Postcolonial Directions in Education
Volume 10 Issue 1, 2021 | 103-138

THIRDWORLD-IST PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR), DEVELOPMENT DISPOSSESSION (DD) AND LEARNING IN INDIGENOUS AND PEASANT STRUGGLES IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT This paper addresses Thirdworld-ist PAR and its contributions towards organizing, networking and learning in social action in small peasant and indigenous anti-dispossession struggles addressing agro-extractive related DD in Baras, West Sulawesi, Indonesia. We elucidate the nature and role of Thirdworld-ist PAR praxis by mapping the following dimensions of learning in struggle against state-market led colonial capitalist dispossession: (a) learning to identify the agents of dispossession, the processes which enable dispossession and the related socio-economic impacts of dispossession; and (b) learning in, from and for social action taken to address dispossession. We conclude by taking stock of the current situation and the continued role for Thirdworld-ist PAR in this context of dispossession.

RINGKASAN (Bahasa, Indonesian) Artikel ini membahas PAR Dunia Ketiga dan kontribusinya terhadap pengorganisasian, jejaring, dan pembelajaran dalam aksi sosial perjuangan petani kecil dan masyarakat adat melawan *development dispossession* (DD/perampasan dalam pembangunan) oleh industri agro-ekstraktif di Baras, Sulawesi Barat, Indonesia. Kami membahas sifat dan peran praksis PAR Dunia Ketiga dengan memetakan

dimensi pembelajaran berikut dalam perjuangan melawan perampasan kapitalis kolonial yang dijalankan pasar dan negara: (a) pembelajaran dalam mengidentifikasi agen perampasan, proses yang memungkinkan perampasan dan dampak sosial-ekonomi dari perampasan; dan (b) pembelajaran dalam, dari dan untuk aksi sosial mengatasi perampasan. Kami menutup tulisan ini dengan memaparkan situasi saat ini dan peran berkelanjutan PAR Dunia Ketiga dalam konteks perampasan ini.

Keywords: Thirdworld-ist PAR; Learning in Social Action; Critical adult education; Peasant; Indigenous; Development Dispossession; Indonesia

Thirdworld-ist/Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Thirdworld-ist participatory action research or PAR, as "an endogenous intellectual and practical creation of the peoples of the Third World" (Fals-Borda, 1988, p 5), is embedded in African, Asian, Latin American and Caribbean neo/colonial political contexts (Fals-Borda, 1979, 1988; Freire, 1979/2000) and intended as a "critique of colonial scholarship, imperialistic history and continuing neo-colonial presence" (Swantz, 2008, p 36) which "investigates reality in order to transform it" (Fals-Borda, 2006, p 353). PAR is undertaken together with "self-conscious people, those who are currently poor and oppressed, [who] will progressively transform their environment by their own praxis" (Rahman, 1991, p 13). As a problem posing pedagogy striving to undo colonial legacies of the culture of silence (Freire, 1979/2000), Third-Worldist/PAR in indigenous and small peasant contexts of DD is an oppositional and anticolonial politics (Fanon, 1963/1967; Mariategui, 1996; Zibechi, 2012) confronting "colonial continuities pertaining to territory, labor, culture/knowledge, racialized identities and production/social relations, actively working towards extending the potential for flattening hierarchical social

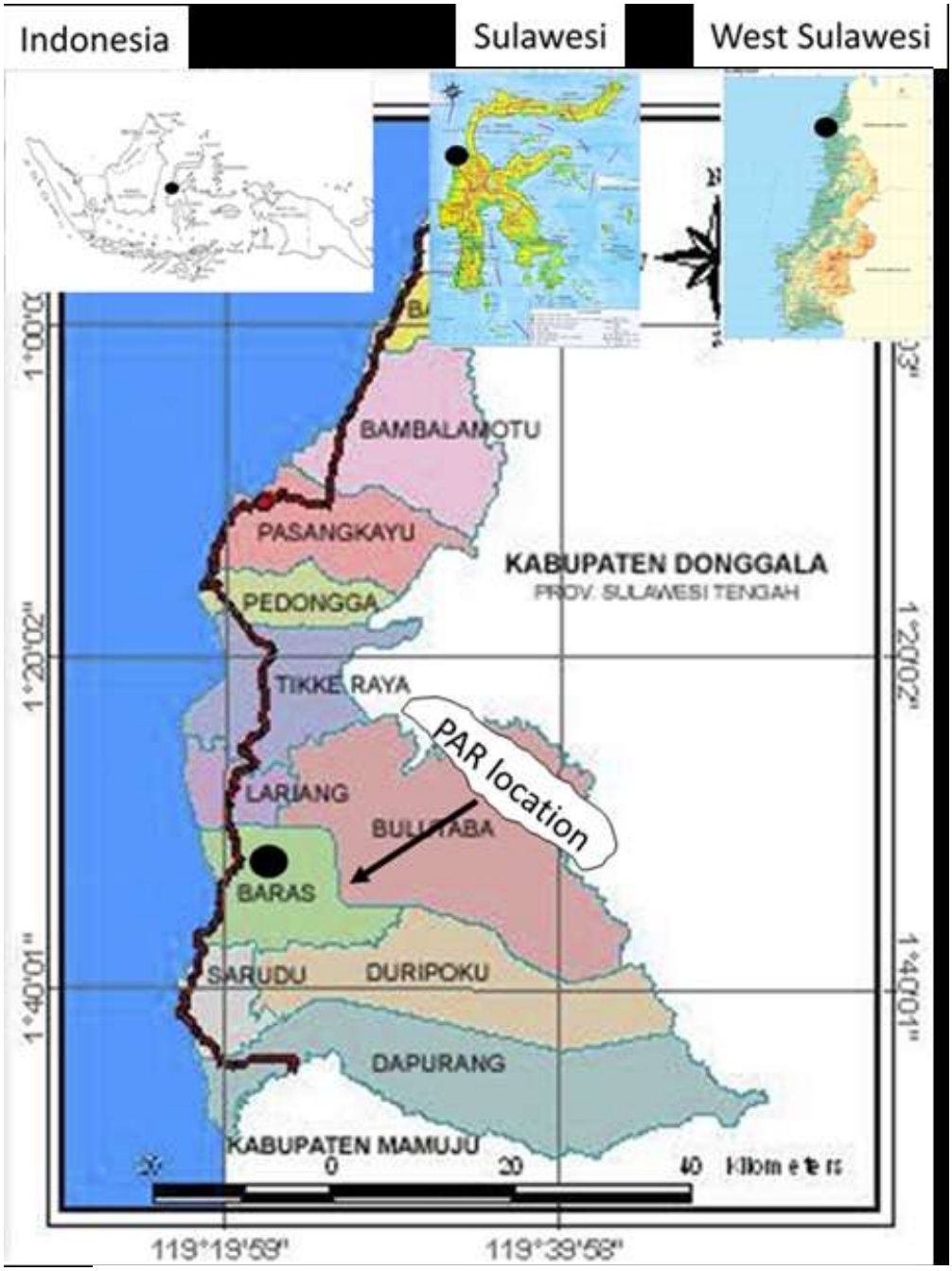
relations of cultural and material production" (Kapoor, 2019, p 87). Neo/colonial historical and contemporary indigenous and small peasant politics is cognizant of the reality "that all the colonized has ever seen on his [their] land is that he can be arrested, beaten and starved with impunity" while knowing well that "the land is the most meaningful…and it is the land that must provide bread and natural dignity" (Fanon, 1963, p 9). In such racial capitalist (Robinson, 1983) contexts of conflict and indigenous and peasant struggle, PAR engages a recurring process of triple praxis cycles of research, education and organized political action for popular democratization with marginalized social groups and classes in rural and urban-peripheral settings (Kapoor, 2020; Masalam, 2019).

