



Women's Grievances and Land Dispossession: Reading Landscapes through Papuan Independent Films

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Abstract

Papuan indigenous women depend on forests and gardens. Through forests, women play an important social-economic role in the community; through gardens, women practice care and reciprocity. Tropical forests, plant species, and animals are also their kin relations (Chao, 2018). Nature and culture are deeply intertwined. However, the role of women is disappearing along with deforestation and the large-scale expansion of oil palm plantations. Selecting independent documentary films mostly produced by Papuan Voices, a community network of indigenous Papuan filmmakers, this article describes women's frustration at being separated from their lands and their discontent at being considered second-class citizens according to customary law. Women's lowly position in the Papuan patrilineal structure is utilized by the plantation industry to dispossess women from their forests and gardens, and thereby threaten their social-economic roles. This article concludes that land dispossession does not serve as a guarantee for development, but is deeply impoverishing.

Abstract: Land Dispossession, Papuan Independent Film, Indigenous Women's Livelihood, nature-culture landscapes, tropical forests and gardens

Introduction to Papua

Papua is located in the easternmost part of the Indonesia Archipelago on the western half of the island of Papua New Guinea, one of the largest tropical islands in the world. The central highlands are dominated by high mountain ranges, which capture the rains, the waters of which are channelled into rivers flowing north and south to alluvial plains. The western part of Papua features smaller mountain ranges and vast areas of rich swamplands. As with many tropical regions, the temperature in Papua is relatively stable throughout the year. However, varying topographies and altitudes create different average temperatures, rainfalls, tropical forest types, and vegetation structures. The rugged topography and high altitudes in the interior and central highlands are dominated by varying rainforest types which give way to alpine vegetation, and snow above 4,000 meters. The hot and humid lowland areas are dominated by sago forests, mangroves, swamp palms, pandanus, and nipa palms.

Most Papuan people who live in the interior depend on the rainforest for their livelihoods. The forest consists of more than 15,000 plant species, including about 2,000 species of orchids, as well as resin (*Agathis labillardierei*), which has high economic value. There are 602 species of birds, 125 mammal species, and 223 reptile species, of which most are endemic to the island (Kartikasari et al., 2012). The rich forest biodiversity is entangled with women who play an important role in taking care of forest products. They mix herbal medicines, make clothes, accessories, and cosmetics from roots and bark, and cultivate seed nurseries from forest to gardens (Kadir & Mahadika, 2019; Katmo, 2020; Malinda, 2021). Women in the coastal areas gather fish species, shrimp, crabs, and other shellfish from the mangrove forests (Laksono, 2000).

The population density of Papua was traditionally low, but following Papua's controversial integration into Indonesia in 1969, a demographic transition has taken place (Elmslie, 2017). People from across the Indonesian archipelago permanently occupy and crowd Papuan towns, especially in the coastal regions. Many Javanese people have transmigrated to Papua under government schemes. Thus Papua has been turned into a colonial settler society by taking traditional land and converting it to new settlements, implementing modern farming, and displacing indigenous Papuans from marketplaces and bureaucratic offices. Being overwhelmed by the presence of Indonesian settlers and being the target of racial discrimination, Papuans have instigated protests against the Indonesian government and have called for independence (Chauvel, 2005; Stott, 2011). To anticipate the ongoing protests, in 2003, the Indonesian government implemented special autonomy (*otsus*) status for Papua and divided the region into two provinces, Papua and Papua Barat. Many national and foreign companies took advantage of the special autonomy status to invest in land and to extract natural resources in Papua (Suryawan, 2011). The Indonesian state's ambition to increase economic growth in the

region causes tropical rainforests, peatlands and other forest types to be quickly converted to oil palm plantations. The massive deforestation has led indigenous Papuans, especially women, to be dispossessed from nature. This process of deforestation and dispossession has been captured in numerous documentary films, including the Papuan independent documentaries that I discuss in this article.

Papuan Voices

Over the past two decades, Papua's land and natural resources have become a frontier targeted by investors, settlers, and military security projects. From 2009-2013, deforestation in Papua reached 612,997 hectares, or 153,249 hectares per year, the equivalent of more than twice the area of Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. Greenpeace reports that deforestation during 2019 consisted of 168,471 hectares of primary forest in Papua that was turned into oil palm plantations (Wamafma, 2020). This number is expected to increase causing rapid changes in the landscape and culturescape of Papua.

Groups of young Papuan journalists, human rights activists, and researchers try to illustrate these problems through visual ethnographic narration. In 2012 they established a community of filmmakers called Papuan Voices who represent their concerns through documentary films. Clifford Geertz's famous phrase, "a story they tell themselves about themselves" (1973, p. 448), applies here to making independent films as part of a cultural reflexivity where people can draw attention to their lives and concerns through self-expression and representation.

Since 2017, Papuan Voices has held the annual Papuan Film Festival (FFP). Through the film festival, Papuan Voices aims to send a message to the local government about food estate issues that harm both the environment and indigenous communities. Some of the films include the voices of Papuan women, and this article specifically concentrates on documentary excerpts that include women in order to highlight their voices and inspirations, problems, and hopes, which remain marginalized. In Papuan patriarchal society, women's voices differ from those of men, and they add an important dimension to concerns regarding land dispossession and its threats to the environment, indigenous nature-culture understandings, and Papuan livelihoods. The voices of Papuans – including Papuan women – need to continue to be raised to the Papuan government which has a vested interest in representing private corporations and the central government in Jakarta.

