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REVIEW ESSAY

Land-Use Change Conflicts and Anti-Corporate Activism in Indonesia: A Review Essay

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Abstract

While processes of land-use change have triggered conflicts across Asia, our knowledge of the responses of affected communities is largely based on case-studies. This review essay addresses this challenge by reviewing and synthesizing 49 studies of conflicts between rural communities and companies in order to identify salient characteristics of anti-corporate activism in Indonesia. We find that, in contrast to the 'rightful resistance' observed elsewhere, the strategies employed by rural communities in Indonesia are remarkably "rightless" as both their discourse and their conflict resolution efforts are marked by a remarkable irrelevance of laws, regulations and courts. Communities frame their claims mostly in terms of customary laws while largely relying on informal mediation by local authorities. We attribute this "rightless" character of land-use change conflicts to the weak legal protection of land rights in Indonesia and the relative powerlessness of communities in the face of collusion between authorities and companies.

Keywords: land conflict; land-use change; contentious politics; anti-corporate activism; Indonesia; political economy; rural development

Introduction

Conflicts over land between rural communities and companies are a recurring feature of economic development across (particularly) the global south. Ostensibly with the aim of spurring rural economic growth, governments have been providing agricultural, plantation, and natural resource companies with access to large tracts of land, thereby facilitating the dispossession of rural communities (see White et al. 2012; Borras and Franco 2013). Concerns about these processes has generated a large literature highlighting how this land grabbing is triggering widespread conflict from Asia (e.g. Levien 2013) to Africa (Gingembre 2015) and Latin America (Rocheleau 2015), as communities try to defend their land or at least ensure more favorable terms of inclusion. Indonesia is one such country where massive shifts in

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land use are sparking widespread conflict. Indonesia's countryside is undergoing "one of most rapid agro-environmental transformations in modern history" (Cramb and Curry 2012, 234), as large tracts of agricultural land are turned into plantations, mines, and residential areas. While the size of oil palm plantations is doubling almost every decade, the size of the mining sector increased five-fold between 2006 and 2018 (PWC 2019, 26), and Indonesia's rapid urbanization is also putting increased pressure on land (Lund 2021). In the face of these rapid transformations, rural Indonesians struggle to defend their ownership and access to land. Feeling cheated out of their land with little or no compensation, communities are protesting against both companies and governments, engaging in demonstrations, lobbying, and litigation as well as road blockages and occasional violence. While exact numbers are unavailable, a recent assessment counted 2050 such conflicts in Indonesia for the period 2015–2019 (varying between 252 new conflicts 2015 to 659 in 2017, see KPA 2019).

Termed in a confusingly varied ways—ranging from "agrarian conflicts," "resource conflicts," "land conflicts," "tenurial conflicts," or "forestry conflicts"—these conflicts between companies and rural communities over (compensation for) control over land has generated a growing and diverse literature. While there are a number of insightful overview studies (e.g. Borras and Franco 2013; Hall et al. 2015, Levang, Wahyu, and Orth 2016; Yasmi, Kelley, and Enters 2013; Lucas and Warren 2013), this literature on land conflicts is largely dominated by case studies. This prevalence of studies on single or a handful of conflicts is precluding the identification and analysis of the general patterns of the trajectories and outcomes of these conflicts. Coming from different academic disciplines with different research interests, the study of land-use change conflicts often proceeds on parallel tracks, with remarkably little cross-referencing. The result is that the available (case-)studies pay little attention to identifying the common themes and questions that emerge when these studies are read side by side. Furthermore, the available multi-country studies (see also Hilson 2002; Temper 2019; Borras and Franco 2013; Hall et al. 2015; Schoenberger, Hall, and Vandergeest 2017) focus on identifying "universal" features of land conflicts while paying little attention to how country-specific characteristics lead to variation in the trajectories and outcomes of land-use conflicts. In this essay we analyze the particular characteristics of conflict strategies of communities in Indonesia with the aim of fostering such a comparative analysis.

This review essay critically reviews 49 studies of conflicts in Indonesia between companies and rural communities over compensation for and access to land. As we argue below, this particular type of conflict can be best labelled as "land-use change conflicts" (see also Leys and Vanclay 2010; Kaufman and Smith 1999). We focus on Indonesia because of the availability of a large number of studies lending themselves to comparative analysis. While in Indonesia such conflicts have a long history dating back to the colonial period (see Tauchid 1953) we limit our inquiry to the conflicts between companies and communities that emerged after 1998, the year Suharto's period of authoritarian rule ended. Furthermore, while land-use change processes also engender conflicts within communities as well as between communities and the state (see Borras and Franco 2013), for the sake of analytical clarity we narrow our focus to conflicts between communities and corporations. We focus our

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analysis on the anti-corporate activism that these conflicts generate: what do rural Indonesians aim to achieve, how do they make their claims vis-à-vis companies, what conflict resolution mechanisms do they employ and what are the outcomes of their contentious politics?

To address these questions, we have tried to bring together as many studies on land-use change conflicts in Indonesia as we could find. To that end we conducted wide-ranging Indonesian and English-language library and online searches using various search terms related to land-use change conflicts. In doing so we also aimed to make the findings from oft-neglected Indonesian-language publications more accessible. Our main selection criterion was that the study needed to concern one or multiple land-use change conflicts and pay attention to both the causes and the trajectory of the conflict. In this way we ended up with 49 publications, of which 16 were written in Indonesian. This selection included 7 books, 18 journal articles, 17 book chapters, 5 reports and 2 dissertations. Most of the studies involved a single conflict, while 16 publications involved between two and six conflicts: in total these studies documented 110 conflicts. We analyzed these conflicts by coding them in terms of the character and approach of the study as well as a number of comparative dimensions using the comparative framework we outline below. While thus sacrificing some of the nuance and detail of these studies, this approach allowed us to extract salient general patterns and engage in a comparative reading. In this way our methodology (and framework) could also be used to study general patterns of land conflicts elsewhere. The online annexure to this article provides a list of the 49 studied publications as well as an overview of our coding of each of these studies so as to enable the reader to check and review them. In interpreting our findings we have benefitted from our own fieldwork on these conflicts (see Berenschot et al. 2022).

