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# Rescaling of Access and Property Relations in a Frontier Landscape: Insights from Jambi, Indonesia

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The recent expansion of protected areas and oil palm plantations in Jambi (Sumatra), Indonesia, has been notably disruptive. This article investigates the scalar dimensions of land conflicts within a privately managed conservation area. We built on qualitative research focusing on struggles related to the formation of two informal settlements within the conservation area. Results indicate that, especially in the context of rapid rescaling (e.g., decentralization), new power constellations emerge, thereby altering preexisting property relations. We argue that competing scales of meaning and regulation are structuring the ability of actors to access land and, consequently, reflect tensions between structure and agency. **Key Words:** land conflicts, conservation, Indonesia, politics of scale, property relations.

印度尼西亚 (苏门答腊) 占碑中, 保存区和油棕农场于晚近的扩张, 已相当具有破坏性。本文检视一个私人管理的保存区中, 土地冲突的尺度面向。我们的研究, 以聚焦关乎保存区内两座非正式居住地形成的斗争之质性研究为基础。研究结果显示, 特别是在快速再尺度化的脉络中 (例如去中心化), 浮现出新的权力配置, 因而改变了既存的产权关系。我们主张, 意义与规范的尺度竞争, 正在结构化行动者获致土地的能力, 并因此反映出结构与行动者之间的紧张关系。 **关键词:** 土地冲突, 保存, 印度尼西亚, 尺度政治, 产权关系。

La reciente expansión de áreas protegidas y de plantaciones de palma de aceite en Jambi (Sumatra), Indonesia, ha sido notoriamente perturbadora. Este artículo investiga las dimensiones escalares de conflictos de la tierra dentro de un área de conservación administrada privadamente. Construimos conocimiento a partir de las bases de la investigación cualitativa, enfocándonos en contendas relacionadas con la formación de dos asentamientos informales dentro del área de conservación. Los resultados indican que, especialmente en el contexto de rápido rediseño de la escala (e.g., descentralización), emergen nuevas constelaciones de poder, alterando consiguientemente las relaciones preexistentes sobre la propiedad. Sostenemos que las escalas de significado y regulación que entran en competencia están estructurando la capacidad de los actores de acceso a la tierra y, consecuentemente, reflejan las tensiones entre estructura y agencia. **Palabras clave:** conflictos por la tierra, conservación, Indonesia, política de escala, relaciones de la propiedad.

**C**limate change and the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) mechanisms have opened new windows of opportunity for forest conservation in Indonesia. The country

increasingly seeks to position itself as a global leader in REDD+ (Finlayson 2014) to attract international investments in forest conservation. But Indonesia's forest landscapes have not only been metaphors for

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proactive conservation; they have also been metaphors for timber extraction, mining, oil palm development, and conflict (Peluso 1992; Tsing 2005; Fold and Hirsch 2009). Multiple disruptive frontiers had been constructed by state-sponsored settlement schemes; logging, mining, and agribusiness companies; and by millions of smallholders following boom-and-bust cycles of cash crops (Ruf 1995; Tsing 2005; Fold and Hirsch 2009). In Indonesia and all over the world, frontiers had been constructed as “empty spaces” (Fold and Hirsch 2009, 95) ignoring the presence of local communities and their customary forms of using and governing forests. Frontiers are transitional spaces where political authorities and social and environmental relations (Fold and Hirsch 2009; Peluso and Lund 2011) “of the recent past are currently being challenged by new enclosures, territorializations and property regimes” (Peluso and Lund 2011, 668).

In Jambi province and in other parts of Sumatra, the expansion of the oil palm frontier has been created through multiple policy narratives depicting the “emptiness” of forests and the “backwardness” of older land-use practices, such as rubber-fruit tree agroforestry (“jungle rubber”) and shifting cultivation (McCarthy and Cramb 2009, 113). In Jambi, the area used for oil palm cultivation increased from 44,000 ha in 1990 to 490,151 ha in 2010 (McCarthy and Cramb 2009; Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Jambi 2011). Jambi’s transformation into an oil palm frontier is notably disruptive, as Indonesian forest law recognizes customary land only in a limited way (McCarthy 2007; Bakker and Moniaga 2010).

