... Because the head said we were going [to the protest], we go.

There was also more subtle pressure to attend. Nurfitri (Sebetaan) was made to feel guilty about not attending, saying “people said if we do not go later our land will be taken. It means we do not care, they say, if we do not go.” Similarly, Nursanti (Sebetaan) conveyed her understanding that she had to attend or she would lose her land:

It is like if we do not go, it is like we give our land to those people ... If we do not go it is like we agree ... so we went.

Despite these few accounts of women feeling forced or pressured to attend, almost all said they were not unduly influenced to attend and did so of their own accord.

The women protesters said their deep anger, fear or sadness about losing their land and their right to decide drove them to protest. They said it made them feel enthusiastic, strong and/or brave. Risa (Sebetaan) remembered how she felt upon hearing the news of the proposed plantation:

It meant we became not scared to speak with the village head. The feeling was we dared to do anything. We said what the situation was, we were brave.

It made women feel like the men and, like the men, capable of taking political action. Ryani (Sebetaan) said she had to demonstrate because she felt “like the men ... I also feel how the men feel. If the men are angry, the women are also angry.” Wati (Teluk Durian) also said that regardless of man or woman, they have to defend their land:

People, basically, they feel of one heart, to make it [the protest] crowded. I like it. Men, women, both want to defend it, the same.

Risa (Sebetaan) said she felt so strongly about the issue that she would not lose, even though she was fighting men: “we will not give up. Even though they are mostly men, and we are women, we will not lose.”

Though nine of the women said they were initially scared to protest, many more (15 women) said they were far more scared by what they perceived as the alternative – losing their land. Women said they did not feel scared because they knew they were in the right, even if family members tried to tell them not to go. Maziah (Sekuduk) said her mother was scared on her behalf:

I am not scared, Mom, I said to her. I am ready to go to the protest ... [My mother] was scared. ‘Later what will happen?’ ‘I am ready. My husband is also going’, I said to her. ‘I’m not scared. How will it be if our land is taken, Mom? How will we go tap rubber,’ I said to her. Only then she was silenced. [She] didn’t interfere again.

Both Saraswati and Melati (Teluk Durian) said they were so angry or upset about losing their land that they were not only brave enough to go to the protest, but were willing to go to jail or die for it.

A fair number (11 women) also said they wanted to attend out of curiosity. Despite having seen protests on television, they did not know what it was like to actually see it in real-life or try participating in it. Sari (Sekuduk) said:

A protest had never happened here. There are those seen only on TV. So what is it like to protest directly? Like that? If on TV, almost every night we see on the news. So it is like that. So, go. I want to see it also. Only want to know how it is ... I want to know how a real protest is ... Just want to see what the atmosphere of a protest is like first-hand. Just curious.

The fact that the protest was unprecedented may have served as a barrier to some would-be protesters. But for these women, the novelty of it actually contributed to their desire to participate. This is fairly common as Whittier (2003) finds that ‘neophyte activists’ do not need previous experience with protest but can easily conceptualize of them due to media depictions.

The women protesters used the failure of (mostly men’s) conventional or formal negotiations with public officials to justify their decision to engage with protest. Lusi (Sebetaan) said that the men’s efforts to convince the Bupati to overturn the decision had failed, with Lastri (Sebetaan) hinting that the ‘gentle’ nature of meetings and hearings would not put on appropriate pressure to solve the problem:

It cannot be done in a gentle way. Are not given a decision. Always go to the council offices [DPR]. They do not care, they do not notice. So that is why [I protest].

Sari (Sekuduk) also said that the meetings and hearings would not draw sufficient attention to the matter:

If it is not so big, if we just relax only, resist subtly, then maybe people assume that it is not important. ‘People don’t care’, like that.

As previously described, women protesters often described themselves as the ‘little’ people, feeling like the ones making decisions about the land, whether the Bupati, legislators or the company, just did not care about them or listen to them. The failure of the meetings and hearings to convince the Bupati to withdraw the permit proved this. In so doing, it justified the use of more ‘confrontational’ tactics like protest to force the authorities to pay attention to their demands.