I elevate the issue of women's voices in the politics of recognition, which means an effort to accommodate and facilitate the needs of cultural groups so that they have equal citizen

status¹ (Shachar, 2000, p. 67). The politics of recognition that considers cultural groups as homogenous has reproduced tensions between sectors of group members. This case concerns gender disparities within groups which perpetuate unequal access to land rights for women (Benhabib, 2002). Indigenous customary regimes are ratified through global discourses, and national policy makers then glorify the discourse by re-implementing customary laws. However, Papuan customary laws tend to maintain powerful patriarchal leaders while leaving women vulnerable.

Film as Ethnographic Method

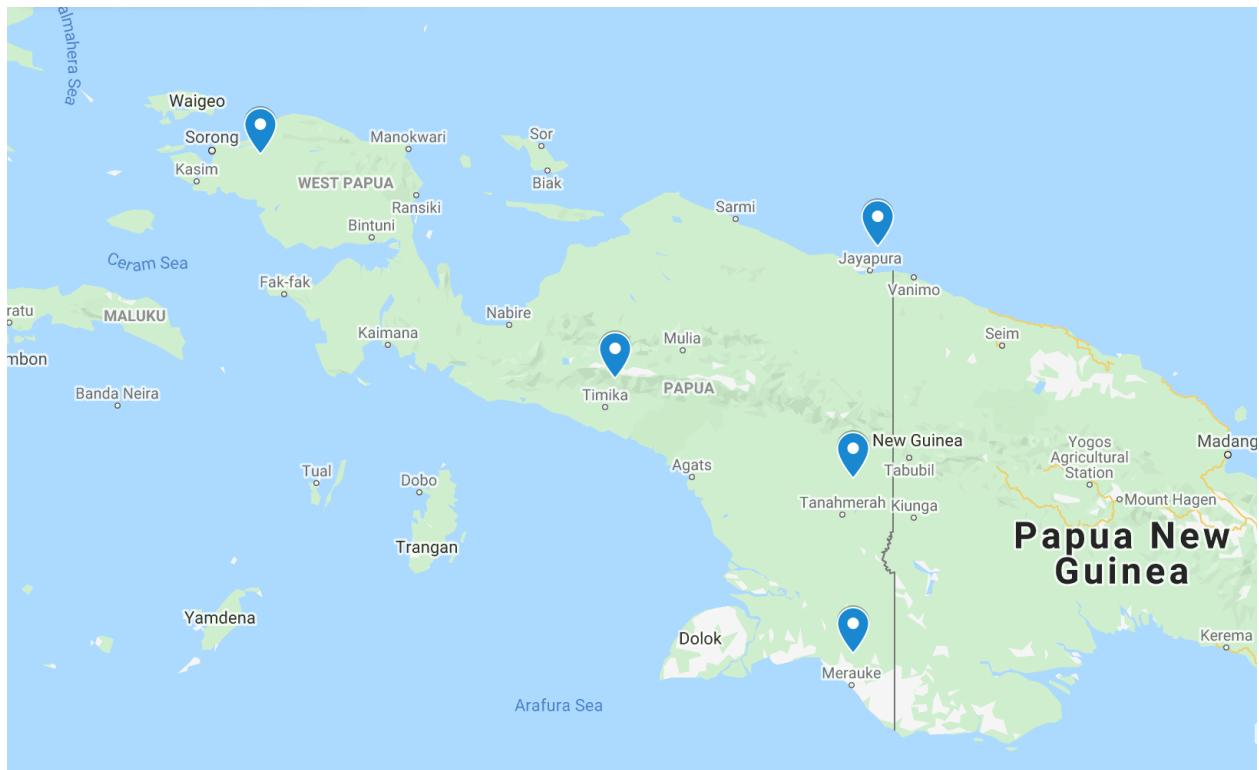
This article concerns two main themes by first questioning how women maintain a livelihood when they are deprived of their land, which not only cultivates plants but also their social roles. And how women can get their voices heard, when they are ignored by the local government which approves corporate licenses for palm oil companies. The second theme of this article concerns the question of what disappoints women and makes them angry about their current situation, and how they deal with the precarity of land dispossession.

In an effort to witness an expansive spectrum of Papuan problems and women's aspirations, I collected data by watching fifty-five films released through Papuan Voices. An analytical viewing of the documentaries was undertaken in order to ascertain thematic links between them. With the understanding that emotions such as frustration, disappointment, and anxiety can be propagated and replicated when people face the same objective reality (Mishra, 2018), I wanted to elucidate the subjective and intersubjective feelings Papuan women experienced as they faced the same problems of dispossession, thus one woman's experience living in the oil palm area in Keerom, for instance, could be compared with that of Papuan women living in other areas, such as Marind Merauke, Sorong, and Timika.

Throughout the fifty-five films, I narrowed my research focus down to women's discontentment caused by the development of a large plantation and the concomitant destruction of their gardens, orchards, and forests. I chose this issue as my main discussion because large plantations change women's work from farming to labour. This issue provides a clear example of how women are uprooted from their forest gardens as places of livelihood while also erasing their roles in society.

