

Environmental Governance Challenges of Indigenous Forest Recognition: Climate Solution Ideal and Its Uneven Outcomes in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Formal policies on Indigenous land and forest rights recognition are increasingly being promoted as a climate solution in global forums. While this suggests a clear discursive victory for environmental justice movements, there has been less attention on the aftermaths of recognition. This in part owes to the novelty of policies on Indigenous land and forest recognition, but also due to the tendency among proponents to view formal legal victories as a means and ends of advocacy. In this paper, we spotlight what happens after recognition in Kajang, the site of the first Indigenous community to formally regain authority over state forests in Indonesia. We apply a lens from political ecology and draw from critical research on land and property to identify the unevenness of an emerging climate policy solution. Through grounded village-level research engagements lasting over three years in the span of over a decade, we identify a range of ethnographic perspectives on land, resources, authority, and shifting identity formation. Results highlight three main findings. First, while the assumption of community-based initiatives presumes the restoration of rights, new forms of enclosure and marginalization occur vis-à-vis policies of Indigenous land rights recognition. Second, the assumption of forest and environmental stewardship is by no means automatic, as land and resource concerns have a geographic dimension that may result in protection for some forests at the expense of others. Finally, Kajang is unique for its history and political economy making it difficult to assume parallel outcomes elsewhere. While environmental justice movements should continue to advocate for Indigeneity and forest and land recognition, more attention should be given to their underlying strategies and the implications of doing so.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous land rights; Recognition; Environmental governance; Ammatoa Kajang; Climate solutions; Property; Forest conservation; Community-based resource management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bungko, a common name for the last born child in Kajang, just returned from another stint of working abroad in Malaysia. He first mustered the courage to leave his home village in 2010 when he learned from family and friends that you do not need to show school graduation certificates to apply for work. Bungko never finished elementary school and struggles to read longer sentences. His motivation grew when he also learned from return-migrants that success in Malaysia rests on proving your worth. He knew he would not get the same opportunity in his own country of Indonesia and decided to try his luck.

Working in Malaysia did eventually mean success for Bungko. He started out slowly, delivering vegetables in a motorcycle cab, then worked as a harvester (k. *pattombak*) on an oil palm plantation. He eventually secured employment as a heavy machinery operator at a mining company. He took special pride in this more secure job because the pay far exceeded the previous ones, and the company seemed to value his work and treated him well. After a decade abroad, however, Bungko missed home. He wanted to

return to Kajang. He felt unsettled without the regular use of the Konjo language and the absence of Kajang rituals in his life. With inheritance lands back in Kajang, and feeling he had saved enough, Bungko decided it was time to go home. He had a plan to put his inherited lands into production, cultivating a variety of cash crops on his smallholding, hoping to plant something that might coincide with a price boom.

Upon return, however, he was surprised to learn that he no longer had access to his land. Family and neighbors explained the new prohibitions on use of land in and around what in 2016 had been designated as the Indigenous Kajang forests. *“This is all because of the perda,”* he was told; and continued, *“but I had never heard of the perda before.”*

The perda (*peraturan daerah*) is portmanteau for local regulation, a policy that had gained significant attention for both its symbolic and material victory in achieving environmental justice through acknowledging and protecting the forests of historically marginalized Indigenous People (Fisher et al., 2020; Muur & Bedner, 2016). News about the recognition of Kajang forests had reached an international audience. A Washington Post exposé entitled “The Best Forest Guardians Already Live There” described the Kajang as follows: *“As global deforestation continues at alarming rates, the empowerment of Indigenous peoples such as the Kajang is emerging as a keyway to protect the world’s rainforests.”* The article goes on to spotlight the Kajang as a prime example about just how much global interests have grown in recognizing and supporting Indigenous communities as the most successful forest guardians.

Indeed, pursuit of Indigenous stewardship as a climate solution is gaining significant attention in financing portfolios among major donors and philanthropies. At the UNFCCC’s COP26, multi-donor funds like the Global Environment Facility (GEF), large philanthropy groups like the Ford Foundation, among many others, pledged to redirect financing to identify, support, and empower Indigenous communities in their sustained efforts at resource protection. The scale of interest and initiatives to support Indigenous land has grown, and by 2024, *“the world’s largest source of multilateral funding for biodiversity — [plan] to invest nearly \$50 billion in non-state actors, like Indigenous peoples and local communities, to support their initiatives to conserve biodiversity”* (Carling et al., 2023).

In this article, we center environmental governance dilemmas that emerge from the implementation of climate solutions and its attendant initiatives to redirect climate finance. We focus on the Kajang case as a way to spotlight the way global institutions envision programming for climate change and to spotlight the messiness, complexities, and politics of implementation. This research draws on participatory action research and ethnographic methods, whereby authors supported policy-drafting working groups on Perda policy enactment from 2013 - 2023, which also included living in Kajang villages for over three years (Fisher, 2021; Fisher et al., 2023; Fisher et al., 2020). During this decade of engagement, our involvement included participatory mapping, surveys and questionnaires, numerous interviews, support for advocacy on rights initiatives, attendance and participation in working group discussions and village planning meetings, programmatic implementation on climate change and forest governance projects, as well as living for extended periods with Kajang families. The most recent policy involvement included the first author’s role as a village facilitator in Kajang as part of a Climate Adaptation Fund project, which lasted for 10 months between January - December 2023.