This paper elaborates on a PAR process in rural Indonesia with the view to contribute towards engaged research and critical adult education projects in colonial capitalist contexts (Kapoor, 2013; 2021) addressing accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003) wherein peasants and indigenous peoples are forcibly and recurrently separated from their means of production (land/forests/water) and existential realities by the racial/colonial capitalist project of accumulation (Kapoor, 2017; Masalam, 2017; Masalam & Kapoor, 2016).

Regional contexts of dispossession and land struggle in West Sulawesi

The PAR initiative is located in the North Mamuju District of West Sulawesi Province in the eastern part of Indonesia. West Sulawesi is a relatively newer and isolated province established in 2004 as part of the decentralization euphoria after the fall of the centralist and authoritarian Suharto regime. The isolation can be traced back to the 1950's to 60's when the Darul Islam Movement, a

secessionist group fighting the Islamic state, led by Kahar Muzakkar, occupied the area.



Location of North Mamuju District, West Sulawesi, Indonesia.

Massive capital expansion began to open up the region in the 1970's for timber and particularly ebony wood

through legal and illegal logging. The region became the site of plunder for Suharto's cronies through forest concessions. The local communities described this highly valuable forest commodity as "*mainan Cendana*" (Cendana's toys).[1] PAR participants in Baras often recalled the early days of logging concession expansion in 1980's when they were intimidated by the forest concession companies who constantly reminded them that the hardtop vehicles and helicopters transporting the timber (tangible symbols of the company's presence on their land) belong to Ibu Tien, the first lady and wife of General Suharto (Kapohu elder, interview notes, August 2016). The subsequent opening of palm oil plantations by the Astra Group in the 90's, through its subsidiaries, i.e. PT Letawa, PT Pasangkayu, PT Suryaraya Lestari, and PT Mamuang, further exacerbated land alienation of the local indigenous and small/landless peasant population. The plantation companies are now a joint venture which includes: the Soeryadjaya conglomerate (original owner of the Astra Group); Sulawesi Wanabakti Lestari (owned by a timber businessman from Toraja, South Sulawesi, Salahudin Sampetoding); the Salim group (owned by Liem Sioe Liong and Suharto); the Lumbung Sumber Rejeki group (owned by Radius Prawiro, a former minister in the Suharto era); and the Adi Upaya Foundation (owned by Indonesian air force officers) (Sangaji, 2009).

In order to meet the labor needs of these plantations, the region was also a location for transmigration programs encouraged by the government. This scheme was part of the relocation area for rural constituencies facing multiple dispossession including, for instance, those displaced in the 1990s by the construction of the Bili-Bili Dam in Gowa district, South Sulawesi province (Rampisela, *et al*, 2009).

[1] *Cendana* refers to the name of Suharto's family residence in Jakarta and reminds people of the stolen wealth of Suharto's cronies.

The cocoa boom in the 80s and 90s also prompted the influx of people to the area in search of land. Together, these migrations (forced or voluntary) encouraged mainly under the Suharto regime, contributed to local tensions along ethnic and religious lines, especially for the early dwellers (*pakkampong* in local terms) of the area or the Baras.[2]

Under the current decentralization era, which commenced in the early 2000s, local/feudal elites jockeying for bureaucratic positions, exploited these tensions in the competition for resources as well as for influence at the grassroots, fuelling horizontal conflict between these marginalized social groups/classes. The entrance of multinational mining corporations in the region, such as Exxon Mobil or forestry and plantation corporates like the Gulf Investment House of Kuwait, further exacerbated local conflict by, for example, vying to finance local elections by giving out forest concessions to individuals on corporate leases in a bid to exercise corporate control over land (Morrell, 2002).

The participants of this PAR work in Baras and are members of rural social groups (indigenous ethnicities) and small/landless peasant working classes involved in the resistance against PT Unggul Widya Teknologi Lestari, one of the largest palm oil companies in the area. PAR participants are located in four villages/sub-villages including: Sipakainga (199 households); Tamarunang (517 households); Kapohu/Kasano (783 households); and Bantayan/Bulu Parigi (404 households) (North Mamuju Statistics Bureau, 2016). The four villages are currently

[2] Speaking historically, the majority who are now known as the indigenous Baras were from Kulawi, now a part of Central Sulawesi province. They lived in the hinterland in the forested areas until the Darul Islam rebellion in the 1950's forced them to move to their present locations closer to the coastal areas. However, they maintained the *baro to dea* (collectively owned sago forest), which they referred to as *jinja nosa* (poles of life) to describe the importance of the sago forest as food reserves.

administratively located in Baras sub-district and Duripoku sub-district, North Mamuju District, West Sulawesi Province. Sipakainga and Tamarunang villages are relatively new and where the majority of the people are originally from a neighboring province, particularly South Sulawesi. Kapohu and Bantayan have a much longer history dating back to the pre-colonial era as Baras villages are in what is now referred to as the Baras sub-district.