We build on the variety found in these studies to propose a number of comparative dimensions and categorizations in relation to the main themes of our essay—the interpretation of causes, the framing of claims, usage of conflict resolution mechanisms and outcomes of conflicts. Applying this analytical framework, we arrive at two main conclusions. First, in contrast to the 'rightful resistance' observed in China (O'Brien and Li 2006) and Vietnam (Kerkvliet 2014), the strategies employed by rural communities in Indonesia are remarkably 'rightless,' by which we refer to a contentious repertoire marked by a remarkable irrelevance of formal guarantees of citizen rights as provided by state laws and regulations and formal institutions like courts. A noticeable recurring feature in many studies of land-use change conflicts elsewhere in the global south, are observations about the importance of a (legal) rights-based discourse involving a strategic invocation of citizen rights and state laws. In this vein O'Brien and Li (2006, 6) described how "discontented villagers [in China] increasingly cite laws, regulations, and other authoritative communications" while Kerkvliet, studying similar land-use change conflicts in Vietnam, observed that "villagers typically claim local officials are violating laws and regulations" (Kerkvliet 2014, 39). A study on the 'rightful resistance' of land-related protest movements in India and Brazil also concluded that their discourse involved "highlighting gaps between constitutional principles, laws, and national policy directives and their nonimplementation or violation on the ground" (Schock 2015, 500). These studies highlight that this engagement with laws and policies went beyond

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discourse as rural protesters regularly take their grievances to court, combining "legal tactics with political pressure" (O'Brien and Li 2006, 3, see also Franco 2008 for the Philippines and Grajales 2015 for Colombia).

The picture that emerges from our studies on land-use change conflicts in Indonesia is remarkably different. Laws, regulations, and courts are relatively absent in both the framing of claims and the strategies that communities employ: communities frame their claims mostly in terms of (legally weak) customary laws while largely relying on informal mediation by local authorities to solve their conflicts. Similarly, while the literature on anti-corporate activism generally concerns attempts to change corporate *policies* (e.g. Soule 2009; Sadler 2004), the anti-corporate protests in rural Indonesia are mostly geared towards strengthening the community's *bargaining position* in ad-hoc negotiations rather than towards changing state or corporate policies.

Second, we argue that this "rightless" character of the contentious repertoire adopted by rural communities in Indonesia is a product of weak legal protections of land rights as well as the nature of Indonesia's political economy. The state-dependent nature of Indonesia's economy and the weakness of left-leaning political movements after the anti-communist genocide of 1965 has engendered a political arena where politics and business are closely intertwined. Economic opportunities depend to a large extent on a cultivation of political connections, while political and bureaucratic careers depend on the monetary contributions that can be obtained by providing regulatory favors (see Aspinall and Klinken 2011). This close embrace between economic and political elites fosters the relative "rightless" resistance of rural communities because this embrace weakens legal institutions and undermines the neutrality of state authorities. On the one hand this long-standing "oligarchic" nature of Indonesia's politics (Winters 2011, Ford and Pepinsky 2014) has successfully stymied efforts to strengthen the relatively weak legal protections land rights of ordinary citizens. On the other hand the regular informal exchanges of favors between companies and authorities weakens the rule of law, undermines remaining legal protections of citizen rights and generates distrust towards the police and courts. For these reasons the entrenched collusion between business and politics constitutes an important yet understudied reason for why rural communities in Indonesia tend to avoid "rightful" strategies and achieve relatively little in their struggles against incoming companies.

This essay proceeds as follows. We first review the ways in which the reviewed publications approach the study of land use change conflicts, and we discuss our usage of this term. After discussing the background and nature of the grievances animating these conflicts, we subsequently focus on how communities frame their claims, and the conflict resolution mechanisms they employ to address their grievances. In the final section we use the reviewed studies to discuss (the reasons for) the outcomes of these conflicts and highlight future avenues for the comparative study of land-use change conflicts.

The study of land-use change conflicts in Indonesia

One obstacle hampering the comparative study of the conflicts sparked by processes of land-use change, is the lack of consensus about how to label these conflicts.

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Scholars are using the terms "land conflict" (e.g. Lucas and Warren 2013), "resource conflict" as well as "mining (or palm oil) conflicts" while inside Indonesia the terms "forestry conflicts" (*konflik perhutanan*), "tenurial conflicts" (*konflik tenurial*) and also "agrarian conflicts" (*konflik agraria*, see KPA 2019) are commonly employed. Each of these terms differ slightly from the others in delineating the type of conflicts under study. For example, the terms "tenurial conflict" and (to a lesser extent) "land conflicts" narrows the focus on conflicts over ownership of (or access to) land, while other terms—forestry, resource, and agrarian conflicts—seem to be mutually exclusive. These conflicts, however, occur in both agricultural zones as well as areas designated as forest, involving also non-agricultural land-use—thus making the terms "forest" and "agrarian" conflicts overly restrictive. Moreover, an important characteristic of these conflicts, is that they are not only concerned about land, but also about the conditions (such as profit-sharing arrangements, compensation, land lease, etc.) under which companies gain control over land (cf. Ribot and Peluso 2003; Peluso and Lund 2011). The usage of different terms for highly similar conflicts has proved to be an obstacle for academic debate and comparative analysis.

The key commonality of all these widely-named conflicts, however, is that they are all a product of the large-scale processes of land-use change currently engulfing much of rural Southeast Asia (and beyond). They are all due to the way in which companies are attempting to put land to new commercial use thereby dispossessing people from their land. For this reason we prefer the term "land-use change conflicts" to refer to conflicts between rural communities and agricultural, real estate, and natural resource companies over the manner in which these companies acquire access to land (see also Leys and Vanclay 2010). As this definition implies, these conflicts do not just concern disputes over control over land, but also grievances about the various kinds of conditions (i.e. compensation, profit-sharing schemes, the character of community consent) under which companies acquire that control.

While all the reviewed studies have in common that they discuss the trajectories of one or more cases of land-use change conflicts, their approaches and arguments are strikingly diverse. The 49 studies we review here represent a wide range of theoretical and disciplinary approaches, resulting in a rich but also somewhat fragmented academic debate. Written by sociologists, legal scholars, and anthropologists, as well as historians and geographers, these studies take up different questions and focus on different aspects of the trajectory of conflicts—from the legal background and the framing of grievances to the character of protests and the effectiveness of conflict resolution.