¹ This research is based on my personal sympathy with Papuan political movements and cultural expressions. So far, the Indonesian government has treated Papuans as second-class citizens. They are marginalized through development based on prejudicial racism. Through visual ethnographic research, I am interested to elevate women's voices because women experience multiple subjugations; by racism and development that benefits non-Papuans, but also the Papuan customary patriarchal system that also ignores their needs.

Figure 1: Map of Papua with Film Locations



The marked points show the locations of the films discussed in this article.

To enrich the perspective and to help deepen my analysis, I collected data through discussions in webinars and public interviews on YouTube regarding Papuan Voices films, and these were treated as field note text. Further research was collected through various published interviews from Papuan websites. Interviews and conversations in the films were treated as ethnographic data from which I directly quote some important discussions; while landscapes, forests, and material things that lie in the background of the films are described as part of visual observations. Together with colleagues from Eutenika, a society of researchers for politics, ecology and technology situated in the city of Malang in Java, we initiated a monthly film discussion about Papuan independent films. To discuss these films, we invited Papuan environmental activists, filmmakers, and intellectuals such as Yuliana Langowuyo the director of *Mama Kasmira Pu Mau* (2012), Asrida Elisabeth, Abner Mansai, and Yusuf Sawaki. The film discussion series ran 9 times.²

The films that portray female Papuan voices have varied settings, from women living in the mountains, in swampland, and in coastal areas. The characteristic of Papuan Voices films is that they are short documentaries between 5 and 25 minutes. Almost all of the films start and end with local Papuan instrumental music. As in many documentary films,

² <https://eutenika.org/archives/category/program/movie-talk>

most of the Papuan films send sombre messages including feelings of insecurity, anxiety, anger, fear, desperation, depression, sadness, and disappointment in the face of deforestation, rapid invasion of settler colonialism, lack of infrastructure, and abandonment. The Papuan filmmakers produce these dark moods aiming to persuade engagement and introduce a new consciousness about real life in Papua. As with many other independent films, these are generally highly realist, they have super low budgets, and very rarely have happy endings (Ortner, 2013). Papuan film makers do not aim to please a wider audience, but do aim to tell stories that explore subjects in a truthful and realistic way. This paper, therefore, demonstrates that independent films can make visible the hidden aspects of development and express the narratives of the socially marginalised (Lundberg & Peer, 2020, p. 203).

Dispossessed Women's Connection to their Environment

Many Papuans are rightfully skeptical about how the media represents them. Through media, the Melanesian race is generally depicted as primitive tribes living in isolated areas within a subsistence economy and possessing only simple technology. Through films, Papuans are also regularly depicted as engaged in a state of perpetual war (Kirsch, 2010). In Indonesia, this pattern of primitive labelling is reproduced in order to justify the central government of Java sending troops to control the territory of Papua. At the same time army control increases Javanese-Indonesian access to the rich natural resources which acts to integrate remote societies into the world system (Kirsch, 1997).

Self-representation of local indigenous people, according to the Papuan Voices perspective, is what is absent or not reported by the mainstream media. And sometimes what is missing can be the most important message. As Badiou (2005) argues, non-representation of being can only be approached through the figure of the "void". The main discussion in this article, therefore, concerns local indigenous women as the void that haunts modern development and plantation projects in Papua.

Papuan independent films could be viewed as a zone of contestation against hegemonic views that are produced by mainstream news and films from Jakarta. According to one of the founders of Papuan Voices who lives in Sorong on the far eastern 'bird's head' of the island, Papuans are experiencing a crisis of representation. Non-Papuan Indonesians dominate in producing films, news, and information about Papua. Independent films aim to counter hegemonic stories and news by trying to tell the truth and to represent reality (Ortner, 2013). Another founder of Papuan Voices distinguishes between "stories about Papua" and "stories from Papua". The former refers to stories popularly produced through Indonesian, often Jakarta-centric, perspectives. As a producer of ideologies, public media has powerfully shaped Indonesian consciousness of Papua as a land of violence, with people living in the Stone Age. This primitivist trope portrays Papuans as backward separatists; or, when performing rituals, as exotic. This imagery has motivated

government and religious missions “to civilize” Papuans (Slama & Munro, 2015). As an alternative to this hegemonic discourse, independent Papuan films propose more diverse “stories from Papua” that include Papuan livelihoods, gardening, and the variety of agricultural cultivation from steep mountains to swampy areas; they reveal the logic behind customary rituals; show women in the market (*mama-mama pasar*); and reveal the struggle by indigenous women for access to their land – in a region well known for land dispossession.