Several women stressed that while they had hoped to solve the matter with more ‘gentle’ tactics, they were eventually forced to take the unprecedented measure of protest to put pressure on the Bupati. According to Hirni (Teluk Durian), “going through a peaceful path does not bring results.” Similarly, Athiah (Teluk Durian) said, “with a peaceful way we cannot. But with protest we can be heard.” Melati (Teluk Durian) explains:

When there was no kerosene, we didn’t demonstrate. Have we ever demonstrated? No, never. Petrol prices went up, I said, did we ever demo, I said to him. All the expensive things, rice, did we ever demo? But for rubber, we would dare to die. It would be better if we were killed rather than our rubber.

Yana (Teluk Durian) said that they had never even considered protesting for other issues before:

If we have a problem with [the price of] basic foodstuffs, problem with kerosene, gasoline or other goods rising, we have never protested. Whatever it is, we have never before protested. When our rights were taken away by the Bupati, we were very angry.

Yana makes it clear that when it came to their land, the community had to try a tactic (protest) they had never tried before. Similarly, Mardiana (Senujuh) said:

[Protest] is the path when all the other paths have come to a dead end. Ya, we are forced to demonstrate. Because other factors were not paid attention to, with hearings, conveying our opinion, they didn't care about that, so we were forced to get together.

The unsuccessful attempts to pressure the Bupati in the lead-up to the protest caused women to lose faith in 'gentle' tactics. As such, women often repeated that they felt forced to protest as a matter of last resort. As Meyer and Reyes (2010) emphasize, protest emerges not just from having grievances, but from the 'belief' that the situation can be changed; from the perception that a political opportunity (like this protest) will make an impact.

The space of protest is hardly an empowering space in and of itself. In this case, individuals (protest organizers) acted to specifically invite or encourage women to participate, thus serving to open up the space of protest to women in an unprecedented way. Individual women also had to make the decision to join the protest, which was not easy or automatic. It required, as many mentioned, individual qualities like bravery, enthusiasm and strength, even curiosity and feeling they had no other means of affecting change. The actions of both protest organizers and women protesters alike show that while gender power relations often act as barriers to participation in the public sphere these may be modified or negotiated to change perceived opportunities around women's political participation. These actions show that there are 'cracks' in the wider gender norms around women's public participation and that these cracks are produced and encouraged by individuals.

6 Conclusion

The multiple axes of rural differentiation mean that oil palm expansion will not be evenly experienced between communities, within communities or even within a small sample of women protesters, as we have seen here. For example, those with less land and capital are more vulnerable when faced with the possibility of losing their land. Also, gender power relations will almost certainly lead to disproportionate consequences for certain community members, especially women, during such a transition. In addition to the existing relations that tend to make women particularly vulnerable in rural Sambas, the introduction of certain configurations of power surrounding oil palm expansion threaten to exacerbate these gender inequalities.

This study focused on the gendered motivations leading to the women's participation in protest, going beyond the material to include more intangible reasons such as defending rights, control and power. These gendered consequences were used by the women protesters to legitimate or justify their decision to turn to protest to defend their land. Women protesters used their identities as smallholder farmers (rather than wage labourers) to justify their decision to protest. They also drew from their gendered positions in society, as mothers or grandmothers, to legitimize concerns about the future of their families and communities due to oil palm expansion and thus justify their decision to protest. The threat of oil palm expansion not only helps to reveal dominant existing gender inequalities in these communities and how these work to produce differential consequences for women; the changing landscape also threatens to further exacerbate gender inequalities.