To tackle this diversity, we propose that the literature on land-use change conflicts might usefully be categorized into five main approaches. While not all studies neatly fit into these categories, as a few studies reflect two or three different approaches, the categorization can help to capture the different ways in which scholars have been approaching land-use change conflicts. A first, relatively common, approach can be termed *socio-legal*, as it focuses on how legal provisions and, particularly, the contradictions and inadequacies of Indonesia's land regime generate conflict and/or prevent its resolution. These studies describe the conflicts mainly in terms of the legal claims of the conflicting parties and the way in which they employ (or circumvent) laws and regulations. In this vein these studies attribute land-use change conflicts to the way in

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which the Indonesian state limits the land tenure security of rural Indonesians by prohibiting ownership of land designated as forest (i.e. about two-thirds of all of Indonesia's territory), while retaining the right to award concessions to companies for the same tracts of forest land (e.g. Bachriadi 2002; Bachriadi and Lucas 2002; Fauzi 2003; Mutolib, Yonariza, and Ismono 2017; De Jong, Knippenberg and Bakker 2017; Wahab, Tisnanta, and Rahayu 2018).

Paying close attention to the legality of the land claims of conflicting actors and the difficulty of proving these claims in court, these studies highlight the weak protection of land rights of Indonesian citizens and, consequently, the limited "access to justice," i.e. the obstacles faced by communities to find redress for their grievances (Haug 2014; Wahab, Tisnanta, and Rahayu 2018). Likewise, these studies also highlight the inadequate implementation of laws and regulations, as they document how companies obtain land through faulty licensing processes (e.g. Colchester et. al. 2006; Nilakrisna et al. 2016), while failing to properly obtain the required informed consent from communities (e.g. Colchester et. al. 2006; Anderson et al. 2013; Firdaus et al. 2013; Chao et al. 2013a and 2013b; Jiwan et al. 2013).

A second and particularly central focus in the study of Indonesia's land-use change conflicts concerns customary land rights of indigenous communities (referred to as *adat* communities in Indonesia). Indigenous identities and attendant customary land rights have paid a large role in the strategies that communities adopt to address their grievances (e.g. Biezeveld 2004; Asriwandari 2013; Lund and Rachman 2018). While Indonesia's land regime currently barely recognizes customary land rights (see Bedner 2016), many reviewed studies discuss how communities adopt a discourse of customary (*adat*) land rights to strengthen their land claims (e.g. Narihisa 2002; Semedi and Bakker 2014; IPAC 2014; Afrizal 2007; Sirait 2009; Acciaioli and Dewi 2016). This body of literature is marked by a debate over the prospects and pitfalls of this strategy (e.g. Muur 2018; Li 2001) and pays attention to (the lack of impact of) attempts by national civil society organizations such as AMAN to get the Indonesian state to recognize customary land rights. These studies link up to observations of political scientists about how Indonesia's democratization process sparked a resurgence of *adat* and an '*adat* movement.' In the context of widening political space for protest, the discourse about customary land rights became a promising avenue for rural communities to strengthen their claims to land, while politicians began to employ regional identities and *adat* as a means to mobilize support (see Davidson and Henley 2007, Klinken and Schulte Nordholt 2007).

A third group of studies departs from social movement studies to focus more closely on conflict dynamics. The (surprisingly few) studies adopting this approach are concerned with the strategies that rural communities adopt, analyzing in particular the relationship between political context and the character of contentious politics (e.g. Afrizal 2007). In this vein studies highlight the opportunities that the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime (in 1998) and the resulting more open public sphere afforded to rural communities (e.g. Nuh and Collins 2001; Afrizal and Indrizal 2002; Wahyudi 2005). Similarly these studies highlight factors shaping conflict dynamics such as the importance of outside contacts (e.g. Kusuma and Agustina 2003), the interaction between conflicting parties (e.g. Azhar 1999), and the role of emotions (e.g. Hafid 2001). A common conclusion of these studies concerns the relative

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powerlessness of communities vis-à-vis well-endowed and better-connected companies (e.g. Hein and Faust 2014).

A fourth approach zooms in on *conflict governance*, taking up questions related to the usage and effectiveness of different conflict resolution mechanisms (e.g. Afrizal 2013; Susilo 2013; IPAC 2014; IPAC 2016) such as third-party mediation by NGOs (e.g. Dhiaulhaq et al. 2014; Dhiaulhaq, McCarthy, and Yasmi 2018), government interventions (Bachriadi and Lucas 2001; Noveria, Gayatri and Mashudi 2004; Susan 2015; Usboko 2016) or the dispute resolution efforts of the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil, RSPO (Afrizal and Anderson 2016). While also highlighting inadequacies of Indonesia's legal system, this body of literature is relatively more upbeat as it highlights, particularly, the possibility that third-party mediation (e.g. Wulan et al. 2004; Afrizal 2015; Dhiaulhaq et. al. 2014) might transform and solve conflicts.

A fifth, less commonly employed approach departs from *political ecology*. This group of studies focuses more on the meanings and value attributed to land as a way to explain how rural communities frame and experience their conflicts with companies. They interpret conflict not just in terms of a clash of material interests but also as a clash of different visions and attitudes vis-à-vis the natural environment (e.g. Adiwibowo 2005; De Vos 2016; Buergin 2016).

Causes of land-conflicts in Indonesia

As this brief overview aims to illustrate, this diversity of approaches has generated a wide range of valuable insights concerning the particular causes and character of land-use change conflicts in Indonesia. Of particular importance for the purpose of this article is that these studies highlight certain aspects of Indonesia—such as the weak recognition of land rights, the relatively strong customary (*adat*) land systems, the long-term effects of the 1965 political genocide of alleged communists and the problematic implementation of state regulations—which can help explain why the character of land-use change conflicts in Indonesia differs from similar conflicts in other countries.

Nonetheless, largely due to the prevalence of case studies we feel that this body of literature also has two important limitations. First, this literature rarely engages in a broader debate and analysis of the more structural processes and causes that give rise to these conflicts. The analysis of most of these studies revolves around what might be called 'micro-level causes' (cf. DeWalt and Pelto 1985, 2–3), i.e. aspects of the particular case under study that contributed to the emergence and intensification of the conflict *in that instance*, such as particular grievances, company actions or violations or the weaknesses (or strengths) of conflicting parties. While important, these micro-causes stem from macro structures and, with a few notable exceptions, this broader political-economic context remains somewhat out of view as authors remain tied to the particularities of their case. For example, while many studies find that communities are dealing with incoming companies on "unequal terms" (e.g. Acciaioli and Dewi 2016, 350; see also Levang, Wahyu, and Orth 2016), the causes of this inequality remain remarkably unexplored. In other words, the relative powerlessness of communities should not be merely a conclusion of a study, it should be the object of the study.