Living in the village provided unique and reflexive insights into the implications of climate policies, especially as they are articulated, understood, and applied from below. As a growing coalition of powerful policy actors see Indigenous land rights recognition as a key priority, we also show how it is important not to overlook potential unintended

consequences and injustices that may arise along the way, particularly those that have a lot to lose in the processes of implementation. Strategic simplifications (Li, 2002) and neglect of emergent injustices will only serve to undermine Indigenous land rights recognition and community-based conservation as climate policy solution.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND INDIGENOUS FOREST RECOGNITION

Studies of environmental governance cover a wide range of research, from the broad to the specific, the normative to the political (Kenney-Lazar et al., 2023). Environmental governance frameworks center around the constellation of state, civil society, and market actors, and tend towards generative solutions aimed at fostering democratic principles across stakeholder partnerships (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). Spotlighting the normative deficiencies of this brand of environmental governance scholarship, a sharp ascent of political ecology research has focused on critiquing state and market-driven solutions in the name of sustainable development (Heynen et al., 2007; Peet & Watts, 2004). Scholars have devoted special attention to the role of non-state actors, specifically neoliberal natures and eco-governmentality, regarding the shift from hierarchical notions of government to diffuse coalitions working towards a specific environmental outcome. There have been recent calls to navigate beyond the normative and the critique, however, vis-a-vis relational approaches are more generative of institutional possibilities (Kenney-Lazar et al., 2023). It is in this vein that we also pursue a relational approach, at once critical of historical political economic and colonial antecedents while committing to praxis and its institutional and discursive possibilities.

Territorialization premised on environmental management has a long history and lasting legacy (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2001). Many notions of environmental protection began as fortress conservation initiatives promoted by and among states for various purposes, in which designation and regulation of vast territories in the form of national parks commonly took place through land enclosures, dispossession, eviction, and violence (Neumann, 1998; West et al., 2006). While fortress conservation remains a central management function among states, more recent formulations of environmentalism reflect neoliberal logics through market-based solutions (Milne, 2022).

Injustices from state-driven and neoliberal forms of enclosure and territorialization have given rise to advocacy for a devolution of authority, whereby policies of decentralization, democratic ideals, and community participation have become more widely accepted (Burkey, 1993; Ribot, 2002; Larson & Ribot, 2004). Climate solutions advocated in international forums today almost always require participation and informed consent of policies and programs, and more recently explicitly situate Indigenous land rights recognition, empowerment initiatives, and authority over resource stewardship, indicating a return to popular ideals of community based resource management, protecting the commons, and polycentric policies promoting integrated conservation and adaptive management. Indeed, there is an irony of the current moment of climate solutions, whereby stated policies increasingly aim to recognize the role of Indigenous and local communities without acknowledging histories of violent dispossession in the name of conservation (Neumann, 1998). Although reparations on the legacy of dispossession are gaining some traction, early evidence on outcomes of Indigenous land rights recognition aimed at restoring rights, improving livelihoods, and securing conservation outcomes show limited success and unintended consequences (Fisher, 2019; Prill-Brett, 2007; Ubink & Quan, 2008).

There are obvious contextual reasons for this. The history of violent enclosures and eviction have pushed Indigenous populations to the margins on the pretext of development, environmental conservation, and the “greater good,” erasing their histories, and reshaping the terms of ordinary claims (Hall et al., 2011; Peluso, 1993). Where recognized, historical claims have been manipulated, and communities enter into unequal patronage relations and locked into precarious path dependencies. For example, communities have been resettled onto infertile or unproductive lands, have had to deal with unfamiliar situations and forced to acquiesce to unfair terms overseen by violent state driven and racialized policies (Hecht & Cockburn, 2010). The resulting legacies and vulnerabilities do not simply disappear, whereby native populations often face some of the largest disadvantages in terms of education and access to resources.

Nevertheless, emergent climate solution narratives in 2024 follow an increasingly common refrain without much discussion of these contextual factors. Rather, the following statements are commonly expressed in international environmental forums, suggesting Indigenous recognition and support can serve as one of the most legitimate, effective, and necessary climate solutions:

“Despite Indigenous peoples’ role in conserving 80% of the world’s biodiversity and stewarding 36% of intact forests and 24% of carbon in tropical forests, Indigenous and local communities received less than 1% of global climate funding in the last decade.” (Carling et al., 2023)

A recent commentary in *Nature* has aimed to rebuff the claim that 80% of biodiversity is found in Indigenous territories spotlighting the potential harms from promoting such a narrative.

On the one hand, it is encouraging that global initiatives are responding and legitimizing advocacy of networks from around the world to demand voice in climate policy negotiations. On the other hand, the discursive axioms and categorical simplifications also carry risks of manipulation, malfeasance, discipline, neoliberal cooptation, responsibilization, and redirecting blame should outcomes not materialize according to external expectations (Li, 2002). It is through this critical vantage point that we approach our research, drawing from a tradition of environmental governance in its more critical and relational forms.