The PAR team included the lead author and a group of rural and now city-based student land activists of the Karsa network; a social movement-oriented non-governmental organization (NGO) based in Palu, the capital of Central Sulawesi. Since the early 2000s, members of the Karsa network have been extensively involved in *anti-perampasan tanah* (anti-land dispossession) activism, especially in Central Sulawesi, and more recently in West Sulawesi, including with the PAR participants in Baras. The lead author's engagement with the Karsa network goes back to 2009 when serving as co-director of Ininnawa Society, a federation of four organizations working in South and West Sulawesi.

Agents, processes and socio-economic impacts of palm-oil development dispossession

The PAR team and participants from five villages in Baras (Sipakainga, Tamarunang, Kapohu/Kasano, Bantayan/Bulu Parigi, including villages with reclaimed land inside the palm oil plantation) organized a series of meetings in each village to conduct joint palm-oil DD conversations over a period of 5 months (June – October 2016). What follows here is a localized analysis pertaining to joint discovery of the agents, processes and related

socio-economic impacts of the expansion of palm oil via a problem-posing PAR praxis. What is depicted below is a final product (artefact) from the engagement which took place over 5 months in Baras, followed by a selective analytical description (for illustrative purposes) of how and what emerged in relation to this diagrammatic representation of multiple dialogues over multiple sessions during this period.

At the commencement of the formal PAR engagement, the participants' analysis of the **actors affecting DD** was generally focused around two key antagonists, PT Unggul Widya Teknologi Lestari (UWTL) or the palm oil company they were in conflict with and Brimob, the special police

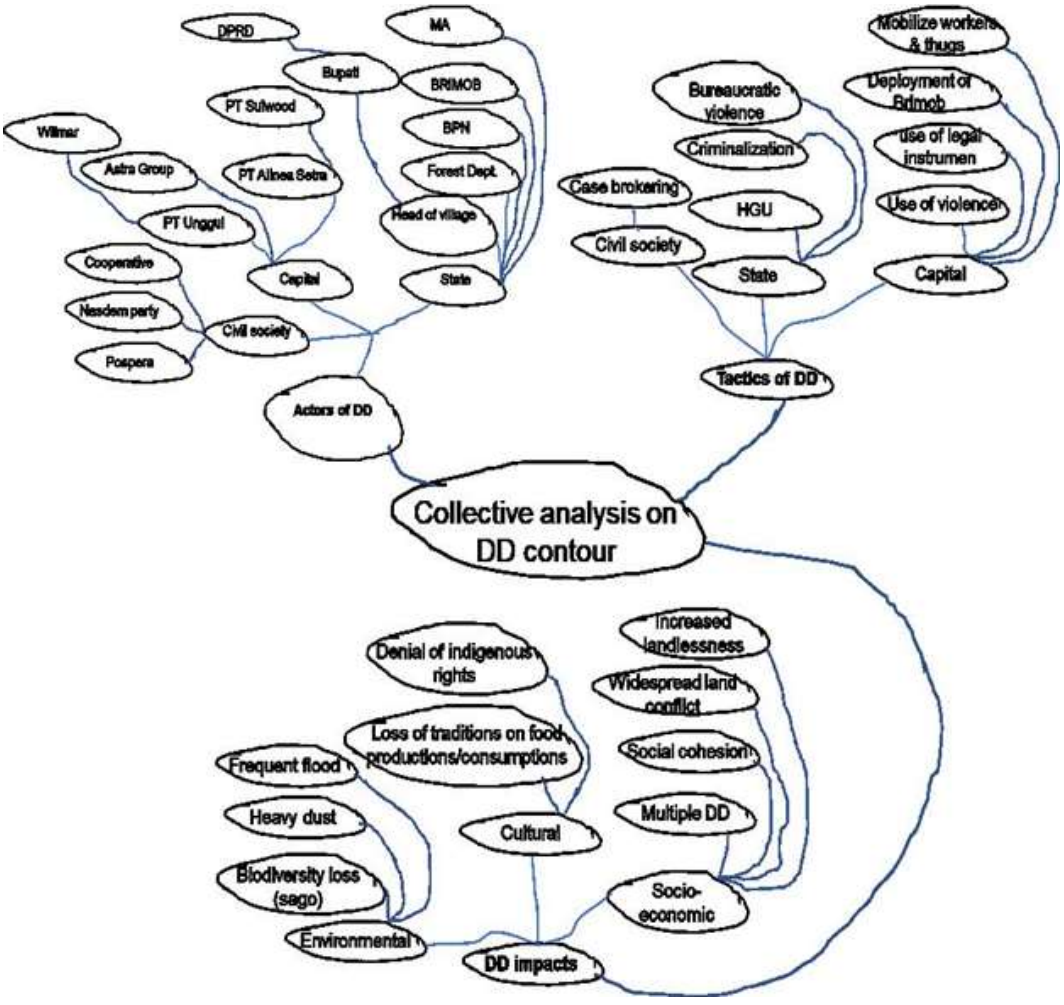


Diagram 1. Collective analysis on DD contour in Baras

force in the region. This initial analysis was understandable considering the fact that these were the most tangible and immediate actors that they had direct contact with in their daily experience as victims of ongoing dispossession. As sketched in the diagram, as the PAR team and participants developed a structural and historical investigation of the micro and macro context of DD, a more complete picture of the various actions of state-capital, institutional and geographical (spatial locations), began to emerge. The emerging complexity of the analysis was influenced by the varied socio-historical backgrounds of the participants. For instance, the historical identifications of agents and actors of DD shared by the *pakkampong* (indigenous) groups involved a much longer time span and variety and was different from that of the small/landless peasant migrants who had a different and relatively recent (including migratory) historical experience.