The experience of dispossession has been occurring since Papua was under Dutch rule. During the colonialist era the indigenous community was not involved in natural resource concessions, and this continued during the transition from the Dutch to the Indonesia era. The decision of the Papuans to join Indonesia through the Act of Free Choice in 1969 was rife with intimidation and only 1,025 tribal leaders were allowed to vote, disregarding the principle of ‘one man one vote’. The root problems of racial discrimination began in Papua when it was being integrated into Indonesia from the early 1960s (Karma, 2014). During the New Order regime, the ongoing process of Papuan dispossession continued in all aspects of Papuan life. The Indonesian racial imagery depicted Papuans as lazy, stupid, and alcoholic (Munro, 2019). Through technocratic development, Papuans are often seen as quasi-human, so they are treated as inferiors with little better than animal status (Chao, 2021b; Kirksey, 2017, p. 200-201). Even agro-industrial development considers Papuan traditional forest foodways as symbolically backward, even though they sustain solutions for food security (Chao, 2021a)

In the post-New Order era, when ethnic identities and local customs have gained more recognition, *adat* (customary laws) have become a bargaining strategy for political determination (Kusumaryati, 2019). This article posits that this creates a new problem in which customary norms are aggravated by capitalist projects. In particular, capitalist plantation projects are increasingly aggravating pre-existing gender inequities, in voice and participation, within Papuan societies. The capitalist plantation system worsens gender inequality because women lose their role as cultivators of the garden, as well as the influence they gain from strategically gifting these yields. This care work establishes social relations, even though it also has economic benefits (Li, 2014, p. 81). Thus, both customary rights and capitalist projects weaken women’s positions, particularly in comparison to men, when dealing with plantation or mining corporations.

In the next sections of this article, I concentrate on two issues. First is women’s connection with their environment. Across Melanesian society, the Papuan concept of individuality or personhood as an ontological perspective is constructed towards relations with a plurality of others, nature, and non-human existences (Strathern, 1990; Li Puma, 2000). Papuans have deep ontological relations with their land, with other creatures and plants, and all that lives or grows there (Chao, 2018). The causes of women’s grief in the films centres

around being deprived of their material possessions, their social and natural entanglement, as well as their future.

The second issue is to explain the situation of being deprived and marginalized. In this regard I use the concept of dispossession which means taking something away that people own or possess. Marx calls it accumulation by dispossession, a process where people are dispossessed from their means of production or their land, and in this process become poor labourers (Harvey, 2005, p. 128). The process of taking away is concentrated in the hands of a few who have accumulated more wealth and power, causing an increase in misery for many people (West, 2016, p. 12) Land dispossession involves converting common land into private property, it often involves brute violence, and it involves both legal and illegal acts. The non-material, psychological and corporeal aspects of dispossession emerge as the process progresses. It alters women's bodies, identities, their social reproduction, and is reconfigured into new modes of being, living, and knowing (West, 2016: 27).

The analysis of dispossession needs to go further, to reveal the deep connections to race and racism, and to paternal, patriarchal ideology. There is a clear connection between Papua as the frontier of development and land/labour commodification. When the land is commodified, Papuans who do not sell their labour to land owners are often seen as, and cast in the media as, outlaws, lazy, and unproductive.

Women's Entanglement with Forest Gardens

To capture what Papuan women deemed important in their connection with their environment, I concentrated the ethnographic reading of the films on the function of gardens and forests in women's lives. Most of the films portrayed women busy in the garden as a background state, implying that gardens are the centre of a household's family life. Gardens are situated between realms of agriculture and old growth forest. Women's activities in the garden are gendered. In forests around the gardens, men cut down trees and build fences, while women make the land useful by planting and weeding. Women also do most of the harvesting, as well as marketing the produce.

One prominent film that illustrates the importance of gardens is *Moinyanyo Hekhe Mokhonate* (Women Who Take Care of Their Land, 2019). Located in Sentani Lake in the Jayapura Regency, the film is directed by Albert Yomo. This film employs an important style of interview technique. Instead of sitting the 'informant' down while interviewing her, the director follows the woman to where she is gardening. The conversation is taken during her trip to two different gardens, digging up yams and washing mud off them in running water, walking through the waterways, and crossing the lake to another garden to harvest other crops.

This film offers a message that caring for a garden raises women's dignity and gives them a sense of identity. Agustina Deda, or Mama Deda, a woman from the Ayapo tribe from Sentani Lake, becomes the main narrator. In her local language she states "*if you do not have the garden, your life is empty and you will not have wealth. People will see you through half-opened eyes*". Gardens have many social and commercial functions. Through the garden, women can activate their care and also gain economic benefits. What is revealed by Mama Deda is in tune with anthropological reports showing that working the garden can minimize fluctuations in commodity prices in the market. Farmers can also use resources more productively and effectively, giving them higher returns than wet rice irrigation, which requires lots of labour (Dove, 1985), or even from plantations (Li, 2015).

Research on the role of women in Papuan gardens indicates that women contribute significant work and social life in the forests and gardens (Kadir & Mahadika, 2019; Pouver, 2010; Wambrauw, 2013). Forests and gardens are a source of food, medicine, and materials for manufacturing equipment, domestic equipment, and household furniture (Ellen, 1999). In her research setting of the coastal area of Mimika, Katmo (2016) shows that through gardens, women in Kamoro have their own autonomous management area where they not only produce food for children, but also medicines. Women can also sort poisonous from edible shells around the swampy areas. Additionally, gardens have made women and their families more resilient during economic crises as they can continue eating, as well as commodify their agricultural products in the marketplace when needed.

Mama Deda presents her garden on the slopes of Lake Sentani. She cultivates the land with a variety of crops. Crops shown in this film are yams and sweet potatoes. People call yams *bete* and sweet potatoes *ubi fam*. These tubers are very important to prevent hunger, as well as to sell in the market to get cash. Having a garden, therefore, empowers women to control the cost of living and manage their own finances.