3. COMMUNITY CONSERVATION AS CLIMATE SOLUTION

The focus on communities as stewards of the natural environment has a distinct history, with scholars, activists, and practitioners undertaking significant work to address misconceptions of resource use, access, and conservation (Ostrom, 1990). Such work has mainstreamed acknowledgement and support for community-based natural resource management and participation in multi-level governance and decision making processes. Framings of these policies range from agrarian reform that tend to advocate land certification, to communal rights of limited tenure and use managed among groups, to more rights-based policies rooted in Indigeneity and autonomous entities. Conceptualizations include terms such as community/social forestry that have also become commonplace as the basis for state policy across the Global South (Gilmour, 2016; Menon et al., 2007; Roe et al., 2009). The discursive explanations for this broad set of initiatives invoke commitments to environmental justice and sustainable development and have long been viewed as part and parcel of development policy and environmental stewardship. Not unsurprisingly, however, such policies also result in corresponding dilemmas in practice.

Originating in human geography and cultural anthropology, scholars have pointed out the adaptive capacities and unique local and traditional ecological knowledge, capabilities, and interests of local communities in environmental stewardship (Sauer, 1963). The assumption also suggests that not only do local communities know more about their local environments and ecologies, but they also have a greater interest in protecting them. Movements advocating for community-based efforts grew significantly in the 1980s in part as backlash to the flawed and racialized metaphor of the tragedy of the commons as pretense for state and corporate enclosures (Larson & Soto, 2008; Saunders, 2014). Driven largely by a coalition of researchers, activists, and practitioners rallying behind Ostrom's seminal work on the commons (Cox et al., 2010; Ostrom, 1990; 2009), policy formulations sought to identify, protect, and replicate models of community stewardship and adaptive collaborative management (Miles, 2013), which hence converged with liberal political ideas of democratic decentralization (Larson & Ribot, 2004). The transition from policy ideal to programmatic initiatives reshaping regulations and practice, however, has been incomplete or come up against larger political-economic forces.

Community-based formulations have had a significant impact in reshaping forestry bureaucracies around the world. As of 2020, a significant area of forest lands in Southeast Asia are mandated under community-based management approaches, covering an area of 13.9 million hectares, or approximately 7% of the total forest land area (RECOFTC, 2020). Policies are usually guided by the trifecta of securing rights for local communities, empowering local livelihoods, and improving ecosystem services or ecological outcomes. The extent to which each of these three pillars have been successful has initiated vigorous debate in recent years, especially in places like Indonesia. Some researchers have looked for the material benefits of economic outcomes (Nakayama et al., 2024) or look to remote sensing to assess vegetation (Santika et al., 2017), while others showcase how management is rife with misunderstanding, poor management, and co-optation, describing implementation as susceptible to elite capture, corruption, obfuscation, and further, entrenches and exacerbates inequalities (Fisher et al., 2019; Moeliono et al., 2017; Sahide et al., 2020a; Sahide et al., 2020b). In considering the often overlapping policy formulation of Indigenous land and environmental stewardship initiatives, particularly in the context of growing attention toward climate policy solutions, similar issues are likely to come to the fore.

Brosius et al. (1998) explain that it is essential to understand the histories, development context, interests, and new trajectories that interventions set in motion. If these issues are not addressed, climate-situated initiatives to recognize Indigenous land rights and their overall role in protecting the forest may lead to the essentialization of local communities, the undermining of the important issues associated with Indigenous rights and livelihoods as just another fad (Sylvain, 2014), which makes way for disappointment and blame relative to policy outcomes and can even result in retaliation against the very communities that policies are intended to empower. Literature on the creation of environmental subjects and eco-governmentality has tilted the vantage point further, explaining how power extends locally to environmental subjects that enact new forms of legitimation and power relations, fostering and disciplining notions that result in material outcomes on landscapes (Agrawal, 2005; Fletcher, 2017). Some have examined such dynamics as a form of responsabilization, whereby community authority is seemingly relinquished in neoliberal terms, extending accountability from the state but reapportioning resources away from previously funded resource management initiatives (Erbaugh, 2019).

Nevertheless, international legal initiatives continue to progressively carve out space to support Indigenous Peoples to reclaim land and resources. The United Nations ILO Convention No. 169 in 1989 sought to guarantee the protection of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (Swepston, 1990). By 2007, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was endorsed and ratified by the United Nations. These advancements supported Indigenous status as cause for formalizing their authority to protect lands and other natural resources (Chen, 2014). Many states have hence responded by passing laws and implementing policies that acknowledge Indigenous Peoples right to land, which have had uneven outcomes (Peluso & Lund, 2011; Tusing & Leemann, 2023; Wenk, 2012). National governments and international development organizations like the World Bank are beginning to accept the idea that Indigenous Peoples have certain collective rights (Li, 2010), which are gaining further traction with discourses around climate solutions (Kronik & Verner, 2010).

This literature, however, largely focuses on moments of conflict, seeking out safeguards or restitution relative to potential dispossession, and especially focuses on processes up to the point of gaining recognition. As acceptance of such policy initiatives are still new, many often look away to the next conflict or have not had the opportunity to meaningfully analyze dynamics that take place beyond Indigenous land recognition. Indeed, we try to train the spotlight on the dynamics that not only lead up to recognition but also help elucidate discursive and material implications that take place afterwards.