Karsa activists and the lead author introduced a more historical perspective on DD and wider (spatial and temporal) macro context of various DD actors in problematization exercises (of participant sketches) pertaining to questions of the key actors affecting land dispossession in this location. Such problem-posing dialogues saw *pakkampong* groups beginning to evaluate their DD experiences as being a long term, multi-actor instigated process of gradual dispossession. They gradually (through problem posting macro-historical exchanges) began to focus less on just the current experience, which began in the 1970s and early 1980s when massive capital expansion began to open the region for timber[3], particularly ebony wood, of legal and illegal

[3] There were at least 21 large logging companies operating in the region, Central and West Sulawesi, especially for the multi-million commodities of "black gold"/ebony wood, mostly connected to Bob Hasan (former Minister of Forestry) and long-time crony of Suharto family (Aditjondro, 1998).

logging and rely on historical memory to recall multiple agents/dispossession linked to current situations.

In terms of the later, one of the companies that the participants recalled was PT Sulwood, the logging company owned by Salahuddin Sampetoding; one of the timber barons who was granted a large forest concession in Sulawesi[4] by the Forest Ministry. The company began to operate in the area and brought in migrant workers from outside the region. A subsequent series of massive capital expansions took place in the 1990's through the opening of palm oil plantations by the Astra Group in the 90's, through its subsidiaries, i.e. PT Letawa, PT Pasangkayu, PT Suryaraya Lestari, and PT Mamuang. In addition to opening up land for their own plantation, these companies were also clearing up the forest for the transmigration scheme, mostly from Lombok Island, as part of the company's obligation mandated by the government, to involve smallholders under contract farming.

While the early dweller groups did not initially clearly categorize trans-migrants as actors of DD in these dialogical sessions, they gradually began to see the state's transmigration program as part of the palm oil expansion scheme and hence include migrants (as subordinate and marginalized actors) in the emergent bubble-diagrammatic analysis of key/secondary (captive) actors of DD through land and forest concession schemes (HGU).

Around the same period, some peasant migrants from South Sulawesi, especially Bugis and Mandar ethnic, gradually entered the locale searching for land to cultivate cocoa, an emerging and lucrative export crop. To legalize

[4] As an illustration, today the Sulwood Corporation is operating 500.000 Ha of forest concession in Central Sulawesi for carbon trading in collaboration with Keep the Habitat, an Australian environmental organization. http://nayu2.blogspot.co.id/2009/06/dana-karbon-dukung-pelestarian-hutan.html

the clearing of forest for cocoa cultivation, some local elites established farmer groups and cooperatives in 1997, as part of a state-sanctioned prerequisite to then secure state permission to convert forested land into farming lands. One of these groups was the Teranggi Raya who were granted the rights by the Forestry Department to convert 1050 hectares of forest into farm land which was initially slated for distribution to local small and landless peasants and especially the *pakkampong* affiliated to the farmer's group. However, since these cooperatives did not have the necessary heavy equipment to clear the land, the Forestry Department granted logging concessions to PT Alinea Setra to cut the forest for the timber industry.

After the peasants cleared and cultivated this land since the late 90's, in 2003, PT Unggul Widya Teknologi Lestari, the key perpetrator of land dispossession identified as such by small/landless peasant participant analysis, entered the region. PT Unggul Widya Teknologi Lestari (UWTL)[5], one of the top 50 high-performance palm oil corporations in Indonesia[6], is a subsidiary of Widya Group, a national private corporation producing palm oil commodities with plantation sites located in West Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, Bengkulu, and East Kalimantan. Since 1985, the Widya Group has managed palm oil plantations and palm processing over an area of 41.680 hectares. To support the company's operation in producing crude palm oil (CPO**)** and palm kernel, Widya Group also built 5 processing mills with a production capacity of 45 - 60 ton/hour in each operation site, which in turn occupied more land. PT Unggul is a supplier for Indofood Agri Resources Ltd., a subsidiary of Salim Group,

[5] PT WUTL was established in 3 February 1997 by Dr. Ir. Muin Pabinru (director general of Food Crops Agriculture), Ir. Hasjrul Harahap, (former Minister of Forestry during Suharto era), Tjiungwanara Njoman, Johanis Izaak Andi Lolo, and Tjokro Putro Wibowo Tjoa, leading members of Indonesian Palm Oil Association.
[6] http://www.cdmione.com/source/50TopKelapaSawit2015.pdf

and Wilmar, who are leading agribusiness multinational corporations in Asia.

The collective analysis of the PAR participants unearthed such key developments around palm-oil/timber DD in the region and their agents. As far as key actors of DD in the region were concerned-- the singular importance of the special force police personnel (*Brimob*) deployment (state sanctioned coercive protection) to guard PT Unggul's workers from irate peasants whose houses and huts and food crops were being demolished and bulldozed to make way for palm oil plantations became increasingly apparent and central. This coercive arm of the state apparatus was not only involved as guardians of capital but as the participants began to explain through collective dialogue on the matter, there were several cases of local police officers (*Babinsa*) being involved (as small investors or via bribes/graft) in the land transactions over these contested sites. What also emerged here was the realization that police (*Brimob*) served as sales intermediaries for palm oil capital by buying palm oil fruits grown on contested land and selling them to the company's mills for processing thereafter.

> This is the same *Brimob* who used to chase, beat even threaten to shoot us when we were staging the open protests, now one of them came to us to buy the palm oil fruits. They used to call us thieves for harvesting the palm oil trees, so what should we call them now? *Penadah* (receiver of stolen goods)? (Tamarunang villager, interview notes, August 2016)

The diagram speaks to another DD actor that participants identified as indirectly complicit in affecting land dispossession – certain local NGOs and political parties who took advantage of the struggle and contestations over

these land concessions/deals. Both the *pakkampong* and peasant migrant participants mentioned local NGOs and political parties having approached them "offering help" (most often a deception), in return for payments to assist with securing legal recognition from the state for their land claims, which was seldom a real prospect as such. A Sipakainga participant recalls, "All of them admitted having direct access to dignitaries in Jakarta; one even said he knew someone in the president's palace (*istana presiden*) who can make sure that our demand to return our land can be fulfilled".

In terms of the **processes, avenues and tactics** deployed by the state-capital nexus in effecting DD, the two most common tactical avenues identified across the groups were the use of legal instruments to deploy the forest (HPH) and land (HGU) concession by the logging and plantation companies as well as the consistent use of violence and intimidation by the companies or by the in/formal state apparatus. Collective analysis repeatedly described the use of "legal instruments" to dispossess peasants and indigenous groups in the locale from their lands via ongoing (post-independence) colonial territorial policies, i.e., where "the state is independent already but we are still colonized" (*negara sudah merdeka, kami masih dijajah)* (Sipakainga villager, interview note, June 2016).