In the period of political turmoil after the fall of President Suharto in the late 1990s, decentralization and democratization posed significant challenges to the autocratic frontier development policies (McCarthy 2007; Peluso, Afiff, and Rachman 2008). Local actors supported by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and peasant organizations such as Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI) started to reclaim authority over former customary land and began occupying corporate plantations and the state forest, altering the politics of scale of access and property (von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann 2001; Moeliono and Dermawan 2006; McCarthy 2007; Peluso, Afiff, and Rachman 2008; Caouette and Turner 2009). In this article, we built on a process-based definition of scale. In accordance with Swyngedouw (2010), we define socioecological scales as manifestations of power relations and as the outcome of sociospatial processes and environmental dynamics.

Frontier transformation in Jambi is a conflictive and contradictory process. In particular, the rapid expansion of smallholders and corporate oil palm plantations and the simultaneous expansion of protected areas have been conflictive and contradictory. Preexisting land-use practices such as jungle rubber, shifting cultivation and logging, and preexisting legal orders (e.g., customary law) are still inscribed in the landscape but are increasingly being challenged by corporate actors running oil palm plantations and private conservation projects. To achieve their

interests, actors draw on different policy narratives (e.g., resource conservation vs. resource exploitation) and different legal orders (e.g., customary law vs. state law) and establish links to political authorities on different political scales.

We argue that the plurality and ambivalence of land tenure systems, multiple competing policy narratives and scales (e.g., REDD+, the national resettlement program Transmigration and village institutions), and ongoing rescaling processes are inscribed into Jambi’s present-day frontier.

This article uses a multisited qualitative approach to analyze the politics of scale of land conflicts involving the conservation company Restorasi Ekosistem Indonesia (REKI), indigenous communities, and migrants. We seek to illustrate dialectical tensions between scale and agency that become visible by investigating the formation of two informal settlements established prior to the implementation of the Harapan Rainforest conservation project of REKI. The ongoing struggles over the two settlements represent current examples of how historically rooted structural inequalities could undermine transnational conservation efforts and how alleged local conflicts on access and property are linked to global debates on REDD+ and climate justice.

The settlements attract smallholders from Java and other parts of Sumatra who convert forests for staple crops, rubber, and increasingly for oil palm cultivation. The first case we investigate is Transwakarsa Mandiri (TSM), in reference to the national resettlement program Transmigration. It was established by village heads, customary leaders, and migrants. The second case, the settlement of Sungai Jerad, was implemented by SPI, which is a member of the transnational peasant organization La Via Campesina. SPI argues actively for pro-poor land reform and organizes land occupations of the state forest and corporate lands.

## **Toward a Politics of Scale of Conflictive Access and Property Relations**

The conceptual framework of this article builds on the politics of scale and on the access and property literature. Socioecological scales reflect the dialectic between structure and agency, and scales are shaped by actors, at the same time structuring the social practices of actors (Marston 2000; Towers 2000). Towers (2000) distinguished between the scales of meaning and the scales of regulation that structure landscapes. Scales of meaning define the essence of a landscape. Different actors might construct different and overlapping scales of meaning within the same physical space. Conservationists, for instance, might point out the particularities of a specific landscape—for example, a habitat of the endangered Sumatran tiger or the carbon storage capacity of peat swamp forest—and, consequently, create a new scale of meaning. In contrast, indigenous groups construct scales of meaning based on their ancestral lands that offer alternative

boundaries for legitimizing their presence in a landscape. Scales of regulation are defined as social spatial entities (e.g., jurisdictions) with a specific institutional setting—in other words, with a specific legal order. Picking up the conservationists' example again, if conservation campaigns are successful in establishing a reserve for protecting the Sumatran tiger, the established scale of meaning might be complemented by a new scale of regulation. The new conservation scale generated excludes actors and might challenge preexisting scales of meaning and regulation (Zimmerer 2000; Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011; Cohen and McCarthy 2015). Socioecological rescaling processes, for example, through the decentralization of forest governance and the implementation of protected areas, “shape in important ways who will have access to what kind of nature” (Swyngedouw 2010, 12).