We draw from broader theories of enclosure and exclusion, specifically the intimate exclusions that take place among communities to foreground our analysis (Hall et al., 2011). Intimate exclusions are driven by emergent capitalist relations through subtle processes that take place between kin or among neighbors, often spurred by commodity boom and bust cycles (Li, 2014). Our results and analysis draw on the processual dimensions of intimate relations between and among community members and their families in Kajang Indigenous land rights recognition, and specifically focus on the unfolding trajectories based on the choices available at the household and community level.

In this article we center our framework on the Kajang case around the changing dimensions of environmental governance in the context of indigenous forest rights recognition. We focus on the assumptions of global solutions as they relate to conditions of marginalization and deepen understanding of the extent to which policy ideal meets implementation reality. As such, our case studies are viewed relative to the three categorical imaginaries on the promises of community based resource management, namely rights, livelihoods, and conservation. Our analysis delves into politics and dilemmas beyond the processes of securing recognition, and rather shows the extent to which policy visions are met long after policies are secured. We close by laying out the potential pitfalls and dilemmas that emerge along the way.

4. POLITICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF KAJANG RECOGNITION

International social movements for environmental justice have succeeded in opening up space for the formal recognition of Indigenous land and forest rights. State supported policies, however, unfold under their own historical and political contexts (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007). In most cases, recognition converges with populist political discourses that encompass a host of aspirations (Afiff & Lowe, 2007; Gilbert, 2013; Rachman & Siscawati, 2014). For various reasons, in 2013, Indonesia came to be framed as the country with the largest number of Indigenous communities in the world, drawing on its cultural and linguistic diversity alongside narratives of historical state and corporate dispossession, and furthermore, connecting the narrative of Indigeneity

and biodiversity conservation to promote forest and resource conservation. This is evidenced by the following statement published in the G20's Council of Councils:

"Indonesia represents a worthy case study for countries struggling to adjust policies to help indigenous peoples. Approximately 50-70 million people in Indonesia could be classified as indigenous and they live in almost every province." (Perkasa & Evanty, 2014)

The rise of this discourse also emerged in concert with the precedent setting victory among social movements around a Constitutional Court Decision (MK35/2012, and other pursuant decisions and regulations) stating that state enclosures of Indigenous (adat) lands were unconstitutional (Myers et al., 2017). This led to the impetus for operationalizing mechanisms for land rights recognition. Kajang emerged as a showcase for its participatory legal drafting approach, its success serving as a blueprint for articulating Indigenous recognition and transfer of authority on state forest lands (Fisher & Muur, 2019). Kajang has drawn attention for comparative study from NGOs across Indonesia. In 2016 a Kajang representative was even invited to join the state delegation at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of Parties showcasing the way the Ministry of Environment and Forestry aimed to support indigenous forest recognition.

As an Indigenous community, Kajang is known for its philosophy of modesty (*k. Kamase-masea*) passed down through local knowledge and oral tradition of the Pasang ri Kajang. At the center of their community is the central authority of the Ammatoa, a figure who lives in the traditional areas of Rambang Seppang (~500 hectares), adjacent to, and part of the Kajang sacred forests (~313 hectares). This traditional protected area also extends into a broader region of cultural influence, whereby NGOs have supported local communities to map out the Kajang region to include 22,000 hectares. The administrative region, or subdistrict of Kajang in the district of Bulukumba, encompasses 19 administrative villages. In the early 1990s Kajang sacred forests were designated as limited production forests. *De facto*, however, the forests remained under the broader authority of the Ammatoa. The local government also supported the realities of land management, recruiting local Kajang to serve as forest rangers and coordinating management plans with the Ammatoa (Workman et al., 2015). In this sense, Kajang forests posed no complex land tenure conflicts within the boundaries of state forest recognition, such as those in the imaginaries of Indigenous land recognition that center around stories of dispossession and designs to reclaim land. Conditions of dispossession, nevertheless, are a key part of Kajang history beyond the sacred forests, especially at the nearby locations of enclosure and violence from past plantation concessions and expansion.

To make sense of the present moment, Kajang must first be contextualized through its political ecological antecedents. The cosmology of Kajang identity begins with the Ammatoa, connecting him to subsequent layers of historical institutional leadership and precedence in the form of the Adda Limayya, or the five main families of lineage. However, regional developments, specifically with the victories of the Gowa kingdom across South Sulawesi also brought a new layer of leadership in the form of the Karaeng Tallua, the three kings, which were initially installed as emissaries to kingdom politics of the region centuries ago (Maarif, 2012). External visions of the Kajang are also present in the colonial record about the 18th (Scheltema, 1931), 19th (Donselaar, 1854), and early 20th centuries (Cense, 1931), describing land use practices, colonial interests and administration, as well as hierarchies of class and identity. The colonial influence in the region highlights the extent to which the region's perception was

characterized as uncivilized people, rife with criminal runaways. Archival records of colonial administrators explicitly lament the expanse of flat lands adequate for plantation expansion but for its lacking a disciplined labor force. Not unsurprisingly then, regional dealings in Kajang unfolded through the Karaeng Tallua, who would later sanction plantation concession establishment. After the forced cultivation period of Dutch colonial rule (*cultuurstelsel*, 1830-1870) and the *domein verklaring* of 1870, a policy that initiated dualism of land administration serving as the basis for state land enclosure, global trade development and Dutch policies opened up its colonies to foreign investment. Kajang was singled out as a target for Harold and Crossfield, a British venture investing in Dutch administered plantation areas (Jones, 2002; Jones & Wale, 1998), establishing the basis for the PT Lonsum plantations that to this day occupies a rubber plantation of 5,200 hectares (Tyson, 2008; Muur, 2019). Both rubber, coffee and other plantation crops were attempted on these concession lands, but World War 2 interrupted operations. A protracted period of violence ensued as clashes between Islamic rebel groups and the Javanese led nationalist army sought to secure control over South Sulawesi (Harvey, 1974).