Participants recalled the early days of logging concession expansion in 1970's when they were intimidated by the logging companies who constantly reminded them that the hardtop vehicles and helicopters transporting the timber belong to Ibu Tien, the first lady of Suharto (Kapohu elder, interview notes, August 2016). During the height of the Suharto authoritarian regime, the logging companies owned by Suharto cronies deployed the powers of a corrupt state to intensify intimidation. Ironically, under the post-Suharto regime that was

supposed to be more democratic, PT Unggul was even more brazen in demonstrating their power to call in the *Brimob* (special force police) to guard their workers while they demolished and bulldozed the crops cultivated on contested land, destroying houses and huts constructed by the villagers, and replacing their crops with corporate palm oil trees for export production. Physical abuse by the police became a daily experience for those who dared to return to the land now planted with corporate palm oil trees. As one Sipakainga villager described it, "they acted like a scarecrow for the company, they shot their guns into the air every day just to scare us away" (Interview notes, August 2016). In addition to using the state apparatus to engage in coercive DD tactics, PT Unggul also mobilized their workers and hired thugs (*preman bayaran*) to intimidate the land struggle constituents, especially after they managed to occupy land in 2014. Since then, violent conflicts between the peasant groups and the company's workers have recurred each time the company tries to enter peasant reclaimed land.

One of the most common experiences among the peasant groups in Baras, as identified in problem-posing conversations pertaining to the tangible **impacts of DD**, is the trend of multiple dispossessions that can be traced back in conjunction with the several waves of massive colonial capitalist expansion related to successive increases in global metropolitan demand for various export commodities from forest products such as timber, cacao and palm oil. In the post-colonial period, particularly during the long years of accelerated economic growth-oriented development under the authoritarian regime of Suharto, the hegemony of developmentalism and modernization ideology during the Green Revolution and modernization of the agricultural sector in Indonesia in the 70's and 80's, increased landlessness and rural

poverty due to the substantial decline in agricultural labor opportunities and land dispossession. Among others, these two factors were the most notable causes of multiple dispossessions as identified in the join analysis in Baras. Some participants left their home villages to migrate to the neighboring provinces, or even to Malaysia, to look for better sources of livelihood with logging and plantation companies, before they arrived in Baras.

The socio-historical context also shapes the collective analysis on DD impacts where the *pakkampong* groups lamented the environmental impacts of gradual deforestation by various actors from the logging era in the 70's to palm oil in the 90's, including frequent flooding over the last several years and other environmental impacts due to company operations, such as the heavy dust in Kapohu, with potentially harmful effects to respiratory health. They also discussed the loss of the *baro to dea* (which literally means, collectively owned sago forest) or the indigenous conception of common space as a food reserve, due to the massive deforestation. The impacts of the Green Revolution campaign favouring rice over indigenous staples in the region, like sago, altered socio-cultural practices around food production and collective traditions related to *jinja nosa* (the poles of life), another indigenous concept honoring the significance of sago in terms of their traditions.

The longer process of gradual dispossession by different actors over time has created a *bannang siroca'* (meaning "the knotted threads"), as one PAR participant described the complex situation in local terms that led to further disruptions of the social fabric and led to tense inter-social group relations pertaining to land struggles. After the initial success of direct action for land occupation and political pressure to protest the deployment of anti-riot Police Mobile Brigade, the land struggle in

Baras/North Mamuju is currently faced with horizontal conflict between peasants and indigenous groups over land claims. The Bugis peasant migrants insist on securing the land that they bought from the local elites, while the *pakkampong*s focus on "*tumpu tanah"* (rights over land territory based on the ancestral claim). This was the primary issue that the PAR work attempted to address by bringing the different land struggle constituents together in order to help consolidate their claim over land being handed over to corporates by the state.

Reflecting on the learning engagement with the land struggle constituents pertaining to the contours of DD, i.e., actors, tactics, and its impacts, the PAR participants pointed out how they have learned to deconstruct and demystify the legalistic logic that the state-backed company has been using to affect DD. For instance, as discussed in the group analysis, participants gained such awareness by problematizing the contradictory roles of special force police (Brimob) stationed in Baras under the request of the company in the name of "law enforcement". They noticed how their characterization of the Brimob personnel changed from "scarecrow" to shoo away the villagers from the land that they have occupied, to "*penadah*" (receiver of stolen goods) as they started purchasing the palm oil fruits harvested from the contested land. For them, such contradictions are indicative of the enactment of a colonial territorial policy deployed by the post-colonial state apparatus on its own citizens.

Another key PAR learning (eye-opener) in relation to affecting DD pertains to the blatant use of legalized violence by the state apparatus and company-hired thugs masked by the logic or discourse of the need for accelerating economic growth-oriented development to "modernize" the rural frontiers allegedly for their benefit.

Especially for indigenous groups, the very idea of modernizing the rural peripheries by issuing land concessions to big capital is what has jeopardized their commons, *baro to dea*, and the sago forests which for generations have provided a collective source of staple food. There is acknowledgement now that the loss of physical commons in turn has dislocated indigenous cosmological beliefs in sago trees as *jinja nosa* (poles of life) thereby compounding the process of deforestation.

Palm oil development dispossession and the learning in, from and for social action

In responding to the government's campaign to turn their ancestral land of *baro to dea* (collectively owned sago forest by the original dwellers from Kulawi), as well as some cacao gardens owned mostly by the Bugis peasant migrants, into concession areas for logging and later in the 90's, for palm oil plantations, the Baras, i.e. the descendants of the Kulawi kept making demands for their ancestral land while the Bugis peasant migrants demanded return of their cacao gardens. Despite the ongoing threats and intimidation, for almost a decade since the plantation company seized their land in 2003, in order to continue cultivating their land, the peasants played "hide and seek" with the *Brimob* troops, who were regularly stationed at the company's compound. The following scheme illustrates the collective analysis pertaining to responses to ongoing dispossession, including the emergence and social grouping of various land struggle constituents, the politics and strategies deployed, as well as the achievements and challenges to date.