To conceptualize the access, property, and authority nexus, we draw on the work of Ribot and Peluso (2003), “A Theory of Access,” and from the work of Sikor and Lund (2009), which mainly presents conceptual thoughts on the relationship between property and authority. *Access* refers to the ability of different actors “to benefit from things including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols” (Ribot and Peluso 2003, 155). Property is right-based access (Ribot and Peluso 2003), recognized by actors and enforced by political authorities that have the legitimacy to do so (Lund 2008). According to Sikor and Lund (2009), authorities can be considered as legitimate “if their interpretation of social norms is heeded” (1) by other social actors.

In many frontier landscapes, different political authorities with varying capacities, ranges of legitimacy, or preexisting authorities and newer ones compete with each other (Tsing 2005; Fold and Hirsch 2009; Peluso and Lund 2011). They seek to constitute different—and often competing—rights as property (Sikor and Lund 2009; von Benda-Beckmann, von Benda-Beckmann, and Wiber 2009). Authorities governing forests and land exist on different government levels and consequently create different—and sometimes overlapping—scales of regulation. Actors engaging with authorities, such as village governments or national land agencies, actively re-create scales of regulation. Actors might have the ability to circumvent political authorities that are not acting in line with their objectives. To legitimize land claims as property, they might need to use higher or lower scales of regulation or, in Smith's (2008, 232) words, they might need to “jump scales” to access a political authority that supports their interests (Zulu 2009).

## Methods and Study Site

The province of Jambi is located in the south-central part of the island of Sumatra (Figure 1). The conservation project of REKI, known as Harapan Rainforest, is located in the districts of Batang Hari and

Sarolangun (parts are claimed by the district of Muaro Jambi as well) and in the neighboring province of South Sumatra. The Indonesian REDD+ agency lists the Harapan Rainforest as a REDD+ demonstration project (Badan Pengelola REDD+ 2015). REKI, the conservation company running the project, is owned by a transnational NGO consortium consisting of Birdlife International, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and Burung Indonesia. It has received funding from, among others, the German International Climate Initiative, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Singapore Airlines.

REKI holds a 100,000 ha ecosystem restoration concession (ERC) within the state forest for running the project. The ERC permits generating income from nontimber forest products, ecotourism, and ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration (REDD+). The ERC overlaps with the customary territory of the indigenous Batin Sembilan and with the informal settlements of TSM and Sungai Jerad (Figure 1D). REKI received the ERC in Jambi in 2010, a few years after the informal settlements were formed. The first case we analyze, TSM, is part of Bungku village. Conflicts between settlers and REKI emerged shortly after the project started. Bungku, with its 10,215 inhabitants, dates back to a resettlement scheme from the early 1970s (Beckert, Dittrich, and Adiwibowo 2014). The second case we analyze, Sungai Jerad, is part of Tanjung Lebar. Tanjung Lebar officially has 2,876 inhabitants (Polsek Sungai Bahar 2011) and was founded in precolonial times (Figure 1A). In both villages, mainly peasant farmers cultivate rubber and oil palm or practice shifting cultivation illegally within the state forest. Shifting cultivation, oil palm cultivation, and other agricultural activities within the state forest are illegal, according to the forest law 1999/41, whereas rubber cultivation requires a permit from the Ministry of Forestry (MOF), which is almost impossible for local communities to access (personal communication with staff of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit [GIZ] in Jakarta, 24 July 2012; Greenpeace Indonesia activist in Jakarta, 27 July 2012; Forest Watch activist in Bogor, 20 July 2012; Hein 2013).

To investigate the politics of scale of land conflicts, this research followed a multisited qualitative approach (Marcus 1995). We followed the transnational networks established by actors involved in, or affected by, the Harapan Rainforest project. On the local level (village and project level), we limited our investigation to the Jambi part of the Harapan Rainforest. We conducted seventy semistructured interviews between May 2012 and October 2013 with members of indigenous communities, migrants, village leaders, and staff members of REKI, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), state agencies, and donors. Semistructured interview guides were used to identify, for example, modes of land access, land use, and regulations and to gain background information on the