When Suharto's "New Order" decisively settled the conflict, a period of coercive developmentalism took root (1967 - 1998) and particular forms of village administration became mainstreamed. State policies were legitimized, led by military and police leadership delivering development in coercive and extractive ways. The village head in Tanah Toa in the 1980s described how he civilized and Islamicized local populations, requiring them to change rituals and mandating labor in development projects (Fisher, 2019). Meanwhile, the political stability of New Order Indonesia facilitated plantation expansion, powering forces of village and smallholder exclusion. Although Suharto's national grip collapsed in 1998, PT Lonsum plantation operations expanded. Aggressive expansionist company policies promoted by plantation managers worked with state backed security forces, creating friction in post-*reformasi* Indonesia. One incident resulted in clashes between Kajang protesters and security officials, ending in three Kajang casualties (SNUB, 2003). Mediation efforts ensued and legal proceedings led to an unusual victory for the defendants (KOMNAS HAM, 2006). Muur (2019) argues that the opening of discourses of Indigeneity helped to strengthen Kajang movement strategies, and provided the basis for Kajang claims to state forests vis-a-vis Indigeneity. What various scholars described as an "adat revivalism" began to expand across Indonesia (Davidson & Henley, 2007; Tyson, 2010).

Through a collaborative process supported by an international research institute working with the local government, activist groups, and local Kajang leaders, a local regulation passed to recognize Kajang Indigeneity under the auspices of Indonesian law. This was especially significant in the aftermath of Constitutional Court Decision MK35/2012, a legal reformulation that suggested the state had no authority to enclose Indigenous land. Kajang was among the first to prove Indigeneity and thus compelled the central government to release state forest land to Indigenous authority. By 2016, the Indonesian government had recognized a Decree from the Minister of Environment and Forestry designating the Ammatoa Kajang Customary Forest as covering an area of 313.99 Ha. This determination legitimized the change in status of the state forest area to the Ammatoa Kajang Traditional Law Community, the first of its kind in Indonesia. At the Indigenous Forest Recognition Declaration meeting, President Jokowi proudly called Kajang a national model that could be a source of learning and claimed that his government had fulfilled its obligation to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples. While these victories were significant from a global and national social movement perspective, regaining authority from the state is no simple process, one that continues

to reshape local power relations and contestations (Erazo, 2013).

5. BOUNDARIES AND RESOURCE DILEMMAS: BETWEEN TRADITION AND DEVELOPMENT IN KAJANG

Changing boundary definitions in Kajang, specifically about Rambang Seppang, have taken place for generations. Rambang Seppang is the area where the strictest form of indigenous laws is carried out, an area that had steadily shrunk over the years due to land use change and development projects. Rambang Seppang also includes areas of the sacred forest at the center of discussions on Indigenous land rights recognition.

Specific rules are enforced in Rambang Seppang. For example, people who enter must wear black clothing, forego footwear, refrain from any use of electronic technology, among many other rules. Adherence is symbolic of the broader philosophy of the Kajang, representative of a modest way of life and other forms of local tradition. In Kajang, people often discuss changing boundaries of Rambang Seppang as a harbinger of change, especially in ways that squeeze its boundaries into smaller units and representative of larger changes in society. Fisher et al. (2019) has described ethnographic accounts about the way a black snake comes to divide the community, linking this story metaphorically to the divisions made to Rambang Seppang representative of road building projects. In these ways, the boundary discussions about the extent of Rambang Seppang are part of a longer history of contestations on the role of the state and development alongside Indigeneity, religion, and local authority.

Differences of interpretation following the *perda*, however, have reconstituted potential trajectories about the boundaries of Rambang Seppang. On the one hand, residents at the edges of Rambang Seppang often express their desire to be placed outside of its borders as they desire the benefits from electrification and the ability to access state resources, such as road building and other development projects (Fisher et al., 2018). On the other hand, by moving away from the practice of the *kamase-masea* and adherence to *pasang ri* Kajang philosophy, local families stand to lose the benefits of inclusion in traditional ceremonies, which underpin their core beliefs and sense of belonging in the world. There are numerous cases where local elders and leaders have refused to perform rituals for families based on how they have embraced lifestyle changes as part of being redrawn outside of Rambang Seppang following the *perda*. How such negotiations are settled determine what is thereafter allowable, and as a consequence, reshaping landscapes and affecting livelihoods, ushering in changes to identity and reformulating alliances based on local ideas about right and wrong.

In 2017, in the aftermath of the *perda*, the Malleleng village administration built a water tank in an area considered to be located at the borders of Rambang Seppang. This type of water infrastructure project is common in Indonesia, whereby the village facilitates a participatory initiative to establish a water and sanitation facility for the community. It is part of a national rural community based water and sanitation project commonly known through its portmanteau "Pamsimas," (*program air minum dan sanitasi berbasis masyarakat*) and in Kajang it consisted of a substantial 300 million rupiah (~USD 20,000) investment, equivalent to roughly one third of the annual village development budget of that time. The Malleleng village government planned the water infrastructure as a priority program as part of its Village Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMDes), a decision following several years of citizen facilitation in a location that had for many years faced a difficult water crisis. Villagers repeatedly demanded representatives find a solution.