Gardens become a production space for reciprocity. In gratitude for the harvest, Mama Deda and many other Papuan women share their first harvest with the *ondoafi* (head of tribes), then with the clan head. The rest they share with teachers and widows, while keeping some for personal consumption and selling the rest in the market. The expectation of this reciprocity is that those who receive these gifts will pay attention to their daughters in the future.

As similarly stated in other films, the thing that worries Mama Deda is that in the future, the next generation may no longer cultivate the garden. One of the most interesting statements was when she said "*if the next generation does not care about the garden, the next garden will be located in the market*". Crop diversity will no longer be found in the garden, but will be accommodated in the market. Many other films highlighting marketplaces such as *Awin Meke* (Warwe, 2012), *Biar Kami Jual Pinang* (Let Us Sell

Areca Nuts) (Kosasay, 2014), and *Mamapolitan* (Siagian, 2018) show that the market is an area where migrant traders from Sulawesi and Java control the economy. Markets are places where women have to compete economically with people from other regions. Unlike gardens, markets do not symbolize social alliances and they have no commitment to social relationships (Strathern, 1975). When women are in the marketplace, they only exchange commodities for cash and do not engage in social reciprocity.

Women also assert that forests have a social function for them. *Mama Melawan Perusahaan Sawit* (Women Against an Oil Palm Company, 2019), set in Merauke, at the most eastern tip of Papua, depicts Mama Elisabet Ndiwaen as the main narrator. Her expression throughout the film was never happy. Before the coming of the oil palm plantation, PT. Dongen Prabawa, her livelihood depended on the forest, but now she is forced to depend on the corporation instead. Mama Ndiwaen explains how important forests are for women. It was common for women to give birth in the forest. She claims many successful Papuan bureaucrats were born in the forest. Mama Ndiwaen sends a strong message that local Papuan bureaucrats, those who were born and raised in Papua, should not be arrogant because they have risen to power and become wealthy. Local bureaucrats must not forget their origins and how they were raised by their mothers according to the traditions. Therefore, local bureaucrats should not be involved in clearing the forests by giving permission to oil palm companies.

What Mama Ndiwaen said is certainly reasonable as it is also the local Papuan government that takes advantage of logging and deforestation. Cahyono (2020) reported that 70% of Papuan candidates for regent (*bupati*) and vice regent were funded by oil palm companies. Once elected, they had to return the money by making policies that benefited the companies. Since the special autonomy (*otsus*) act was handed over to the local government, Papuans have more autonomy to govern customary land. However, this also opens an opportunity for the regent and local elites to manipulate the laws to benefit investors (and themselves). Different to the New Order regime, which used threats of violence and military force to take over the land, the post-New Order local government uses laws and legality, considered more legitimate and soft, to expropriate land (Li, 2020).

Throughout the film, Mama Ndiwaen outpoured her concerns, convinced that forests play central roles for women to perform their duties in providing food, health, and education. Mama Ndiwaen revealed that from the forest, women could also benefit by making handicrafts, baskets, and mats, but she still could not understand why the local officials were obsessed with cutting trees and extinguishing forest functions. Forests are where women learn and pass on their knowledge to their daughters in making *noken*, looking for sago as a staple food, as well as finding medicinal plants. While men go hunting, women provide food from the forest and domesticate seeds in the garden. Thus, when women lose their forest and garden, they not only lose their livelihoods, but also their creative knowledge in making *noken*, as well as finding and mixing ingredients for food and

medicine. In line with what Mama Ndiwaen articulated, Malinda (2021) shows that forests play an important role not only regarding food, but they also serve a psychological function in healing women's mourning. In one of her stories, she describes a Papuan woman whose husband had died and to cure her grief, she went to the forest and spent time there.

The kinship system leads women to contribute labour in the garden. In Papuan marriages, men pay bridewealth. The women, in reciprocation, give their labour power to make gardens, raise pigs, and bear their children (Goody, 1999). A woman's marriage to a man of another clan means she has access and use rights (*hak kelola*) in the forests of her husband's clan (Stasch, 2009). However, the films about the forest and garden indicate that women do not have a voice when the land is leased to a company. From male perspectives, women have the right to use the land economically and socially, but not politically. Gardens, even though they have many social economic functions, also become places of subordination where women are not involved in most of the political decisions regarding them.

The main reason why women do not have a voice in land decision-making lies in the high bridewealth paid by the husband's family. One film, *Antar Maskawin* (The Engagement, 2018), set in Tanah Merah, District of Boven Digoel, illustrates a woman who is paid with bridewealth. *Antar Maskawin* narrates the story of a man calculating money for the bridewealth that will be handed over to the wife's family. The bridewealth was fifty million rupiah. Added to the cash were a *tomako* (a shimmering carved stone axe with a black colour that turns bluish green when it is exposed to light), and beads. The man's family also brought garden produce and a *noken* (a multifunctional knotted bag) as signs that the woman is ready to be a housewife.