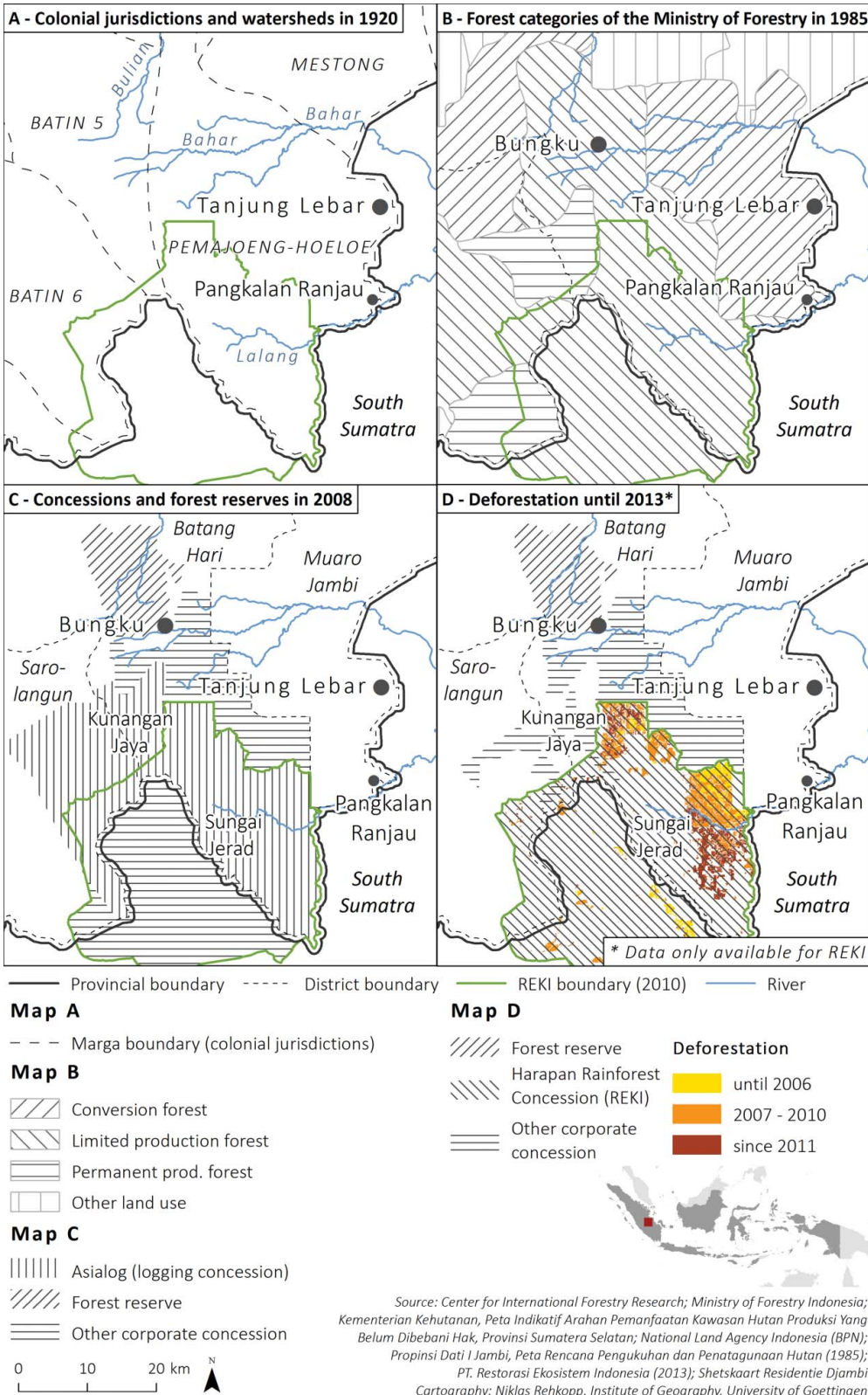


Figure 1 Different thematic maps of the Harapan Rainforest and its surroundings. (Color figure available online.)

history of the landscape. The majority of the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded with the support of field assistants from the University of Jambi and the Agricultural University of Bogor.

## Results

In this section we describe sociospatial rescaling and historical roots of land conflicts at Jambi's oil palm frontier. Furthermore, we analyze two different cases of informal settlement formation (Figures 1C, 1D). Both cases represent differing access, property, and scale relations. The TSM case represents a locally driven imitation of the national Transmigration resettlement program. The second case, Sungai Jerad, represents a settlement organized by SPI. The settlement is part of the organization's multiscalar strategy to promote pro-poor land reform through organized land occupations, urban protests for legislative reforms, and transnational campaigns for food sovereignty and climate justice (Vu 2009; Hein and Faust 2014).