This study also revealed how protest motivation is not a sufficient condition for taking political action, especially for women. It also depends on having political opportunities to take action. These political opportunities, whether formal or informal, are shaped by underlying gender power relations that condition if and how women participate in the public sphere. Despite recent attempts to involve women in formal politics and decision-making in Indonesia, the failure to adequately address underlying gender relations continues to produce exclusion and marginalization for women in formal political spaces in Sambas. Whether in the formal political processes that lead to the establishment of oil palm plantations or in the formal spaces of politics that attempt to counter or overturn such

developments, women are excluded or marginalized. This provides a 'push' factor for women to engage in more unconventional or informal politics, particularly on crucial matters like land, thus leading to protest participation for a group of otherwise apolitical women.

Informal politics should not, however, be considered a silver bullet for facilitating women's involvement in politics. While unique features of protest may diminish typical barriers of participation for women, the informal political sphere is also imbued with the gender power relations that exclude or marginalize women in the public sphere more generally, with women facing significant barriers to participation relative to men. Thus, far from seeing political spaces as empowering in and of themselves, this research established the role of actors in opening up new political opportunities for otherwise apolitical women. In Sambas, the protest organizers invited women to protest and the women themselves made the difficult decision to participate. It is not, then, the political spaces in and of themselves that marginalize or empower women, but the way in which people engage with them that open or close down possibilities for participation.

In doing so, this study contributes to explanations of women's participation in politics, recognizing that women's engagement with informal or protest politics cannot be understood in isolation but in how it relates to, and is produced by, participation (or non-participation) in formal politics. It also sheds light on the nature of the relationship by arguing that exclusion from formal politics may facilitate or produce participation in informal or protest politics (Agarwal 2000, 2001; Ferree and Mueller 2003; Hart 1991).

In short, the Sambas case study has demonstrated the multiple ways in which gender relations shape women's decisions to participate in protest (by informing their motivations and political opportunities). While the research focused mostly on how gender relations condition women's decisions to protest, it must be emphasized that gender relations are not fixed. This opens up the possibility that gender relations themselves may be shaped by and through women's decision to participate in protest. It reveals how rural struggles around land and dispossession, though ostensibly free of explicit gender concerns, are inevitably struggles over gender itself. Despite existing gender relations that lead to the exclusion of women from public affairs and formal politics in Sambas, the signs of change and negotiation with these relations provide some hope that a different kind of political landscape – one in which women participate in equal and meaningful ways – is possible.

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A convergence of factors has been driving a revaluation of land by powerful economic and political actors. This is occurring across the world, but especially in the global South. As a result, we see unfolding worldwide a dramatic rise in the extent of cross-border, transnational corporation-driven and, in some cases, foreign government-driven, large-scale land deals. The phrase 'global land grab' has become a catch-all phrase to describe this explosion of (trans)national commercial land transactions revolving around the production and sale of food and biofuels, conservation and mining activities.

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Women, Gender and Protest Emergence: Contesting Oil Palm Plantation Expansion in Sambas District, Indonesia

In Indonesia large-scale land acquisitions, fuelled in particular by the desire for developing oil palm plantations, are leading to dispossession, particularly for vulnerable populations. But this is not without contention; as oil palm plantations have spread, so have instances of land-related resistance. Gender power relations influence not only the distribution of costs and benefits of large-scale land tenure changes for men and women, but also condition the political opportunities that men and women have to influence such changes. Drawing from a case study in Sambas district, this study demonstrates that rural women can and indeed do participate in protest, even if their participation is rarely acknowledged, and it explores the conditions that lead to their unlikely participation. It finds that gender relations are integral to shaping the motivations and political opportunities that lead to women's decisions to participate in protests around land. But it also reveals that gender relations are not fixed. Individual actors are able to play an influential role in opening up new political opportunities for otherwise apolitical women. Despite dominant gender relations that tend to exclude women from politics and even public spaces, then, the presence of women in protest indicates that these are being negotiated. This opens up the possibility that rural struggles around land and dispossession, though ostensibly free of explicit gender concerns, may simultaneously serve as sites of struggle over gender as well.



landpolitics@gmail.com

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