The following diagram on resistance addressing DD was generated primarily with the assistance of the Karsa land activists who facilitated separate group discussions with the five social-historical groupings of land struggle constituents, i.e. the Bantayan and Kapohu villagers, primarily where the early dwellers reside; Sipakainga and Tamarunang who were mostly migrant peasants; and the camps inside the reclaimed area that included villagers from both socio-historical situations. Although there were some members from different groups involved in the discussion in the village from outside these villages (e.g. the villagers of Sipakainga attended the discussion in Bantayan and Kapohu), the PAR engagement was not successful in organizing a wider inter-village expanded possibility.

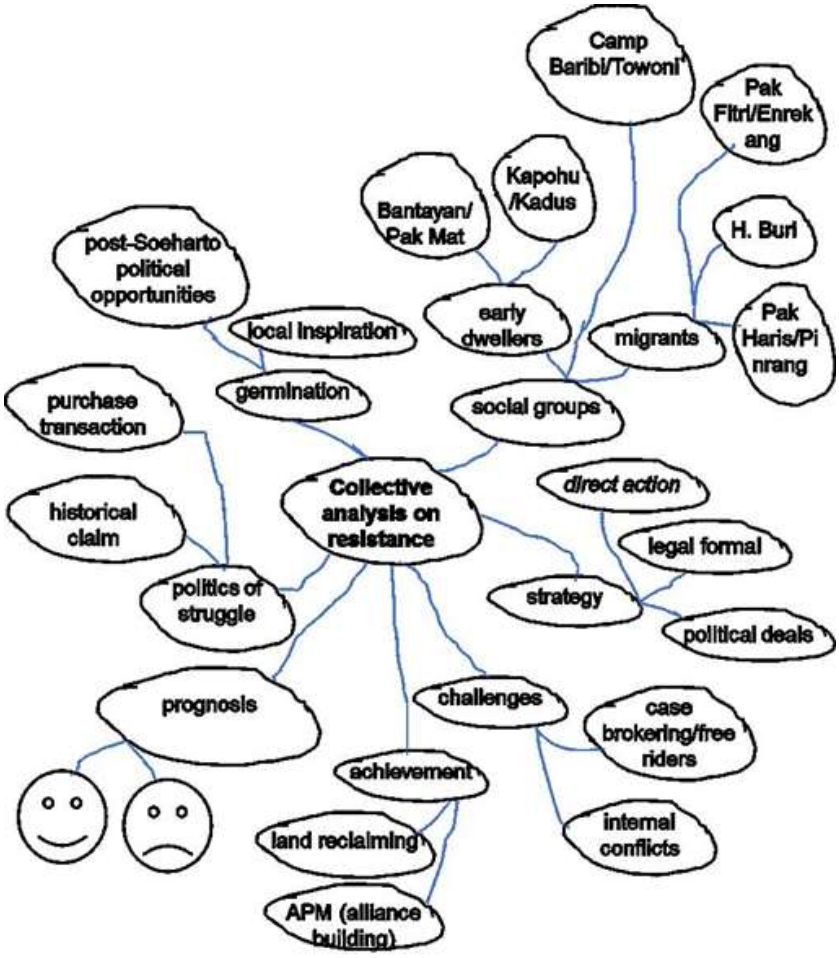


Diagram 2. Collective analysis on resistance in Baras

Emergence of the Aliansi Petani Matra (APM)

The coalition emerged from localized analysis regarding the politics of local dispossession in and in their collective attempts to resist continuous land alienation initiated by corporate expansion with the support of feudal elites and local bureaucrats who profited from the reproduction of a noxious blend of a feudal-capitalist mode of commodity production. The initiative to establish the coalition was taken by the peasant migrants (*pendatang*) in Sipakainga and Tamarunang in 2014 after they found out that the neighboring villages of the early dwellers, Bantayan and Kapohu, were also involved in the same conflict with PT Unggul. The *pendatang* groups invited the Karsa land activists to support them with this coalition building exercise. The above diagram drawn from collective learning sessions illustrates the establishment of the alliance as a considerable achievement for the land struggle constituents.

Initially, Karsa was only supporting the Sipakainga villagers before they managed to expand and consolidate the constituents of the struggle to include other neighboring villages. That was the time when the idea of establishing the North Mamuju Peasants Alliance (*Aliansi Petani Matra/Mamuju Utara*) emerged in a bid to meet the need for a common identity as a unified group contesting PT Unggul's claim to their land as opposed to becoming scattered individuals scouring for land. In the regular meetings leading to the establishment of APM, Karsa activists facilitated the large group discussions with all land struggle constituents from the five villages on possible options that the villagers could pursue and the respective consequences of each avenue. One such avenue was the legal method which according to Karsa

experience, would be more difficult to win, and even when they win in the local court, the company usually wins at a higher level. Another option was extra-institutional action by land reclaiming which would necessitate solidifying unity at the community level to deal with continued repression by the state, the company and the police.

Strategies, Tactics and Mobilization

During a series of meetings with PAR participants, they reflected on their options based on their understanding of their localized context and the wider setting of DD (as discussed in relation to agents and avenues for DD). The first option of going through the courts could provide results, yet with some disadvantages. For example, the peasants as plaintiffs must bear the cost of judicial challenges, and the corrupt judicial system would most likely fail them and eventually compel them to accept the legal decision. The extra-judicial path, on the other hand, would take a long time and could evolve in to an endless contestation, not to mention the severe consequences of such actions including terror tactics used by the company and arrest by corporate-complicit police. The advantage of operating outside the court system is that the learning in land struggle action could strengthen the peasants' collective solidarity and educate them to develop their own responses. All land struggle constituents could gain new knowledge about how to deal with state laws and company repression.

> …our relation is not like a lawyer and a client or a doctor and a patient, where the lawyer and doctor are responsible to treat the client or patient, and they just have to believe in what the lawyer or doctor decide to do on their behalf.

> Here we're all patients and doctors at the same time. Of course, there are lots of challenges, for instance we don't understand about the HGU (concession) law. But we can't avoid it, because we never invited the HGU, instead it's the HGU that came to us. This issue will never happen unless the government issued the HGU for PT Unggul on our land. So, we have to know what HGU is! If we don't know yet, that's what we're all here for, to learn together. By learning it ourselves, we will not be depending on outsiders to help us. Of course, we will not able to answer all the questions in one sitting. That's why we need to get together more often so we can solve the emerging challenges (Oyong, Karsa meeting minutes, 2014).