### *Spatial Rescaling and Historical Roots of Land Conflicts*

Since precolonial times, the border region between the former sultanates of Jambi and Palembang (today South Sumatra) has been the home of seminomadic tribes (Hagen 1908). The Batin Sembilan groups living in and adjacent to the Harapan Rainforest trace their origins back to these groups (Steinebach 2013). A few existing settlements of the Batin Sembilan, such as the hamlet of Pangkalan Ranjau (Figure 1A), confirm their precolonial presence in the area (Hagen 1908). According to oral history, different lineages of the Batin Sembilan controlled the landscapes close to the upper courses of the Bulian, Bahar, and Lalang rivers and their tributaries (Figure 1A; personal communication, customary leader and member of the village government in Bungku, 12 September 2012). Each lineage controlled a subwatershed and the adjacent forests, permitting only members to establish fruit gardens and dry rice fields (personal communication with customary leader and member of the village government in Bungku, 12 September 2012). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Dutch took control, introduced rubber cultivation, and imposed new jurisdictional boundaries (Figure 1A; Sevin and Benoit 1993; Locher-Scholten 2004). The Dutch also sought to settle and to "civilize" the native population, therefore challenging the watershed as a relevant scale of regulation (Hagen 1908; Steinebach 2013).

After independence, Suharto's New Order regime (1967–1998) changed the region fundamentally. During the nationalization and privatization of forest management in the 1970s and 1980s, almost the entire region was classified as state forest area (Figure 1B). To fight

"backwardness" and "unproductiveness," the central government allocated large forest areas claimed by the Batin Sembilan to logging and oil palm companies. It also allocated large forest areas through the state-sponsored transmigration resettlement program to mainly Javanese farmers. Settlement policies for Batin Sembilan groups, such as the program for "underdeveloped villages" (*Impress Desa Tertinggal*), provided only very limited land for agriculture (personal communication, former member of the village governments of Tanjung Lebar, 27 July 2013, and Bungku, 8 September 2012). Any protests against national land allocation policies were suppressed using police and military force (Peluso, Afiff, and Rachman 2008; Steinebach 2013).

Furthermore, law No. 05/1979 on village governance imposed the Javanese village governance system and established villages (*desa*), hamlets (*dusun*), and neighborhoods (*rukun tetangga*) as new scales of regulation, further undermining the former watershed-related governance system and the role of customary authorities. In the course of the establishment of plantation estates and settlements for transmigrants, many Batin Sembilan were displaced and lost access to fruit and rubber gardens, and to forests for hunting and shifting cultivation (personal communication, Batin Sembilan in Bungku, 21 September 2012).

By the end of 1998, as in other parts of the Archipelago, political turmoil, decentralization, and democratization induced the most recent and conflictive rescaling processes that have been ongoing in the region. District heads (*Bupati*), village heads (*Kepala Desa*), and customary leaders took advantage of the confusion, interpreting the reforms to their advantage and asserting far-reaching administrative authority over forests (Barr et al. 2006). During the same period, peasant movements in Indonesia gained ground, fighting for land rights and organizing occupations of corporate plantations and the state forest (Peluso, Afiff, and Rachman 2008; Vu 2009). Founded in 1998 in North Sumatra, SPI has a strong presence in Jambi, is one of the largest Indonesian peasant organizations, and has well-established transnational support networks.

Within the areas in and around today's Harapan Rainforest, customary leaders of the Batin Sembilan increasingly began using the extra leeway for reestablishing their former customary land as a relevant scale of meaning and regulation. Batin Sembilan elites started to collaborate with peasant organizations and—together with migrants from other provinces, including Java—adopted their land-use practices (e.g., oil palm cultivation) and began allocating the forests of the 67,000 ha concession of Asialog (abandoned since 2003; Figure 1C) to arriving migrants. Interethnic marriages gained importance to form strategic alliances between Batin Sembilan elites and migrants. They enhanced the social status of the Batin Sembilan and provided migrants access to land and natural resources. The allocation of land to migrants can be considered an active spatial strategy of the Batin

Sembilan elite to regain authority over forest land and to defend their customary land claims within the state forest. Heads of the formal village governments—in most cases Batin Sembilan, or at least individuals with strong kinship ties to Batin Sembilan—legitimated the land transactions by issuing village-level land titles. By issuing village land titles within the state forest, village governments expanded their competences formally and spatially (personal communication farmer in Bungku, 25 August 2013; member of the village government in Bungku, 9 September 2012).