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In that light we feel that these studies pay too little attention to the impact of Indonesia's political economy on the emergence and trajectory of land-use change conflicts. These conflicts need to be studied in the light of how the character of capitalist development in Indonesia generates strong power imbalances which weakens the capacity of rural communities to resist the dispossession of their land. There is a considerable literature on the political economy of natural resource extraction and land-use change in Southeast Asia (e.g. Gellert and Andiko 2015; Robison 2009; McCarthy 2004; Ford and Pepinsky 2014; Pye and Bhattacharya 2013) offering relevant insights concerning the nature and history of state–business interaction in Indonesia and, particularly, the ways in which the Indonesian state has tended to prioritize the interests of economic elites over those of citizens. Yet, with some exceptions (e.g. Lund and Rachman 2018; Muur 2018), studies of Indonesia's land-use change conflicts rarely employ these insights. A particularly salient example of the relevance of political economy concerns the way in which the clientelistic, high-cost nature of Indonesia's democracy has given rise to collusive ties between politicians and corporate actors (see Aspinall and Berenschot 2019; Gecko Project 2017). While rarely an explicit topic (but see Susan 2015), the reviewed studies regularly offer hints that these informal connections enable companies to 'criminalize' (i.e. ensure the arrest of) protest leaders, avoid punishment for violations and ignore community grievances. A 'political economy approach' to land-use change conflicts can thus serve to identify the more structural reasons for why corporate actors tend to have the upper hand in land-use change conflicts in Indonesia (see for example Carrol, Hameiri and Jones 2020).

A second and related weakness of this body of literature is that these studies offer little analysis of general patterns. As comparisons with other studies are relatively rare, most case studies offer little indication of whether and how the conflict(s) under study are exceptional or, conversely, representative of how conflicts unfold. Similarly, these studies only rarely engage in international comparisons, as they offer little insight into whether and how land-use change conflicts in Indonesia differ from those in, say, Thailand, India, or Malaysia (but see Colchester et al. 2013). This need for identifying and studying general patterns informs the second part of this essay. In the following sections we synthesize the observations and conclusions of all these studies with the aim of identifying a number of general characteristics. We focus, in turn, on the framing of community claims, the usage of conflict resolution mechanisms and the outcomes of these conflicts.

What are the claims and grievances of communities?

We will first discuss the claims and grievances driving land-use change conflicts: what do communities aim to achieve and how do they frame their claims? To obtain an overview of salient issues, we started out by marking all the complaints and grievances mentioned in the reviewed studies. When conflicts involved multiple claims (which was common), we noted down all of these claims.

We found that most communities did not aim to prevent the arrival of companies but rather to secure a more beneficial (or less detrimental) deal with such a company. While land-use change conflicts sometimes get interpreted as 'anti-capitalist

resistance' or as 'environmental conflicts' aimed at protecting the environment, in most cases communities actually have more modest and pragmatic aims. The studied conflicts only rarely (in 3 out of 49 publications) involve the actual refusal of companies, and the pollution caused by companies does not figure in any of these studies. Instead, in most cases communities either demand community land to be taken out ('enclaved') of the concessions (involving 60 cases or 55 percent of 110 cases) discussed in our studies) or they want to be better compensated for the loss of land (either financially (25 cases) or through profit-sharing schemes (21 cases)). This rather pragmatic focus on compensation and retrieving parcels of land rather than flat-out refusal reflects partly a widespread hope that incoming communities would improve their economic condition. These communities do not seem to harbor anti-capitalist ideologies or broader concerns about the long-term impact of new mines or plantations. Communities often like the economic development promised by incoming companies, they just resent the terms under which this is happening.

Yet this apparent pragmatism also reflects the relative weakness of rural communities as companies generally find it easy to acquire control over land—making the prevention of corporate land acquisition a foregone possibility and forcing communities to settle for relatively modest aims. Due to the above-mentioned weak land tenure of rural communities, companies generally can move in rather easily once they have obtained a government permit such as a location permit (which is actually only the first permit of a longer licensing process). While both the law and (in the case of palm oil) industry standards require companies to obtain 'free prior and informed consent' (FPIC) before taking control of land, the reviewed studies suggest that this process of obtaining consent remains highly problematic. In many cases companies co-opt community leaders who subsequently sign away community land without the consent (or, often, knowledge) of community members. This collaboration of village heads or customary leaders enables companies to acquire the necessary signatures while paying nothing or relatively low amounts for this "consent." Next to this elite co-optation, companies also use intimidation from local *preman* as well as trickery (such as using the attendance sheet of a meeting as "proof" of community consent). This haphazard and sometimes outright fraudulent manner of acquiring consent is an important driving force behind land-use change conflicts. Most of the conflicts in our set emerge from grievances about this process as communities feel cheated out of their land.

With 21 cases out of 110 conflicts involving profit-sharing schemes (and 4 cases with mixed demands including plasma), the reviewed literature also highlights how problematic the implementation of profit-sharing schemes is. Since 2007 oil palm plantation companies are required by law to offer community members the ownership of (or profits from) a part of the new plantation. Under such schemes (labelled 'inti-plasma schemes') palm oil companies obtain community land in return for offering local people (the profits of) at least 20 percent (the 'plasma') of the total area of a company's concession (while they would generally still be charged for the costs of turning this land into a plantation). While these terms are already quite beneficial to companies, from the studies surveyed here (e.g. Afrizal 2007 and 2013; Chao et al. 2013b; Anderson et al. 2013; IPAC 2016) it seems that these profit-sharing schemes are sometimes little more than scams: after the inti-plasma schemes have

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served to convince communities to give up their land, companies often renege on their promise to share the profits. The resentment of communities over the lack of profit-sharing or its non-transparent implementation constitutes another major driver of land-use change conflicts.

How do people frame their grievances?

What discourse do people use to convey and legitimatize their claims to land, compensation, or profit-sharing? Frames are "short-cut devices [that] organize knowledge in ways that affect individual's interpretation of a situation and their choices regarding it" (Kaufman and Smith 1999, 165). In that light the framing of land-use change conflicts refers to the way in which communities interpret their grievances and the discourse they use to legitimize their claims. This is, in the context of Indonesia's political development, not an inconsequential matter. A considerable portion of the literature on land conflicts focuses on the character and usage of customary (*adat*) land rights. As, for example, Davidson and Henley (2007) have argued, Indonesia's democratization process sparked a resurgence of *adat*: a discourse about customary land rights became a promising avenue for rural communities to strengthen their claims to land, and a strong '*adat* movement' has developed over the last twenty years.