After considering the available options (as illustrated in the diagram above), the PAR group discussed the possible strategies that they could pursue. In July 2014, the social groups from these five villages had already started land reclamation on their own terms by building huts and planting banana trees as markers or symbols of reclamation on "company land". The police in turn destroyed the huts several times since but these were promptly re-constructed by the Baras. After the occupation, the next stage was building a *bantaya* (traditional building for communal meeting space), which was both a symbolic and functional means of affecting land occupation (see picture below).

Photo 1: *Bantaya, a communal meeting space inside the reclaimed land.*

After an agreement was reached to consider extra-judicial paths, the next collective strategic decision was to convert the contested land into settlements and farming sites. The land struggle constituents considered the reclaimed land as a fortress for defence (*benteng pertahanan*) to demonstrate the symbolic and functional meaning of the newly established settlement, as it would provide them with a safe space to focus on internal strengthening, while continuing to educate themselves about state laws that the company used as a legal grounds to displace them from their land. At the same time, the establishment of the new settlement also attracted many small and landless peasants from neighboring villages who were in conflict with other plantation companies and were interested to learn about the reclaiming process.

To further strengthen their claim and normalize daily life in the newly established settlement surrounded by

palm oil trees planted by the company, the constituents also built a *mushalla* (small prayer space). The *mushalla* is also a symbol of unity in their resistance as they learned from the fact that their temporary huts were destroyed by the *Brimob* (special police force), i.e., "a thousand huts we built and destroyed by Brimob will have no meaning, compared to destroying this one small *mushalla* which will make many people angry" (Group discussion note, June 2016).

Photo 2. Building Mushalla to claim, "We are here to stay!"

For the early dweller groups, historical messaging was also an important strategic and tactical mode of resistance. Some elders were rekindling the history of fighting the colonial Dutch plantations. For example, a symbol of resistance against the Dutch, an old canon that is venerated to this day as a tombstone for honoring their elders and martyrs, is a source of historical learning with

great contemporary potential in movement motivation and organizing.

Photo 3. Canon, an inherited regalia as a symbol of resistance.

To nurture a spirit of unity, elders often repeated the story about when their ancestors collected the coconut harvest, one of the most lucrative commodities at the time and bartered them for guns used in the armed struggle against the Dutch colonialists. They recount how their ancestors managed to halt the expansion of Dutch coconut plantations along the Lariang River in defense of their villages which were subsequently never colonized.

> … I am not a fearless old man, but I am determined to fight for the rights of my people. What will happen to my grandchildren if no more lands are left? They will probably curse me as an irresponsible grandpa!

> I have been involved in this struggle since I was a teenager, accompanying my father to go to the government offices in the city to file our official complaints against the intrusion of all sorts of companies with the state permission on our ancestral land. There was no road connection at that time, so we have to go there by boat. Since then, my family had been going through a lot of hardships to get our land back. Before my father passed away, he requested me to continue the struggle as the symbol of our respect to our ancestors (*penghormatan nenek moyang*). You can see some remnants of our old villages inside the plantation, the bodies of our elders were buried there. If I quit this struggle, wouldn't that be a big betrayal (*pengkhianatan besar*)? (Bantayan elder interview note, June 2016)

To some extent the historical learning was also intended to respond to the need for a sense of unity between the *pakkampong (*early dwellers) and *pendatang* (peasant migrants) as they recognized the "need to know the history of the arrival of people to this land. Hopefully by listening to these stories we can meet again more often" (Group discussion note, June 2016). Similarly, for the peasant migrant it conveyed the message of appreciating their "*bekas tangan*" (results of hard work) because "[a]fter leaving my village, then migrating to Malaysia for so many years, until I managed to secure this piece of land in Baras, would I just let the company to take it from me?" (Interview notes, Tamarunang villager, August 2016).

During collective group reflection on the repertoires of strategies and tactics pursued throughout their struggle since PT Unggul confiscated their land in 2003, participants generally agreed on the importance of direct action, compared to the costly and timely legal standing

and making political deals during the election. Moreover, the struggle constituents across generational and gender groupings developed their own analysis concerning the collusion of power structures, i.e. state apparatus, and capital or palm oil companies. For the elders, especially the original dwellers, this struggle is an expression of their homage to ancestral lands and the accompanying system of social relations that come with it, as well as intergenerational responsibility to provide land for their future offspring, as the key means of production for peasants. Female participants and constituents, especially mothers elaborated on their distinct roles in critical moments of state/market induced violence (e.g. acting as shields by leading marches), which have proven to be very effective as strategic actions to advance these land struggles. For the youth, their involvement with the land occupation have politicized their understanding by developing their appreciation of the political economic structure contributing to the palm oil led-DD as well as in terms of helping to define their contribution to the struggle.

> There are some young university graduates in this village, but they seem to be reluctant in associating themselves with our struggle, so I told them, "If you want to learn about state power (*ilmu kepemerintahan*), get yourself involved in this land dispute. Here, we have to confront with the experts of state laws (*sarjana hukum*) all the time." (Bantayan villager, field notes, June 2016).

Road blocking is another direct-action tactic that has been deployed several times and has proven to be an effective intervention because the groups are aware of the company's urgent need to get the recently harvested palm oil fruits to the mills as soon as possible before they spoil

as it has to be processed in fresh condition. It was an effective way to slow down the company's operation and affect their cost structures and bottom line. They also developed *jalur tikus* (mice road/short cut) to counter the company's control of road systems, passing the plantation area, allowing them to navigate the road connecting the villages inside the plantation. Throughout the joint reflective learning session, out of the three types of tactics mapped in the diagram, direct action was considered the most effective in disrupting and pressing demands on DD actors.

Photo 4. "Mice road" to bypass the security gate inside the plantation.

One important lesson from confronting the police and company's ongoing intimidation through the deployment of direct-action tactics was the importance of documenting such repressions. As Ipul, a young member of the land struggle, mentioned "we now recorded, mostly secretly, any encounter we have with the police. Other than as

evidence of police violent actions, it's also a useful tool to educate my fellow young people here in Baras about the land struggle and why it is important to play more active roles." The participants also learned to involve local media, printed or electronic, as a shield to avoid harsher repression from the state apparatus. On one occasion they even managed to cancel the deployment of Brimob undermining the company's request for them to be stationed in Baras.

