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The Hybridity and Friction of Frontiers: the Lived Experiences of Smallholders in Pampang Dua

GEO 511 Master's Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines frontier dynamics in the village of Pampang Dua in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Drawing from political geography and frontier studies, this research conceptualizes frontiers as dynamic, contested and continuously remade spaces. At the center of the thesis stand the lived experiences of smallholders and other local actors as they move through the remaking of the oil-palm frontier. This remaking is brought about by state-led replanting programs and the introduction of bauxite mining.

For this thesis, qualitative field work was conducted in Pampang Dua, consisting of semi-structured interviews, informal conversations and observations. Feminist and decolonial approaches in knowledge production guide this thesis, with an emphasis on how situated knowledge, reflexivity and the agency of participants shape both frontier dynamics and the research process itself.

The findings in this thesis showcase that the frontier in Pampang Dua is characterized by hybridity and friction: Modernist and capitalistic regimes clash with Indigenous practices, land valuations and livelihood strategies. The local population actively participates in the frontier by engaging corporations, cooperatives and government actors. The entanglement of bauxite mining and oil palm frontier create a unique context in Pampang Dua. This thesis contributes to frontier scholarship by highlighting the complex and dynamic characteristics of a frontier which is made by both large and small actors, and how this in turn creates the highly specific situation in Pampang Dua. It presents local actors as important makers and unmakers of the frontier.

Keywords

Frontier, Palm Oil, Hybridity, Friction, Livelihood, Agency, Mining

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Content

Glossary

Adat	Customary laws practiced in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia
BHD	PT BHD Indonesia Group - Main Palm-oil production corporation
BLT	Social welfare program of the Indonesian government
BPDKPS	Oil Palm Plantation Fund Management Agency
CPM	Cooperasi Merah Putih
DSE	Palm-oil production corporation in Pampang Dua
Kantor Desa	Village office
Kapling	Plot on plantation, 2 hectares, can hold about 280 trees
KUD	Korperasi Unit Desa - Village farmer's cooperative
MPN	Mandara Prima Nusantara, an Indonesian mining corporation
NTT	East Nusa Tenggara, region in Indonesia
PIR-Trans	Development and Resettlement scheme launched in 1986
PTPN	PT Perkebunan Nusantara III - State plantation corporation
PT Visitama	Indonesian mining company operating around Pampang Dua
PSR	Peremajaan Sawit Rakyat - Government replanting program
MPN	Mandara Prima Nusantara - Mining company operating near Pampang Dua
UGM	University of Gajah Madah, Jogjakarta
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
UZH	University of Zurich
Warung	Shop, Kiosk

1. Introduction

Picture 1 a/b: Oil Palm Plantation Plot, Bauxite Mining Site (Source: Tobias Graf, April 2025, Meliau)

"I oppose bauxite mining… Don't disrupt our land. Pampung Dua should stay bauxite-free. We only plant oil palms here*."*[1]

"The mining plan will not damage the existing environment; it rather provides economic opportunity other than palm oil."[2]

These two quotes originate from local people in Pampang Dua, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. They display contrasting perspectives and living experiences. For one, bauxite mining was disruptive for the lands of his community, while palm plantations were not. For the other, the mining presents a further opportunity for economic development. Various forces were shaping the land, and the communities living on it were reacting to them differently. To analyze this specific issue in West Kalimantan, political geography utilizes the conceptualization of frontiers.

At the theoretical center of this thesis stand frontiers and their dynamics. Frontier spaces is a much-discussed topic in political geography: Across the globe, different, unique cases of frontiers have been analyzed and discussed (Bächtold et al., 2020; Eilenberg, 2014; Kelly &

[1] Interview with Smallholder Bang R., May 2025, Pampang Dua

[2] Speech of PT Visitama representative at Modas ritual, April 2025, Pampang Dua

Peluso, 2015; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018; Tsing, 2005). These analyses take place on smaller and bigger scales, delivering a broad understanding of frontier spaces. This has also led to various conceptualizations of what constitutes a frontier. This thesis would like to add to the discussion, by analyzing a specific frontier space in Indonesia.