Yet the invocation of customary land rights is not the only manner in which citizens can stake their claims to land. Studies of citizenship elsewhere highlight, for example, how citizens might formulate their claims in terms of their special needs, their contribution to society or in terms of the rights afforded to them by formal laws and regulations. Rural communities, in other words, frame their claims to land rights in a variety of ways. This thus raises an empirical question: given this diversity of available frames, how do rural Indonesians frame their claims and to what extent is this *adat*-based discourse indeed dominant in Indonesia?

To address this question, we analyzed our 49 studies in terms of how community claims are framed. We paid particular attention to the particular standard of fairness or justice that communities invoked to legitimize their claims. While different distinctions are possible (cf. Kaufman and Smith 1999), we derived inspiration from O'Brien and Li (2006) and from Holston (2008) to distinguish four different types of 'claim-frames' of land-use change conflicts that are salient in our set of studies: *adat*-based, needs-based, rights-based and justice-based. With "*adat*-based" we refer to claims to land that involve an invocation of customary land rights—i.e. claims to land that are substantiated by invoking local traditions in managing access to land. With "needs-based" we refer to claims that are legitimated by invoking the importance of land for sustaining livelihoods (cf. Holston 2008, 240–45). With "rights-based" we refer to claims that are substantiated with references to legal provisions and formal state regulation. These are claims motivated with reference to legal provisions and state regulation. Describing such claim-making of communities in China, O'Brien and Li (2006, 3) coined the term "rightful resistance" to capture the way in which communities strategically invoked laws and regulations to discipline local powerholders: "In their acts of contestation, which usually combine legal tactics with political pressure, rightful resisters typically behave in accord with prevailing statuses [and] use a

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regime's policies and legitimating myths to justify their challenges." Lastly, with "justice-based" claims we mean claims that are substantiated in terms of ideas about fairness and justice in ways that are not related to legal provisions (or *adat*) but rather to alternative, non-legal notions of what is fair and morally just. Rodan and Hughes argued that such claim-making is particularly salient in Southeast Asia. They define such "moral ideologies" in terms of "conformity to received codes of behavior [that] assumes pre-eminence in evaluating the conduct of power holders." (Rodan and Hughes 2014, 12 and 4).

Such a categorization of four types of framing of claims is admittedly rough and somewhat overly schematic as the discourse found in some studies contains elements of different claim-frames. Nonetheless we feel that these categories can help to identify and analyze comparatively the particular discourse involved in land-use change conflicts. Employing these four categories, we sorted studies on the basis of the kind of framing highlighted by researchers in their description of community grievances. Wherever possible we relied on direct quotes from interviewed community members. As direct quotes were absent remarkably often, we also relied on the way in which researchers rendered their claims. This has obvious drawbacks, as researchers' renditions of community discourse might be distorted by, for example, the analytical aims of the researcher, while our interpretations of their rendition inserted further possible distortions. While keeping such limitations in mind, Table 1 at least provides a very general overview of how community grievances are framed in the studied publications. We add a few examples of claim-framing in the studied articles to allow readers to assess our interpretations. See the online annexure for a fuller overview.

This table highlights a clear, salient pattern: *adat*-based discourse is the dominant framing of land conflicts. In the majority of studies (28) the claims of rural Indonesians are "justified (…) by invoking the idiom of *adat*" (Acciaioli and Dewi 2016: 330). A key feature of this discourse is that land is not claimed in terms of formal proofs of individual ownership but rather in terms of being customary land. In all these studies the disputed land is claimed to be *tanah adat* or *ulayat* (communally owned customary land) and their acquisition by companies is presented as a violation of customary rights and rules (and not in terms of a violation of state laws or regulations). For example: "[the companies] took over the land without the consent of the *ulayat* rulers and the Malay Ninik Mamak [customary leaders], so that traditionally the two companies did not have the right to control the land" (Murtolib et al. 2017: 218) or "[h]e claimed that the land had been owned by his Dayak ancestors and, therefore, he still has the right to use it" (De Jong et al. 2017: 339). *Adat* land claims are the main justification employed by rural Indonesians to claim land ownership. In comparison, a much smaller group of conflicts involve needs-based, legal-rights-based claims or a mixture of those. Quite tellingly, the few articles that contain justice-based forms of claim-framing (e.g. Semedi and Bakker 2014; Haug 2014) offer only very vague articulations of the social or religious norms (or notions of fairness) that were being violated.

It is important to point out that a few studies concern quite exceptional traditional communities—i.e. communities which have maintained distinct traditions and strong customary land tenure systems, such as Suku Anak Dalam (IPAC 2016), the Kuntu

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Table 1. Claim Frames in studies of Land-use Change conflicts

Claim frames	Examples		Articles reporting frame
Customary (*adat*) land rights	"The people argued that the former rubber plantation cultivated by PT CSR was the customary land of the community of Nagari Pangean" (Afrizal 2015, 147). "The local *adat* communities are fighting to defend their customary ownership of their *ulayat* lands" (Colchester et al 2006: 166). "[They] resort to the idiom of *adat* to gain some compensation" (Acciaioli and Dewi 2016, 349).	28	Nuh and Collin 2001; Afrizal and Indrizal 2002; Fauzi 2003; Wulan et al. 2004; Noveria, Gayatri, and Mashudi 2004; Colchester et al. 2006; Afrizal 2007; McCarthy, Gillespie, and Zen 2012; Sirait 2009, Dhiaulhaq et al. 2014; Afrizal 2013; Asriwandari 2013; Colchester et al. 2013; Firdaus et al. 2013; Anderson et al. 2013; Chao et al. 2013a; Chao et al. 2013b; Jiwan et al. 2013; IPAC 2014; Afrizal 2015; Susan 2015; Nilakrisna et al. 2016; Mutolib, Yonariza, and Ismono 2017; De Jong, Knippenberg, and Bakker 2017; Dhiaulhaq, McCarthy, and Yasmi 2018; Muur 2018; Afrizal and Anderson 2016. Acciaioli and Dewi 2016.
Needs-based	"*Ladang* fields are meaningful to farmers for providing food security and additional cash income […] A plantation system would threaten this variety of land tenure and eventually affect people's access to land" (De Vos 2016, 22).	7	Bachriadi and Lucas 2002; Kusuma and Agustina 2003; Adiwibowo 2005; Susilo 2013; Usboko 2016; De Vos 2016; Yazid et al. 2013.
Rights-based	"To legitimize their land claims SPI refers to Basic Agrarian Law (BAL), transnational anti REDD+ discourses and global environmental justice discourses. SPI members cite the clauses of the BAL" (Hein and Faust 2014, 23). "Their claim [is] the right to be recognized as citizens of Indonesia" (Wahab, Tisnanta, and Rahayu 2018, 314).	5	Bachriadi and Lucas 2001; Bachriadi 2002; |Hein and Faust 2014; IPAC 2016; Wahab, Tisnanta, and Rahayu 2018.
Justice-based	"Notions of justice in this context refer to unhampered and sufficient access to land, to resources and markets, as well as to the capacity to act independently from plantation companies and landowners" (Semedi and Bakker 2014, 388).	2	Semedi and Bakker 2014; Haug 2014
Mix *Adat*, needs, rights.	"While occupation and presence were technically illegal, agreements, and the invention of a new category for a community that claimed *adat* status, resituated the settlement within a 'less illegal' realm" (Lund and Rachman 2018, 426).	7	Azhar 1999; Hafid 2001; Narahisa 2002; Biezeveld 2004; Wahyudi 2005; Buergin 2016; Lund and Rahman 2018.
	Total	49	