In 2010, the MOF turned the abandoned logging concession of Asialog into an ERC that denied the existence of settlements and farmland and assigned the area to the conservation company REKI (Figures 1C, 1D). The legal basis for the ERC and the issuance of the concession by the MOF was very much the result of lobbying activities by REKI's owners, particularly Burung Indonesia (personal communication, staff of the NGO Burung Indonesia in Bogor, 11 October 2012, and staff of the company Carbon Synthesis in Jakarta, 11 October 2012; Hein 2013). Burung Indonesia was able to alter the existing regulatory frameworks to provide a legal opportunity to implement private conservation projects within the state forest. By developing new conservation regulations and conducting border demarcations, tree inventories, and law enforcement, the Harapan Rainforest REKI seeks to create a new scale of meaning—linking local conservation to global threats such as biodiversity loss and climate change—and to establish the project area as a new scale of regulation. Batin Sembilan and migrant groups supported by SPI and others sought to resist turning the Harapan Rainforest into a confused and contested arena.

#### *Development Narratives Revisited: Informal Land Occupations*

After Asialog stopped its logging activities in 2003 and before the Harapan Rainforest project started in 2010, a number of informal but organized settlements were established within the borders of today's Harapan Rainforest (Figures 1C, 1D). The establishment of the settlements was facilitated by coalitions between Batin Sembilan elites, members of village governments, and mainly Javanese migrants supported by local investors, members of district and subdistrict governments, and peasant organizations such as SPI (cf. Silalahi and Erwin 2013).

The actor coalitions actively reproduced the development narratives of the New Order regime to justify forest conversion and the formation of informal settlements within the state forest. In our interviews, actors emphasized that the settlements aimed to provide land for landless migrants and agricultural extension services for poor Batin Sembilan families to support them in overcoming “backwardness” and to achieve “development” (personal communications, farmers living in the TSM settlement in Bungku, 9 September 2012 and 10 July 2013; in Bungku, with members of the

village government, 7 July 2013 and 9 July 2013; and farmers living in the TSM settlement in Bungku, 10 July 2013 and 25 August 2013). The informal settlement projects mostly provided land for smallholders. Regulations developed by Batin Sembilan elites, village governments, and Javanese migrants limit the maximum amount of land per household and stipulate that direct replanting must occur after forest conversion (personal communication, farmers living in the TSM settlement in Bungku, 10 July 2013). According to a land survey conducted by REKI in one of the settlements, 80 percent of the settlers own less than 5 ha of land (REKI 2011). In interviews, REKI staff and smallholders reported that private investors from Jambi city and even Jakarta possess up to 300 ha that employ up to sixty daily laborers for oil palm cultivation within the Harapan Rainforest in violation of the local rules (personal communication, REKI staff in Jambi City, 2 September 2012, and farmer living in the TSM settlement in Bungku, 9 September 2012).

#### *The Case of Transwakarsa Mandiri*

The settlement project TSM started in 2003. The project can be traced back to an agreement between a Javanese teacher named Pak Kumis (fictitious name), a local customary leader, and a former village head of Bungku (personal communication, Batin Sembilan elder in Bungku, 24 August 2013). The former village head of Bungku claims to represent village and customary authority by arguing that his family has Malay and Batin Sembilan roots and that they are descendants of a customary leader who controlled the forests along a Bahar River tributary in precolonial times. In addition, Pak Kumis (personal communication, Bungku, 9 September 2012) claimed that he received a permit from the district head to establish a farming group and to convert forest into rubber plantations within the former concession of Asialog.