Upon completion of the pamsimas project, however, Kajang Indigenous leadership received a complaint, suggesting the construction had taken place within the

traditional areas of Rambang Seppang. Indigenous leaders then called village representatives to clarify. The village representative explained that the structures were located beyond Rambang Seppang, in *Rambang Luara*, based on the perda boundary mapping process. Nevertheless, Indigenous leadership rejected this explanation firmly stating that the water infrastructure had been placed in Rambang Seppang. This meeting led to no conclusive outcomes, and the Indigenous and village representatives finally agreed to raise the issue at the subsequent Indigenous council gathering.

The council reconvened to discuss the boundary of Rambang Seppang in 2018, a meeting attended by over a hundred people. Attendees came from villages throughout the Kajang adat region. They considered the meeting significant for its implications to set precedent on how an area could be considered within and beyond the boundaries of Rambang Seppang. The decision would reshape the rules and rights at a given location. In particular, the ruling would decide whether a home could either be allowed to 'modernize,' especially on electrification and other amenities, or the extent to which a family could receive blessings from the Ammatoa and the council of leaders.

One attendee from the council meeting reiterated what the Malleleng village leadership explained: *"The village head said that the Pamsimas infrastructure does not break any rules because the location is outside of Rambang Seppang based on the Perda regulation."* This perspective is not without basis because during Perda formulation, the Malleleng Village Head - who also holds title as Kajang Indigenous leadership - was involved in the Working Group to map the *adat* region. Other than reinforcing that there is no rule that was broken, the village head also focused on the water crisis in Malleleng and the significant need for water. He expressed his desire to do anything to ensure provision of water services to villagers in his jurisdiction. He even expressed his willingness to receive sanctions from Indigenous rule.

"For years we experienced difficulty in accessing water. In the dry season we were forced to buy water from outside at a significant cost, even though we live just downstream of a forest full of spring water sources. My role as a leader of the community is to provide for the needs of my community especially if these are their wishes. I'm willing to pursue these goals no matter the consequence."

For the Indigenous council, the actions of the Malleleng village head consisted of a grave breach of Kajang rules, and worse undermined Indigenous authority. One leader explained: *"If we continue to allow people to break the rules [on modernizing construction], we will eventually lose our indigenous identity (kehilangan adat)."* This Indigenous leader expressed concern over precedence for others emboldening more people to break the rules. At the council meeting, the Malleleng village head was handed the gravest sanction of Indigenous rule in Kajang because he refused to admit breaking the rules. He responded by further requesting that the council undertake additional measures to remove the Pamsimas site from Rambang Seppang. Denied the request, another Indigenous leader further expressed that *"The sanction has had a deterrent effect for those who break Indigenous rule and authority. We have to be firm because now we can see how each year the areas of Rambang Seppang continue to be squeezed."*

He further referenced the council meeting, citing the Ammatoa, the ultimate authority of interpreting Kajang rule, reminding all local villagers in attendance that they have long ago predicted such incidents: *"There will once come a day,"* he explained *"where Rambang Seppang only represents an umbrella held up by the Ammatoa, but where only he remains, as all others no longer respect or carry out ancestral laws [Pasang ri Kajang]."*

One of the hamlet heads in Malleleng shared his disappointment over the sanctions. He explained that Indigenous leadership should follow the precedence set by the perda. *“It’s true that the Pamsimas water facility was located within Rambang Seppang, but that the perda’s mapping had redirected the boundaries of Rambang Seppang further inwards. We have discussed this change in community meetings as part of the Perda. We even did a ritual [called tunu passaung] to consecrate the new boundaries before the regulation passed.”*

The boundary conflicts of Rambang Seppang did not occur exclusively in the eastern parts of Malleleng village on the issue of Pamsimas construction. To the south and west of Rambang Seppang, for example, in the hamlets of Saukang, Lembang Kahu, and almost half of Kampung Baru in the village of Bonto Baji all overlap with the traditional areas listed in the Perda. However, households located there have long stopped following the strict traditional practices of Kajang. Motorcycles routinely drive in and out of the area, home electricity metering connections are common, and housing upgrades breaking from traditional practices have been integrated. The Indigenous council have repeatedly requested these people breaking the laws to revert and dismantle their structure. When faced with the threat of a fine, many households refuse, and instead prefer to pay rather than make changes. Meanwhile at the northern gate, in the main village of Tanah Towa’s Janayya hamlet, conflicts have taken place because of the extension of electrical lines undertaken by the National Electricity Company (*Perusahaan Listrik Negara*, PLN). The Indigenous council complained about this national development initiative as it directly impacts Rambang Seppang. The perda in this case has served as strong justification, and as a result, the electric lines were dismantled and the electrification project discontinued.