In the Papuan exogamous marriage system, a man's family must choose his potential female partner from outside his clan. Marriages between clans (endogamy) are avoided and unwanted because they are still of one bloodline. Through the bridewealth system, a woman has to live and work on the land of the husband's clan. In other words, marrying women from different clans sends women to work the man's family garden, as well as creates kinship where the descendants can make claims on the land (Jacka, 2015)

However, when the land is cleared for plantations, there is a cultural change in the tradition of bridewealth. Life becomes secularized and monetized since women now work on the plantation. Women are no longer working their husband's family gardens as the land has been released to corporate plantations. Additionally, women also lose contact with their relatives, and also the ancestral spirits that they used to contact in the garden (Chao, 2018). It is often illustrated in the films that when their land is under threat, women will lose contact with their work and the parental-social value of passing their knowledge and skills on to the next generation, or the *generasi selanjutnya*.

Forests containing social places and a religious sphere for indigenous people remain unseen to developers, corporations, and government agents (Tsing, 2005). Caring for local crops and herbs, cleaning gardens, gathering wood, cooking, knotting *noken*, and weaving mats from pandanus are seen as unproductive from mainstream economic perspectives. These caring activities and non-economic realities are deliberately ignored. Agribusiness corporations perceive purely economic endeavours; from this perspective, women with a monthly wage are the ones who are considered economically productive.

The myth of the lazy Papuan, therefore, emerged when the oil palm plantations came to the area and tried to recruit cheap labour of Papuan woman. Papuan women were deemed lazy because they did not maximize working in economic activities, but rather they mixed their paid labour with non-economic caring activities such as working at home and in the gardens and forests. Furthermore, indigenous people are seen as lazy and inefficient as they 'waste' abundant land without making it productive. This judgmental perspective becomes an alibi for taking over the various tropical forest landscapes to turn them into plantations "efficient" and "productive" landscapes that are controlled and ordered.

In indigenous Papua, gardens, forests, and trees play significant roles in shaping identity and social lives. Crops, trees and plants have cultural biographies and material-semiotic entanglement with people (Kohn, 2013; Tsing, 2015). However, the conceptualization of plants as sentient and as being related through kinship – and therefore also as victims of mono-crop plantations – is difficult for the state and corporations to understand (Chao, 2018). Through this ontological perspective, the relationality of non-humans takes part in shaping culture.

Land Dispossession and Women's Grievances

According to indigenous ontology, and especially from the perspective of Papuan women, forest gardens are not an inert commodity that can be traded. The new consciousness of land as a commodity only emerged when oil palm companies arrived and persuaded traditional elders to give up their lands for lease. Women were not involved in negotiations, but they were directly impacted when the land was handed over to the oil palm companies and they were displaced from their gardens. Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence against Women) recorded that they received 26 reports from 2016 to 2109 from Papuan women who protested mining or oil palm plantations that destroyed their autonomous spaces and livelihoods (Iswarini, 2021).

The effect of oil palm plantations in Indonesia has caused intergenerational displacement (Li, 2017). This displacement is depicted in many statements from women in the Papuan Voice films. One of the films, entitled *Perempuan di Tanahnya* (On Her Own Land, 2019),

directed by Kristina Soge and Dion Kafudji, illustrates this issue. The film is set in the Arso District, Keerom Regency (near Jayapura and the border with PNG). Under Suharto's New Order regime, Keerom was a site of military operations with vast amounts of land, which oil palm companies were able to buy at very low prices. When Suharto stepped down, the Keerom people reclaimed their land. Herlina Fatagur is the main protagonist in this film. Her father had leased the land to PTPN II, a state-owned company that entered Papua in 1983 to clear forests for oil palm plantations. During negotiations for the release of the land the company composed a letter and insisted that the customary elders sign it. The negotiations for land leases involved a lot of trickery.

Considering that Arso had been a Military Operational Area (DOM) since the 1970s, the company took advantage of the local community's fear of military forces and no one dared refuse the establishment of the oil palm plantation. People feared being called "separatists" if they did not lease the land, and they were coerced to lease for very cheap compensation. It is commonly said that the corporation also supplied Papuans with alcoholic beverages so that they could easily be persuaded to sign. The signing involved obscuring the contents of the letter of release, while leaving only the signed part visible. The community was also promised that they would receive clean water facilities, a proper house to live in, and motor vehicles. In the initial agreement, the use of customary land was only approved for 500 hectares, but the release letter was written as 50,000 hectares.

Herlina's mother was not originally from Papua and has already passed away. Like her mother, Herlina and her daughters did not get any part of the land inheritance. Herlina felt it unfair that customary rules only benefitted men. When the film was made, the contract period of the land was about to expire. Herlina strongly insists *"I have a child; the blood is from me too. So automatically I have a right to have a piece of the land for my children and grandchildren. You (the men) also have rights, but if you want to sell them again, go ahead. Not mine. If you take mine, I swear my seventh generation (tujuh turunan) will disturb you. I am also a native woman, I have the same rights as you, I do not want to be differentiated"* (Soge & Kafudji, 2019). Her facial expression shows her rage and that she is fed up with decisions taken by the elders in her village regarding selling land.

One of the ways oil palm companies lease land from indigenous people is by individually contacting customary leaders. Katmo (2020) points out that it is easier to release the land when one single owner represents the communal land. Companies cannot get the land if it is under common ownership or is held by many people. One customary head, therefore, must represent ownership of the land; a majority of these customary leaders are men.