To access land, migrants had to pay a “development fee” of approximately 700,000 to 1,000,000 Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) per hectare (equivalent to US\$55–80; personal communication, farmer living in the TSM settlement in Bungku, 23 August 2013). The development fee contributed to the construction of public infrastructure (e.g., roads, schools, generators) and to the construction of wooden houses for poor Batin Sembilan households (personal communication, Pak Kumis in Bungku, 9 September 2012, and 10 July 2013; neighborhood head in Bungku, 10 July 2013). According to the regulations of Pak Kumis, each household was allowed to convert a maximum amount of 5.25 ha of forest for agricultural use. The village government of Bungku legalized the settlement by issuing residential permits (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk*) and accepting the settlement as an official neighborhood (*Rukun Tetangga*). To legalize individual land claims, the village government issued village-level land titles. Village-level land titles are accepted at the

village scale but are not fully recognized by the National Land Agency. Yet they are a necessary document for getting land certified by the agency. Some banks accept village titles as collateral (personal communication, farmer in Bungku, 13 September 2012, and member of the village government in Bungku, 10 September 2012). De facto legalization of forest conversion and settlement formation was provided by the Agricultural Agency of the district of Batang Hari. The agency supported the members of the settlement with fertilizer, soy, and corn seeds. Both soy and corn cultivation are—according to the forest law—not permitted within the state forest (personal communication, activist of the NGO Yayasan CAPP in Jambi City, 18 July 2013; cf. Steinebach forthcoming).

The use of village-level land titles and the successful attempt to gain further legitimation by receiving agricultural extension services from the Agricultural Agency of the district of Batang Hari can be considered as active scale-jumping strategies of local actors (Smith 2008). Given that it is almost impossible for smallholders or communities to receive formal land-use permits from the MOF, smallholders jumped to the authorities on the lower district and village scale to circumvent structural inequalities (Zulu 2009).

REKI is questioning the land rights of the settlers, stressing that it has the only legally binding permit issued by the MOF as a national authority, while reproducing the state forest as a relevant scale of regulation. According to interviewed settlers, REKI sought to relocate the settlers and to enforce conservation regulations with the support of the forest police and the mobile police brigade (personal communication, participants of TSM project in Bungku, 9 September 2012, 10 July 2013, and 25 August 2013). In 2012 REKI started conflict mediation with the settlers. The parties agreed on twenty rules, including those that prohibit land trade, land swap, additional forest conversion, commercial logging, and new oil palm plantings (Kesepakatan Terhadap Prasyarat Mediasi Antara PT. REKI Dengan Warga RT 11 2012). The mediation process included a participatory land survey conducted jointly by the district and provincial forest services, the MOF, settlers, and REKI. The negotiated rules and the survey can be regarded as de facto conditional land tenure agreements between REKI and the TSM community.

#### *The Case of Sungai Jerad and SPI*

The SPI settlement, Sungai Jerad, has a size of 2,500 ha (Figure 1D) and dates back to an agreement from 2007 between the head of the hamlet of Pangkalan Ranjau and SPI members (personal communication, SPI members in Tanjung Lebar, 20 July 2013). To access land, SPI jumped to a lower scale, the hamlet scale, to circumvent the MOF, as TSM settlers had done. The settlement has a complex institutional structure established by SPI, thereby producing the settlement as a new scale of regulation. To access land,

smallholders have to hold a residence permit issued by the village government of Tanjung Lebar, should become SPI members, should be landless (which is, of course, hard to verify), and have to pay a “land measurement fee” of at least 300,000 IDR (equivalent to US\$25) per ha to SPI (personal communication, local SPI leader in Tanjung Lebar, 20 July 2013). SPI permits a maximum land size of up to 6 ha per household, depending on the size of the household. SPI leaders stated that a basic rule for all settlements are the three Ts (*tebang, tanam, tumbuh*), literally meaning logging, planting, and growing (personal communication, local SPI leader in Tanjung Lebar, 20 July 2013 and 21 July 2013; SPI leaders in Jambi City, 12 July 2013, and Jakarta, 20 June 2013). Oil palm cultivation is not allowed within the settlement. The oil palm ban can be considered an attempt to show conformity with regulations of REKI and with global campaigns by La Via Campesina against biofuels. According to SPI leaders, settlers violating the oil palm ban will be expelled from the organization. Yet, especially REKI argues that oil palm cultivation is still an important driver of deforestation in the forests around Sungai Jerad, thereby questioning SPI’s oil palm ban.

The land conflict in the Sungai Jerad area has been notably violent. REKI and SPI accuse each other of kidnappings as well as the destruction of houses, trees, and plantations (personal communication, SPI members in Tanjung Lebar, 20 July 2013; SPI leader in Jambi City, 12 July 2013; and REKI staff in Bungku, 30 July 2013). During field work in 2013, the conflict was still ongoing and both parties had rejected mediation.