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community (Wulan et al. 2004) or the Ammatoa Kajang (Muur 2018). It seems, in other words, that the case selection of the reviewed studies was not fully representative, as this selection might reflect a preference of some scholars for conflicts involving more exotic communities harboring quite distinct cultures—and, hence, more likely to adopt an *adat*-based discourse. We cannot exclude the possibility that some scholars have emphasized (or focused on) *adat*-based discourse simply because of a theoretical or methodological preference, rather than because of its relative importance. Furthermore, many of these studies focus on conflicts with natural resource and palm oil companies largely occurring in Sumatra and Kalimantan—where such traditional communities are more common. Similarly it bears emphasizing that this article focuses on conflicts taking place in rural settings; there is some evidence that in urban Indonesia communities (who cannot invoke *adat*) do more regularly employ a rights-based discourse referencing laws and regulations (see Davidson 2015: 198–229). This might also be due to the more affluent, middle-class background of such communities (see also Lund 2021).

Yet even if we account for some over-representation, this striking dominance of adat-based discourse in the reviewed studies is remarkable. It is remarkable, firstly, in a comparative sense. While studies on land-use change conflicts in countries such as China (O'Brien and Li 2006), Vietnam (Kerkvliet 2014) and elsewhere (Schock 2015, Franco 2008) tend to emphasize the importance of legal rights-based claims, such 'rightful resistance' seems relatively absent in rural Indonesia: claims are relatively rarely substantiated by invoking laws and regulations as communities instead opt for an *adat*-based discourse with relatively little resonance in formal laws. This dominance of *adat*-based claims is also remarkable because its desirability and effectiveness is regularly critiqued (see Muur 2018; Bedner and Arizona 2019, Dhiaulhaq and McCarthy 2019). Back in 2001 Tania Li already remarked that *adat*-based claims end up relating land rights to ethnic identity, thereby not only disadvantaging non-*adat* communities but also undermining the possibility of establishing more universal, non-identity based land rights (Li 2001). Furthermore, as Acciaioli and Dewi (2016, 335) argued, *adat*-based claims curtail solidarity and cooperation because this discourse stimulates communities to fight their own, isolated fight with one company, rather than engaging in a broader class-based mobilization to push for a joint agenda of reform.

In that light the prominence of *adat*-based land claims is, in our view, not so much a reflection of the effectiveness of such discourse, but rather an indication of the limitations of the alternatives. Rights-based land claims are severely hampered by Indonesia's legal framework, which severely restricts the possibilities for Indonesian citizens to claim land ownership—thereby forcing Indonesians to turn to customary land rights as the next-best alternative. The relative absence of justice-based land claims, on the other hand, is in our view an indication of the relative absence of ideas of (social) justice regarding access to land and land redistribution in Indonesia's public sphere. In the aftermath of the 1965 political genocide such a discourse became associated with the outlawed communist movement. As a result, although the phrase of social justice often surfaces in public debate, Indonesia does not have—compared to, say, India with its Chipko Movement or the Zapatistas in Mexico—a strong tradition drawing on ideas of fairness and justice concerning access

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to land. In other words, as alternative discursive repertoires were stymied by legal and historical obstacles, rural communities often have little choice but to turn to *adat*-based discourse.

Ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms

Having discussed the claims and grievances of communities, we now turn to their strategies. To get companies to act on these grievances, what avenues do communities pursue? In particular, what conflict resolution mechanisms do communities use, and how effective are these? As we noted above, only seven studies focus on protest dynamics, often with very limited interaction with its broader literature. While rural Indonesians engage in very varied and creative forms of protests—from demonstrations and land occupations to blockades, customary rituals and the harvesting the land of companies—at present we lack a study that engages in an in-depth study of forms that land-related contentious politics in Indonesia takes. This is clearly a study waiting to be done.

For that reason we will focus here on another aspect of the contentious politics of communities: their usage of conflict resolution mechanisms. Apart from protesting, communities are also taking their grievances to a range of different fora. Broadly speaking, four main types of conflict resolution mechanisms can be identified: the adjudication of conflicts through Indonesia's court system, the dispute resolution facility set up by an organization such as the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), bilateral negotiation between conflicting parties, and third-party mediation facilitated by the district head, a judge or, occasionally, an NGO, who assist conflicting parties to reach an agreement (Afrizal 2015).

Our compilation provides an occasion to assess the usage and effectiveness of these different mechanisms for a broad range of cases. Yet, given its practical relevance it is unfortunate that only a small portion of our studies—16 out of 49—explicitly discuss conflict resolution processes and outcomes. Nonetheless, for these 16 studies we summarized in Table 2 how communities attempted to address their grievances, and what the outcomes of these conflicts were. The reader should bear in mind that these cases are not fully representative: these are relatively high-profile conflicts with some remarkable community victories (which is often the reason researchers selected these cases for study).

Nevertheless, this table yields two striking conclusions. Firstly, these studies confirm that communities tend to avoid litigation—in marked contrast with land-use change conflicts in, for example, Malaysia (Aiken and Leigh 2011) and India (Kohli et al. 2018) where litigation is a more common and effective means of protecting land rights. With only two conflicts in this list involving court cases initiated by communities, it seems that the weaknesses of Indonesia's legal system and, particularly, the inadequate protection of land rights have made litigation very unattractive for communities. Instead, the most common trajectory seems to be that communities first try direct negotiations and then—as these mostly fail—turn to local authorities (politicians and civil servants) to pressure companies and to act as mediators. This mediation generally involves meetings at the local parliament or district government, where communities express their grievances and companies (if they attend) refute them.