For the constituents of the struggle, they are not only fighting for land (means of production); it is also about building a new structure of social relations between different social groups and classes caught up in DD situations. This is a pressing need especially after some signs of division started to emerge after they managed to occupy disputed land and started to plan for redistribution. At this point, PAR praxis became a potential means for re-consolidating the struggle. A group leader refers to the need for strengthening identities that could help with unity and solidarity across social groups through the process of "*duduk bersama*" (literally means sitting together):

> We should solve the rivalry that we now witness among ourselves. We fight against the injustice pursued by PT Unggul to all of us for so long, if someone wants to monopolize the land distribution now, are we not similar to Unggul?
>
> We need to sit together (*duduk bersama*) again to resolve the weakening of our struggle (*perjuangan*). We should be aware by now that sitting together is our strongest weapon against these awfully rich and powerful people. We managed to occupy this land (*pendudukan tanah*) only because of our collective determination

> (*keputusan bersama*) to do so, nothing else. We have spent so much money and energy going through the lengthy court processes (*lewat pengadilan*), but now I am not convinced that the lawyers and NGO people are really working for our cause as they promised. We have tried to make deals with the politicians (*jalur politik*), by giving them our votes, but all we got are empty promises. Enough with all that! If we fight against the company through the legal means available, we are doomed, so we just have to ignore it (*masa bodoh*). (Bantayan elder, field notes, June 2016)

The PAR process with the social groups and emergent classes involved in the struggle against palm-oil DD in Baras are still in their preliminary stages and will require further educational and organizing initiatives to strengthen the politics of resistance, especially in relation to the horizontal differences among the constituents of this formation; differences that the company and the state apparatus are more than happy to exploit to affect DD.

Based on the joint reflection with different land struggle constituents, there are two key learning themes. The first concerns collective identity construction across social groups/classes and organization building to further strengthen the internal consolidation of the different agents of land struggle in Baras. By creating alliances between different social groups participants have learned to demystify and challenge the state-backed legalistic claim by the company. The new organization, however fragile, has provided a platform to sit together and to foster the realization that "learning [the law] ourselves, we will not be depending on outsider" (Karsa meeting minutes, 2014). Second, participants learned about the limits and possibilities of direct action. As social groups/classes whose survival depends on the tactical capacity to

over/side step the law, direct action is a logical choice in terms of the available repertoires of resistance. Participants have learned that the other options they have pursued such as going through the court and making voting deals with local politicians have seldom been fruitful. In fact, as a Bantaya elder put it quite succinctly, the most potent resistance strategy so far is being "*masa bodoh*" (to ignore) the law.

Continued Engagements in Sulawesi and Thirdworld-ist PAR

Initially it was agreed among the struggle constituents that the land would be distributed fairly, with landless members getting priority. Once the early achievement of reclaiming the land was attained, some key figures of the struggle started to use their influence to claim a larger share on the basis of length of involvement in the struggle and legality of ownership evidence, as well as ancestral rights in the case of the *pakkampong* groups. Some peasant migrants could not provide convincing evidence of where exactly the land they bought was located. Receipts for transactions do not specify the exact location of the land purchased and only provide a general geographical site of the plot. In fact, some of the receipts reference the wrong place and wrong address and do not match up with a claim.

The PAR engagement has been focusing on internal reconsolidation to disentangle this *bannang siroca'* (knotted thread) throughout the problem-posing exercises of analyzing the contours of multiple dispossessions that both the *pakkampong* and *pendatang* groups have experienced as well as reflecting on their own tactics and strategies in addressing DD. One possible solution identified in the group discussions with the land struggle

constituents was organizing a series of reconsolidation meetings with the key representatives from each group, followed by larger group meetings with all land struggle constituents from the four villages. These meetings would also be utilized as an opportunity to affirm the agreements over the direction of the land struggle moving forward. Agenda items proposed for this large meeting included: strengthening the claim over the contested land; solving the issue of conflicting claims; and reconsolidating the collective identity of the struggle.

In addition to the primary commitment of Thirdworldist PAR to facilitate practical movement interventions, this action oriented participatory inquiry is a continuous attempt to construct locally sensitive analysis based on the lived realities of the marginal peasant and indigenous people, while being attentive to the structural and political impositions of a colonial capitalist political economy of DD; a process which affirms the agency of small/landless peasants and indigenous peoples, replete with all its contradictions and possibilities (Kapoor, 2017). As peasant and indigenous resistance to DD continues to expose the inherent contradictions of capitalism (including the contradictions of movement responses that are embedded in a terrain of capitalist commodification which divides groups variously impacted by DD) and the living legacies of colonialism while producing movement relevant knowledge that is emergent from their struggles addressing cultural and material dispossession, they continue to produce "theory that both explains and enables action" (Foley, 1999, p 130).

The consideration of possibilities and challenges of learning and knowledge production through the PAR praxis with the land struggle constituents in Baras suggests continued directions for a PAR praxis in Sulawesi which embraces the idea of a resurgence of a non-

commodified land-based cosmic vision (Masalam, 2017, 2019; Nichols, 2020) to constantly confront the exploitative, pauperizing and dehumanizing impacts of the continuous intrusions of colonial capital and its cultural ideological attendants in the rural frontiers. For that to happen, peasant affinities to land need to pay attention to the details of the local and immediate political situation (Masalam, 2017, 2019) as the primary basis for building towards the more nebulous process of macro-political efforts to try and address centres of power and actors that are harder for peasants and the indigenous to reach.

Building on the engagements with the land struggle constituents in Baras, the continued direction of this PAR praxis will be particularly geared towards tackling localized dynamics in their respective places while expanding the "trans-local networking" aspect (Masalam & Kapoor, 2016). The focus remains on strengthening the alliance between the migrant peasant and early dweller groups through reconsolidation meetings to deal with the varied interests and understandings of land around a reclamation politics fraught with the contradictions of neo/colonial impositions associated with the problematic and fractious dialectics of land dispossession and possession. To this end, this Thirdword-ist PAR praxis continues to produce peasant and indigenous movement relevant knowledge, while affirming the courage and persistence of the wretched of the earth in localized contestations, despite the odds, embedded in colonial capitalist power structures.

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