To legitimize its land claims, SPI refers to the citizenship rights of its members and the “social function” of land articulated in the Indonesian Basic Agrarian Law from 1960. As mentioned earlier, the settlement can also be considered part of a multiscale resistance strategy of SPI. At the local scale, the settlement provides essential benefits to SPI members (e.g., access to land), hence strengthening the attractiveness of the organization, and consequently its political mobilization potential. Nationally, the settlement is part of a larger resistance campaign against the land allocation policies of the MOF (personal communication, SPI leader in Jambi City, 12 July 2013); globally, the settlement can be considered part of the transnational campaigns by SPI and La Via Campesina against REDD+ and carbon offsetting (Hein and Faust 2014).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The construction of multiple disruptive frontiers and the specific historical causes of structural inequality differ among places but are, at the same time, common features in many tropical frontier zones hindering forest conservation (Fearnside 2008; Hall, Hirsch, and Li 2011; Hecht 2011; Kelly 2011; Rodriguez de Francisco 2013). Our investigation reveals that conflictive rescaling processes in frontier zones can only be understood by reflecting the specific local contexts. Land conflicts



between smallholders and conservationists are caused by competing political authorities constructing different and sometimes contradicting or competing scales of meaning and regulation legitimizing conflicting and sometimes mutual exclusive claims over forest land.

In Indonesia, colonization, nationalization, and democratization have changed the dialectical relationships between scalar structure and agency and consequently the abilities of actors to access land and property. The most recent sociospatial rescaling process induced by the fall of Suharto widened the agency of local political authorities. It has strengthened their positions within webs of power (Ribot and Peluso 2003), their ability to legitimize property rights, and therefore the momentum to occupy state forest land (cf. Peluso, Afiff, and Rachman 2008; Galudra et al. 2011; Steinebach 2013; Lukas 2014). Peasant movements such as SPI and local political authorities consider the occupation and conversion of state forest as a reasonable response to colonial and postcolonial politics of appropriation (Peluso, Afiff, and Rachman 2008; Lukas 2014).

As in other parts of the Indonesian archipelago, local political authorities in the research area referred to customary territories as preexisting scales of regulation to legitimize property claims (Wadley and Eilenberg 2005; Rhee 2009; Galudra et al. 2011; Steinebach 2013). Yet in the case of the TSM settlement, a specific actor coalition and specific scalar strategies facilitated settlement formation. Coalitions involved indigenous and village leaders, district agents, and migrants. Scale jumping was used to circumvent structural inequality and the construction of a new scale of meaning based on development narratives of the New Order period created legitimacy for the informal settlement.

Jambi's oil palm frontier is a space of "newly emerging social and environmental relations" (Fold and Hirsch 2009, 97) where different authorities and legal orders compete and new power constellations emerge (Peluso and Lund 2011). Contested scales of meaning such as rural development to fight against "backwardness" and privatized conservation for habitat protection are inscribed in the landscape and entangled with different social and environmental relations.

Our analysis documents that scale matters but also indicates that a politics of scale-based framework has its limits (Jessop, Brenner, and Jones 2008). Not all social relations are organized in a nested manner, as network relations proved to be relevant at the frontier as well. The actor coalition that established the Harapan Rainforest project and the coalitions of resistance that founded the informal settlements consist of vertical and horizontal linkages. Beyond this, the cases stand for a new type of transnationalized conservation conflicts. They are transnational in the sense that REKI is financed by European donors and private companies linking struggles over access and control of forests in the Global South to northern greenhouse gas emitters and consequently to questions of global climate justice.

We conclude that recent rescaling has widened the agency of marginalized actors. Ongoing attempts of NGOs and international organizations to establish a new global scale of forest regulation are again changing the dialectical relationships between structure and agency. Their social consequences are not yet conceivable. REDD+ negotiations provide voice (e.g., protests at climate conferences) and, at least theoretically, new legal opportunities (e.g., Cancun Safeguards) for marginalized actors. At the same time, a REDD+-induced expansion of protected areas could increase the potential for exclusion. Conflicts at Jambi's frontier provide evidence for a statement made by Kelly (2011) "that conservation by dispossession may actually threaten the environment more than it preserves it" (694). ■

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