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Table 2: Conflict Resolution and Conflict Outcomes

No	Case (Publication)	Resolution Mechanisms	Outcomes
1, 2	Farmers in Jenggawah (East Java) demanded the return of land from state company PT PTPN 27 (Azhar 1999; Hafid 2001).	Bilateral negotiation and third-party mediation by state officials.	5000 Farmers obtained land certificates of the land after a struggle of 21 years
3.	Farmers from two villages (Tapos and Cimacan) in West Java demanded the return of land from two corporations (Bachriadi and Lucas 2001).	Bilateral negotiation.	In both cases the villages could reclaim some of their land but did not obtain ownership.
4.	Three villages in Central Kalimantan demanded the return of land from three oil palm companies (Noveria, Gayatri, and Mashudi 2004).	Bilateral and government adjudication.	No resolution in all three cases.
5.	Two communities in Nagari Kinali demanded profit-sharing and financial compensation from oil palm company TSG in West Sumatra (Afrizal 2013).	Bilateral negotiation and mediation by government officials.	The people received financial compensation for their land but no profit-sharing.
6.	In five conflict cases in West Sumatra *adat* communities demanded the return of their customary land as well as compensation, and profit-sharing (Afrizal 2007).	Bilateral negotiation and third-party mediation by state officials.	Two communities succeeded to obtain financial compensation after 5 years of struggle; the other three failed.
7.	Two conflicts with palm oil companies in Jambi and Riau, about profit-sharing and about land taken without consent (Dhiaulhaq et. al. 2014).	Both communities used third party mediation by an NGO.	Both communities succeeded in obtaining ‘plasma’, i.e. profit-sharing.
8.	Three conflicts involving palm oil plantations and a tree plantations company, concerning demands for joint-venture scheme (*plasma)* and a return of community land (Afrizal and Anderson 2016).	Two communities use bilateral negotiation and one community used RSPO’s mechanism.	One community successfully recovered some of their land as well as profit sharing, while the other two communities failed.
9.	An *adat* community in Riau Province demanded the return of land from oil palm company PT. CRS (Afrizal 2015).	Bilateral negotiation, third party mediation by state officials and an NGO, supported by RSPO.	Community managed to reclaim 225 ha of the demanded 400 ha after 7 years of struggle.

(*Continued*)

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Table 2: (*Continued.*)

No	Case (Publication)	Resolution Mechanisms	Outcomes
10.	Two communities in Sulawesi tried to reclaim their land from PT Lonsum using *adat*-based claims (Muur 2018).	Bilateral negotiation and lobbying the local government.	One community successfully used informal ties with officials to obtain land, whereas the other community failed.
11.	Four cases in Riau, Jambi, and West Kalimantan of villages asking return of land, access to plantation and profit-sharing (Dhiaulhaq, McCarthy, and Yasmi 2018).	After bilateral negotiation all villages engaged in mediation led by NGOs.	The NGO-led mediation led to beneficial outcomes in all four cases.
12.	Three conflicts in Sanggau District of West Kalimantan involving three palm oil companies, triggered by demands for project sharing and a refusal to give up land (Sirait 2009).	All three involved bilateral negotiations as well as mediation by state officials.	In the end the companies took the land, but people of two villages obtained some profits through *saham* (share) scheme, while the third obtained plasma land.
13.	Seven conflicts across Indonesia involving *adat* communities demanding compensation and return of land from palm oil companies (Colchester and Chao 2013).	These cases involved RSPO, bilateral negotiations as well as facilitation by non-state actors.	None of the conflicts had led to an agreement or solution at the time of writing.
14.	Two *adat* communities in Mesuji, Lampung demanded the return of customary land taken without consent by oil palm company Silva Inhutani and pt. BSMI (Susan 2015).	Third-party facilitation by state-officials, court-case.	Despite considerable violence no resolution in both cases.
15	Since 2003, an indigenous group called Suku Anak Dalam tried to recover 3550 hectares of customary land from a palm oil company (IPAC 2014).	Bilateral negotiations and mediation by NGO.	Despite company promises, the land was not returned to the community and protests are ongoing.
16.	Seven villagers in West Kalimantan demand oil palm company Sintang Raya to return their land and implement promised profit-sharing (IPAC 2016).	Negotiations and court-case.	Supreme Court ruled in favour of community, but as company and BPN refused to implement ruling the case remains unresolved.

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Yet this reliance on third-party mediation by local authorities does not seem to be very effective. In Table 2 we also tried to summarize the outcomes of these conflicts as reported in the publications. While such a summary of (often) very complex cases is quite rough, our review suggests that of the 38 conflicts discussed in these 16 studies, only 16 conflicts led to favorable outcomes for communities. While communities rarely fully achieved their aims, in the 16 cases they booked at least partial successes, such as recovering some land, enforcing the implementing of a profit-sharing scheme (i.e. plasma), getting jobs or financial contributions to community services and, in one rare case (the Jenggawah case described in both Azhar 1999 and Hafid 2001) actually obtaining formal land title. The 22 other conflicts discussed in these studies did not yield any beneficial outcome for communities, while there seem to be no salient differences between provinces. The record of local authorities in solving conflicts is mixed: in some cases they help communities achieve successes, but most other cases they did not. Another striking finding is that *adat* communities employing a discourse of communal land rights are not particularly successful. In contrast, a more important success factor seems to be the involvement of NGOs as independent third-party mediators, as our selection includes three studies (Afrizal 2015; Dhiaulhaq et al. 2014; Dhiaulhaq, McCarthy, and Yasmi 2018) that discuss seven cases that were resolved through such mediation.

It might seem quite hopeful and reassuring that communities did achieve something in almost half of the studied cases. Yet, as mentioned, some of these cases were studied precisely because they were famous victories. Furthermore, once we read into the details of the conflict resolution process, this statistic loses some of its shine as even the community victories cannot really be attributed to the effectiveness of conflict resolution mechanisms. Firstly, the success-cases seem somewhat a-typical. The big community wins described in the studies of, for example, Hafid (2001), Azhar (1999) and Bachriadi and Lucas (2001) stem from the early years after the fall of Suharto, and their resolution seemed to have relied on a combination of community activism and effective lobbying of the (central) government. Their resolution involved a very long struggle: for example, in the case of the community in Jenggawah described by both Hafid and Azhar, it took 21 years, which is actually not uncommon as the resolution of other successful cases took between three and 20 years (e.g. Dhiaulhaq, McCarthy, and Yasmi 2018).