The film *Perempuan di Tanahnya* has similarities with *Mama Kasmira Pu Mau* (Mama Kasmira Wants, 2013). The film is only six minutes long. The director, Yuliana Langowuyo, follows Mama Kasmira to her place of work as well as to her house. *Mama Kasmira Pu Mau* discussed women's struggles working for PT. Tandan Sawita Papua, an

oil palm corporation under the Rajawali Group, an Indonesian holding company based in Jakarta. This film depicts the transformation of Papuan women from working in their gardens to working for oil palm plantations. Their status is no longer as cultivators; but as low wage-earning employees. Like other workers, Mama Kasmira receives her salary every fortnight.

In *Mama Kasmira Pu Mau*, eight tribal leaders in Arso district signed a letter releasing their customary land that covered 18,337 hectares. They secretly released the land without prior deliberation. Mama Kasmira, as a woman, was not informed or consulted. The men claim that taking care of the land is men's business and women have no right to interfere. Like many other cases, this film reveals that Papuan customs prohibit women from talking about land. From the men's perspective, since they paid high bridewealth, women only have the right to manage trees, such as coconut and cocoa, but they do not have the right to make decisions about buying and selling land. Thus, they are required to remain silent.

Figure 2. Women are loaded into a truck to work in the palm plantation.



The front view is the open cleared forest where the forest garden for women's work and sociality used to be. (Film: *Mama Kasmira Pu Mau*)

Mama Kasmira is considered an unskilled labourer. She is trapped in an inferior situation on the plantation. Her wage is low and she has neither a binding contract nor health benefits. She clears the forest and cuts bushes for the oil palm plantation. Instead of asking for raises, Mama Kasmira wants a piece of garden so that she can maintain her role and identity as an indigenous Papuan woman and not merely rely on cash from the oil palm company. Throughout the film she looked unhappy. She is worried about the

future for her two children who are still in elementary school. For her, working for an oil palm plantation is only useful for the present, but cannot be relied on for the future. As a labourer, she cannot own the palm and generate wealth for the next generation. Different from gardens, on plantations, women cannot pass on their work and land to the next generation. As flexible labour on a plantation, women earn wages that easily run out by the end of the month. On any kind of plantation, women are replaceable and alienated from their social and physical environment (Ofstehage, 2018). Mama Kasmira has lost hope for the future.

The film, *Mama Mariode* (2015) directed by Agus Kalalu, tells the story of husband and wife, Mariode Malak and Kefas Gisim, who became the guardians of the remaining forest in Klawana Village of Sorong, West Papua. Their two daughters sit beside Mama Mariode during the film interviews. They are the last people who are still living in the village as other residents have already sold their land and left. During the interview, Mama Mariode was sitting in her old, dilapidated house facing her daughters who do not understand their parent's problems. "*The forest will be depleted in the future. The company has taken everything from the forest until it lies in waste, and I am worried about your futures*" (Kalalu, 2015).

The duration of the film is very short, five minutes, but the view in this film is catastrophic and creepy. Trees lay felled as far as the eye can see. The ruined landscape is covered with smoke from the burning remnants of the forest. During the rainy season, barren, eroded earth slides and piles up with the smoky debris from the deforestation fires. The smoky atmosphere is very eerie and it is not clear whether it is fog from the rain or smoke from the fire. All the while Mama Mariode can only stare at the ruins of what was once a forest, but has now vanished – cleared away by an oil palm plantation, PT. Henrison Persada. The film's landscape is also a reminder of the nature-culture entanglements of deforestation and climate change – and how these likewise disregard indigenous ways of knowing and being with nature (Chao & Enari, 2021).

Similar to the film *Mama Kasmira Pu Mau* and *Perempuan di Tanahnya*, in *Mama Mariode*, the disappointment comes from lost hope for the future. When the land is given to the company, her *anak cucu* (grandchildren) can no longer eat from the forest. Mama Mariode's only remaining hope is that the corporation could leave a small piece of forest, what she calls "*hutan sisa*", for her *anak cucu* (grandchildren). At the end of the film, through streaming tears, she questioned why "development" means it is necessary to clear an entire forest.

The next step of dispossession shows how women struggle with their conditions when they are forced to go to the oil palm plantation as workers. The film *30 Tahun Su Lewat* (30 Years Have Passed, 2019), directed by Mona Upuya, bears some resemblance to the film *Mama Kasmira Pu Mau*, as it focuses on the poor working conditions in oil palm

companies. However, *30 Tahun Su Lewat* describes in more detail the dire situation of working for a palm oil company, as well as exposing life after the ruination of a palm oil plantation. The main narrators of the film are Mama Karolina Wayangkau and her husband who live in an abandoned oil palm plantation. They moved from Serui in 1998 and worked in PTPN 2 in Arso, Keerom.

The film is about broken promises, specifically thirty years of working a contract that was violated due to the plantation's bankruptcy. The company promised that if the employee's work was good over the span of one to three years, there would be a good career path and gradual salary increases. But that never happened. In 2014, the company went totally bankrupt as production fell. The local people around the company never gave up asking for land compensation.