6. FOREST DESTROYERS? MIGRATING FOR LAND AND TREE CROPS IN KOLAKA

In the 1980s, long before any discussions of Indigenous land and forest rights recognition, Kajang began experiencing timber shortages for housing construction. The most important trees for housing construction and maintenance are *bitti* (*Vitex cofassus*), an endemic and valuable hardwood, and what people locally describe as forest rambutan (*Castanopsis argentea*). However, the only viable trees could be found in the sacred forests, whereas the supply of trees at household plots at that time had not matured enough for harvest. This scarcity triggered Kajang, especially local merchants, to start seeking out timber resources elsewhere.

Networks identified the availability of timber in the neighboring province of Southeast Sulawesi, particularly in the Kolaka region, a full day’s trip over land and sea via Boné bay. Kolaka contains significant tree cover density in a relatively remote but accessible state forest. The trees also matched the overall demand profile for housing construction in Kajang. According to one seasonal migrant to Kolaka, *“...we were basically free to open up those forest lands. The rangers stayed away and local people from there also did not mind.”* In a brief amount of time, Kajang merchants succeeded in converting dozens of hectares of land and brought timber back to Kajang. This period of forest conversion also coincided alongside the phenomenon described throughout Sulawesi as “cacao fever [demam kakao].” The merchants initially focused on timber extraction but then began to claim lands they cleared for cultivation of cacao groves. Laborers from Kajang traveled to this region of Kolaka to plant and oversee cacao seedlings. In the meantime, the laborers continued to clear and expand land in the state forests and claim them as their own. They sold timber to merchants and proceeded to plant and maintain cacao groves.

But in the mid 1990s, cacao fever stalled due to declining productivity from widespread pest outbreaks. This led to a nearly total conversion of the Kajang groves in

Kolaka's state forests into cloves. Not long after the cloves went in, prices spiked during the Asian financial crisis in 1998. Clove harvests coinciding with this price shock across Southeast Sulawesi experienced immediate windfall profits. The news of the clove boom and the ease of accessing land in Kolaka's state forest lands spread quickly in Kajang. Those with the capital to invest began to send people (*pasenso*) to clear land and divide up plots one to one. For example, each two hectares converted by a *pasenso* meant the Kajang person with the capital to invest in the operations would get claim to one hectare of land while, the *pasenso* could claim the other hectare for himself. In these early stages a limited capital of around IDR 100,000 (~USD 7) would be enough to claim one hectare. Several people who made the trip shared that they succeeded in converting extensive forest lands into clove plantations by the dozens accumulating hundreds of hectares. Involvement from these local Kajang investors and elsewhere represented large scale forest conversion taking place in state forests, shaping networks of migrants from South to Southeast Sulawesi provinces (Mulyotami et al., 2014).

At this time, migration to Southeast Sulawesi remains a key livelihood option for some Kajang. About 500 Kajang households own land over two hectares in Kolaka's state forests. Their approaches differ, however, with some relocating entirely while others migrating seasonally or in cycles. Those that remain in Southeast Sulawesi consider their options tied to small land ownership plots back in Kajang. Their livelihoods on these small plots are contingent on risky agricultural productivity and further tied to financing Indigenous rituals and the social exchange practice of the *passolo*¹. To fulfill these expectations migrants usually lend from other family members or are forced into selling their small plots of land to migrate. As of 2024, approximately IDR 7 million rupiah (~USD 500) provides all the necessary financing to acquire about one hectare of land. Meanwhile, seasonal migrants stay in Kajang for most of the year and periodically make trips to Southeast Sulawesi, especially during key periods of applying fertilizer, field maintenance such as clearing overgrown shrubbery, and harvest. Seasonal migrants who spend a majority of their time in Kajang have more diversified and dependable sources of income to remain in Kajang, while more permanent migrants stay away for longer periods to escape expectations or have found more permanent lives and livelihoods at their destinations.

Other than migrants, local elites in Kajang also invest in converting forest lands from afar. From the outset, they never traveled to Kolaka, financing *pasenso* to convert and manage lands. Usually these are done under patronage arrangements, paying a family member or someone in need of work as a field worker to oversee their fields. During the harvest season, landowners or plantation managers increasingly use social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to disseminate information about hiring clove harvesters. A message on WhatsApp might read: "*I urgently need a clove harvester in Kolaka, with departure from Kajang on either Friday or Tuesday.*" Upon harvest, field workers bring yields with them from Southeast Sulawesi to Kajang, and at this scale, the wealth is used to finance local leadership positions like elections for village head or to contest regional parliamentary positions.

¹ *Passolo* are funds or other forms of exchange given to family members undergoing important local rituals. Depending on relationships, *passolo*' expectations can exceed millions of rupiah. Kajang often complain of the undue burdens of *passolo*, the rising costs expected of the practice, and the frequency with which one must contribute.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Indigenous Peoples have experienced a long history of land enclosures, dispossession, eviction, discrimination, violence, and violations of human rights (APF & OHCHR, 2013; Gilbert, 2007). Global social movements and discourses on land rights have made great strides in efforts to recognize and restore Indigenous land rights, supported by a legal language and subsequent policies on recognition. The successes of these movements are evident in the growing number of governments and state institutions incorporating policies for Indigenous land rights recognition. Stated aims of recognition include commitments to acknowledge land rights and empower cultural self-determination and local livelihoods. More recently, global initiatives have linked Indigenous land rights recognition with environmentalism and climate solutions by presuming the existence of resources and biodiversity and overlaying Indigenous Peoples at the same location. While research has focused on the histories and ongoing struggles of activism and policy, as well as implications linking rights to resources (Fernández-Llamazares, 2024), we explored a more grounded empirical dimension of land rights policies and environmentalism to provide situated nuance and specificity.