In that light it bears pointing out that these success cases are actually somewhat similar to the unsolved conflicts in the sense that these conflicts are rarely settled on the basis of a straightforward application of formal procedures or laws. Instead the outcomes of these conflicts seem to depend more strongly on the availability of informal connections and the bargaining position of communities. The successful communities did not achieve their successes because they had a stronger legal claim, or because of a victory in court. Rather, their success depended on their superior connections to both local or, in the Jenggawah case, national authorities. In that sense the 'success cases' in Jenggawah, Tapos, and Cimacan actually give little cause for celebration, because they show the incapacity of formal mechanisms—such as the courts—to address these conflicts. Communities do not win (or lose) because they are 'right' but rather because they developed a stronger bargaining position, a conclusion dramatically illustrated by the case of PT Sintang Raya where even a victory in the

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supreme court yielded no concrete results (IPAC 2016). Informality often works to the detriment of communities: in the unsuccessful cases the communities lacked the informal connections or pressure points to enlist the support of local and national authorities, while they were facing companies who often did have such connections. It is striking that in these cases authorities were happy to listen to grievances in numerous hearings and field visits, but they seemed very reluctant to actually act. Despite sometimes quite blatant violations, parliamentarians and regional government heads often seemed unwilling to take on the companies themselves.

In that light it appears somewhat ominous that communities appear to be much less successful in more recent studies. This pattern suggests that local authorities have become much less responsive and active in solving conflicts. As these studies also report that communities mainly rely on the facilitation or mediation provided by these local authorities to solve conflicts, it is worrying that these studies regularly quote informants saying that they feel that district heads or parliament members are "in the pocket of" companies. Returning to our earlier observation about the impact of Indonesia's political economy, it seems to us that the need to fund expensive election campaigns has driven politicians into the arms of natural resource and plantation companies. These companies are happy to fund the campaigns of politicians, as such campaign contributions are an effective means to ensure that politicians will help to arrange permits and, if need be, ignore or even actively suppress community protests (see Aspinall and Berenschot 2019). This collusion between companies and politicians seems to have become more intense since the institution of direct elections for district heads and governors in 2004, since these elections have helped to raise the costs of election campaigns. As these elections unfold in local economies that are heavily dependent on natural resource extraction, ambitious politicians often can hardly afford to make deals with companies as they lack alternative sources of campaign funding. In that sense the institution of direct elections in 2004 may have weakened rather than strengthened the bargaining position of communities, since these direct elections have greatly increased campaign expenditures and, hence, the lure of collusive deals with companies. The effect of this collusion is to make rural resistance in Indonesia even more "rightless," as the informal exchanges of favors between business actors, politicians and bureaucrats is undermining the rule of law: as companies can use their connections to state authorities to circumvent the application of onerous laws and regulations, affected communities have gained the impression that the invocation of state laws and policies relatively useless as a means of addressing conflicts. The resulting distrust of state laws and formal institutions such as the police and the courts constitutes an important reason that rural Indonesians are not invoking their citizen rights nor rely on formal institutions to address land-use change conflicts.

The major drawback of this kind of rightless resistance employed in rural Indonesia is that it seems to undermine a broader mobilization aimed at strengthening citizen rights. A striking feature of these various studies is that the wide range of efforts of communities geared at obtaining better deals from companies does not (or rarely, see Sirait 2009) seem to translate into (or link up with) larger campaigns (such as those of national NGOs such as AMAN or KPA) to change the state laws and regulations (such as those limiting the land rights of rural

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Indonesians) that helped generate these conflicts. Nor do communities seem to aim at changing corporate policies. The reviewed studies suggest that informants rarely expressed such more policy-oriented concerns as communities seem fully preoccupied with extracting piece-meal concessions from "their" company. Interpreting this finding, it seems that a vicious circle is at work here: the relative irrelevance of state laws and formal institutions is discouraging citizens from actually using these laws and the associated citizen rights to address conflicts, which in turn prevents citizens from putting pressure on state institutions to improve these laws to make citizen rights more effective. In other words, these "rightless" strategies to resist dispossession seems to prevent the emergence of more concerted resistance to rightlessness.

Conclusion

In many parts of the world rural communities are resisting the corporate "land grabbing" accompanying land-use change processes. Yet the comparative study of such conflicts remains starkly underdeveloped. While some authors explicitly invite comparative analysis (e.g. Levien 2018) and recently some progress is made (see Ong 2020), the available overview studies (e.g. Hall et al. 2015; Borras and Franco 2013) mainly focus on identifying the general features of such conflicts, with little attention for how historical, legal, and social conditions generate variation in the trajectories and outcomes of land-use change conflicts. In this essay we have endeavored to identify salient characteristics of the conflict strategies of communities in Indonesia in order to foster such a comparative analysis. In this vein we highlighted how, compared to studies on land conflicts elsewhere, the reviewed studies on land-use change conflicts in Indonesia describe a form of anti-corporate activism in rural Indonesia marked by a remarkable irrelevance of laws, regulations, and courts. We attributed this "rightless" character of community strategies to the weak legal protection of land rights in Indonesia and the relative powerlessness of communities in the face of collusion between authorities and companies.

In that light a particularly relevant and promising avenue for the comparative study of land conflicts concerns the political economies of politico-business collusion and their impact on trajectories of land-use change conflicts. In Indonesia a history of crony capitalism (Robison 2009) and the dependence of its economy on natural resource extraction (see Gellert 2020) has made the embrace between political and economic elites particularly tight, thereby limiting the chances for rural communities to get state institutions on their side. Such partiality of state institutions is not a universal feature of land-use change conflicts: in India, for example, communities seem more successful in pressuring politicians (see Levien 2018) while more independent courts seem more likely to help communities in Malaysia (see Aiken and Leigh 2011) and, as we mentioned earlier, communities seem more likely to successfully invoke legal provisions in Vietnam and China. In comparison with these countries, it seems that in Indonesia such avenues are less effective due to the particularly tight, highly collusive interdependencies between political and economic elites. Such a proposition implies that comparative attention for prevailing configurations of politics–business interaction can explain such striking differences between countries. With (the methodology developed in) this essay we have aimed to facilitate such

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comparative assessments. More comparative research is needed to understand why, while land-use change processes pose challenges to rural communities around the globe, the scope for effective resistance differs markedly.

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