Mama Karolina has not one fond memory of PTPN. When she was sick, her salary was cut to pay for medicines and hospitals that were chosen by the company. So if they got sick, their salary would run out very quickly. The company was a branch of an oil palm business in Kalimantan (Indonesia Borneo). She received a standard salary based on economic factors in Kalimantan, not Papua (where costs of living are higher). She also bitterly remembers that the certificates as permanent employees were only released in 2013; just one year before the end of the company's operation and following bankruptcy. And then the situation worsened. Electricity and water facilities were cut off, thus she had to buy gasoline from her own salary to operate the generator for electricity. When the oil palm company was gone, they did not receive any severance pay.

In the last years that she worked, her salary was 2 million rupiah (150 USD), but it did not cover her living expenses. She had to allocate money for gasoline to pick up their children from school, which was quite far from the plantation. Mama Karolina and her family also did not cultivate any crops in the garden, so they had to allocate money to buy them in the grocery store in Abepura, which is located 50 km from the plantation.

Despite their precarious situation in the oil palm plantation, *30 Tahun Su Lewat* shows that Mama Karolina played a significant role in making decisions during the crisis when their employment was terminated. She actively initiated creating a garden beside the house and she is the one who sells their produce in the market. While clearing the garden around the house with her husband, she said "*we are already tired clearing these bushes, so do not mention about the company anymore, it makes us more tired. They will never pay us. We better work in the garden like this so that we can pay all of our debt at the kiosk*" (Upuya, 2019).

She does not want to remember more about her bad experiences working with the company; it is difficult enough that she has to face the harsh conditions of living in the plantation ruins. The plantation area no longer provides water facilities; the land is dry

because the oil palm plantation sucked up ground water; the house on the ruined plantation is itself rotting and starting to collapse. Life in the ruins is precarious. When crops from the garden are ready to sell in the market, it requires high transportation costs because of the distance between the plantation and the Abepura market. At 200 thousand *rupiah* for a roundtrip (15 USD), she has to sell a lot of produce to cover transportation.

Mama Karolina and her husband finally decide to move away from the plantation. They find a place to live, and there, they start a garden and cultivate some crops. By the end of the film, located in their new garden, Mama Karolina and her husband say that gardening is like returning to their original identity as Papuans – which they had been deprived of for so long by working on the oil palm plantation. In her new garden, she not only can sell their crops, but they can also consume their produce for themselves, which makes them feel more secure.

The film *30 Tahun Su Lewat* is in a similar vein to Malinda's Report (2021) on the case of indigenous women working as freelance wage labourers for the PT. Menara Group, one of the biggest corporations in Merauke. In their jobs, women can be fired very easily with no guarantees of severance pay. Malinda gives one instance of a single parent mother with her two children. One day, she was taking leave due to menstruation. Unfortunately, the corporation did not provide menstruation leave and she was fired without any compensation. Throughout her report, Malinda also describes women working on oil palm plantations trapped in debt as they liquidate their wages on lotteries and other kinds of gambling. Being debt-entrapped these indigenous women are prone to sexual harassment as they are seen as having loose morals and few options for a better life.

Conclusion: A View from Forest Gardens

Women's stories in films teach us about their values, relatedness, exchanges, and connections. Although land is passed through patrilineal lines, women's actions in the garden have the reproductive capacity to control and govern their autonomy. In examining women's personhood and sociality through films, I found two related themes. First, women's being is produced by both social and material exchanges, such as marriage exchanges and gifts of land. Second, women indicate their potentiality for future action in taking care of gardens and nurturing them for the next generation. Looking from the angle of gardens and forests reveals women's sovereignty. I take sovereignty as connected with the ability of self-governance. In the sense of rights, gardens and forests have given women agency to make decisions about themselves, land, family, and future, as well as the ability to assert autonomy through daily practice and action (Simpson 2014).

The second discussion in this article illustrates that deforestation is a form of dispossession that uses coercive means such as violence, threats, and a politics of fear. Plantation companies dispossessed women's belonging to gardens by using the

customary power held by men. Men's customary domination does not necessarily damage the environment on a large scale, but once it is hijacked by the capitalist interests of plantation companies, women experience double frustration. Women are detached from their sovereignty over their lands and rights to acquire knowledge of plants, animals, extended families, ancestors, and gift these treasures to future generations. Large scale deforestation and mono-crop oil palm plantations undermine the multispecies reciprocities between the Papuans and animals, plants, and their space for livelihoods. Forests and gardens, to Papuans, constitute part of their families. Specifically for women, when they lose the forest, it also harms their senses of compassion and self-worth.

The sources of the grievances in the films discussed in this paper are that Papuan women lost their hope for care and reciprocity, and therefore their future. Gardens and forests promise the future for generations to come. The future that they worry about is very concrete. It is about livelihoods, homes, and gardening. On the contrary, oil palm plantations embody a present temporality, one that only brings Papuans worry and concern for the future. When women are forced to work for oil palm plantations, there is no guarantee for their sustainability. The films I discussed show that oil palm plantations have a "beneficial" effect only in the short term where people can get cash so that they can send their children to school. These films leave me with a sense of wonder about the Papuans who have found educational opportunities from the meagre income made from plantation labour, including those Papuans who have reciprocated this gift by making films.

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