The Kajang case in Indonesia gained significant attention for various reasons. First, it was a clear site of a unique Indigenous community in which people are distinct from those that live around them because of their embodiment of ancestral traditions. Second, the region was broadly a site of historical conflict and land dispossession by a plantation, which had once upon a time flared up in incidences of deadly violence. Third, the community continues to protect its sacred forest in ways that outwardly expresses the roles of environmentalism in human wellbeing tied to local identity. Although the sacred forest had been re-gazetted in the 1990s as a limited production forest, it remained easily recognizable as belonging to local traditional authority making it a strategic site for policymakers eager to fulfill commitments on Indigenous land rights. It also spotlighted the broader fulfillment of commitments on environmental justice and stewardship to the global community, evidenced by involving Kajang leadership as a delegate at the UNFCCC meetings. Kajang also appeared as a landmark case study of environmental Indigeneity in international reporting at the Washington Post.

In this light, this research delved deeper into the nuances of policy applications by examining the changing power relations that unfold upon recognition. Literature on community-based resource management and resource decentralization are clear about the benefits of localization (Knox & Meinzen-Dick, 2000; Ribot, 2003; Ribot & Larson, 2012). There is a powerful logic that suggests that by returning authority to local control increases interest, incentive, and commitment in governing the commons and protecting resources. While we support the broader normative and philosophical dimensions of this premise, recognition unfolds through participation and consent, and returning land is more complex in practice, mediated by local power legacies, relations, and dynamics (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). We have shown how the perda - the regulation to recognize the Kajang as an Indigenous community and paving the way for the first Indonesian state return of Indigenous forests - also refracts and reconstitutes these local power dynamics. Indeed, the perda has created new dilemmas between the revival of traditional institutions relative to state institutions (Davidson & Henley, 2007) and has compelled new forms of environmental governance. Through the stories of Bungko's loss of land rights, the boundary conflicts mediating access to water and development resources, and the effects on existing patterns of migration and its impacts on forest conversion elsewhere, we highlight emergent dilemmas from Indigenous recognition and its attendant policy initiatives.

In most instances, stated victories over land rights recognition like the Kajang case presents a powerful rejoinder for environmental justice. Nevertheless, advocacy organizations also tend to quickly look away after legal victories are achieved, pivoting attention to other struggles of securing the legal and formal means of recognition. We have shown that the presumed benefits of recognition are certainly not automatic after state recognition, and indeed can exacerbate some unanticipated dimensions of inequality and environmental injustice. Recognition in Kajang has resulted in an entirely new set of land relations to redefine boundaries of traditional territories, especially the boundaries of the sacred forest. This is significant as it sets the terms for which land can and cannot be accessed, and by whom. Bungko's story of return migration and inheritance is a case in point, where land he thought he was coming home to was no longer accessible. The driving narrative of these policies of Indigenous land rights are to restore land back to marginalized communities and those most in need of access, but it turns out that policies of recognition also create their own instances of enclosures (Hall et al., 2011). We show that it is important for advocacy efforts and policy initiatives on Indigenous land rights recognition to raise questions about whose rights are actually recognized and what is done with those rights.

As we have also shown, ideas of recognition are regularly tied to discourses of livelihoods empowerment. The sacred forest in Kajang, however, has largely become a site of symbolic ritual that prohibits access of anyone into the forest, except for specific cultural activities sanctioned by the highest authority in Kajang. Dove et al. (2011) has written about the enchantment of the sacred forest, highlighting the importance of looking beyond its borders. Indeed, in Kajang, land has taken on an increasing level of importance as a site of the dual economies of cash crops and for subsistence (see Fisher & Muur, 2019; Dove, 2011). Through crop booms, capitalist relations take root, and intimate exclusions ensue, as Kajang seeks to find the next highest value tree crop on private land and compete for access to shared rotational land among kin (Fisher, 2019; Li, 2014). Policies of recognition have only intensified these land, resources, and livelihood dynamics and their attendant conflicts, leading to an increasing impetus for many, particularly the most vulnerable, to seek out livelihoods elsewhere.

We have also shown a very different temporal and geographic picture of forest change taking place in Kajang and beyond. This change also does not necessarily point to a future of better conservation outcomes under Indigenous stewardship authority. While on the one hand, Kajang has greater authority and discursive support to protect their forests, on the other hand, the demand for land for livelihoods in Kajang has led many to migrate in search of opportunities in forests of a neighboring province. This phenomenon began long before the politics of Indigenous revivalism and land rights was ever proposed (Davidson & Henley, 2007; Tyson, 2010; Muur, 2019). Decades ago, shortages of timber for home construction led Kajang to migrate to more remote state forests in search of livelihood, land, and resources. They followed networks to clear, cultivate, maintain, and ultimately claim land and profits from these previously forested landscapes. We do not point to this as evidence of blame given the complex relational political economic and social forces that structure their decision-making. Nevertheless, by seeking out empirical evidence on the effects of recognition, we highlight the importance of taking a more nuanced and critical approach at what looks to be a major shift in global donor and climate financing directed at Indigenous Peoples as forest stewards.

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