Most basically, frontier spaces represent the discovery or invention of a new resource (de Jong et al., 2017; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). Expanding on this discovery, historical and contemporary authors have debated on different ways of conceptualizing the frontier. Linear progressions of frontiers through space and time (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018) were reworked into the absorption of the periphery (Bächtold et al., 2020; Barney, 2009; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018), with both ideas being understood as oversimplifying frontier dynamics by contemporary authors (Kaartinen, 2020; Peluso, 2017; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Tsing, 2003, 2005). This thesis engages with this debate, with the aim of having an analytical framework for a specific case of a frontier.

The focus of this thesis is a specific resource, namely palm-oil: Existing since the early 20th century, the palm-oil industry became key to the Indonesian economy in recent time (de Jong et al., 2017). Palm-oil is a resource linked to the global market, being exported for various use across the globe. Furthermore, since the 1970s, multinational corporations have come to Indonesia to exploit natural resources (de Jong et al., 2017; Hall, 2011; Lounela, 2015; Peluso, 2005; Tsing, 2003). These amongst other factors have perpetuated frontier dynamics across the Indonesian peninsula. Its importance and connection to the global market make it a resource entangled in different dynamics.

Geographically, the thesis centers around a case in West-Kalimantan: The island of Borneo is shared by the two states of Indonesia and Malaysia, creating a situation where frontier dynamics are entangled with militarization and territorialization processes (Eilenberg, 2014; Peluso, 2005). West-Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo, has historically been a frontier (Kaartinen, 2020). Additionally, West-Kalimantan is produced discursively in two ways: For one, it is seen as an area with pristine nature, untouched rainforest worth protecting. On the other hand, it is seen as undeveloped area, rich with resources which need to be extracted. These contradicting narratives create cases where conservation and extraction processes clash. Clearly, West-Kalimantan is a unique setting which needs to be studied further. Zooming in, this thesis wants to explore the community in Pampang Dua, which is located near the Kapuas River in the Sanggau Regency in West-Kalimantan.

Pampang Dua, and West-Kalimantan, deliver uniqueness to this case study: In the coming years, the concessions issued by the government to the palm-oil corporation will come to an end, and the oil-palms will need to be replanted (Semedi, 2014). A key question that can be raised at this juncture is how the people in Pampang Dua feel about the end of the concession and what their reaction could be. Also, the commercial lifespans of oil-palms, approximately a quarter century, are coming to an end, with the government promoting replanting programs. Both these aspects have sparked rumors and hopes for the local population, and could lead to remaking of the frontier and its dynamics (Sarma et al., 2023).

Another uniqueness which shaped the frontier dynamics and the community's navigation was the establishment of the bauxite mining industry in the region. The contrast between the mines and the plantations is reflected in the conversations I had with different people. The introduction of another resource led to an entanglement of frontiers into broader capitalist forces. The two frontiers connect, through which new dynamics established themselves, and the local community can experience this. Thus, in addition to the palm plantations, the impact of bauxite mining will be explored in this paper.

The main focus of this thesis are the lived experiences of people in the village of Pampang Dua. It explores how gender, class and social standing influence an individual's life in the frontier. It is important to note here, that while these individuals maybe subjects to frontier-making processes, they are not without agency (Kaartinen, 2020; Sarma et al., 2023; Semedi, 2014). Not only skill, but also personal social obligations such as family shapes each person's way through the frontier space. This thesis departs from the notion of people living in the frontier as passive subjects to one that centers on their perspectives and recognizes how they produce the frontier.

By highlighting people's perspectives and understandings, this thesis wants to amplify voices disregarded in general discourses. While discussions on global relations and capitalist dynamics are important as a foundation for this thesis, the perspectives of the people living in frontier spaces stands in the foreground. My interest is the lived experience of the people living in the oil-palm frontier (Goundar, 2025). With this, this research project wants to shift the focus towards understandings marginalized in western science, decolonizing knowledge production in the process (Peake & Sharp, 2024). It seeks to showcase different perceptions of the frontier spaces, by moving past a purely economic one: For smallholders in West-Kalimantan, the land is not only an economic asset, but holds the history of collective labor (Kaartinen, 2020;

Semedi, 2014). Such Landscapes hold different values. This thesis wants to highlight these values.

This thesis focuses on the navigation strategies of the community in Pampang Dua through the palm oil and mining frontiers. It explores how frontier societies live with and shape frontier dynamics. It answers the following research questions:

How do the smallholders of Pampang Dua navigate and negotiate the remaking of the palm-oil frontier and its dynamics?

- How do people understand and navigate the introduction of bauxite mining and the replanting of the oil-palm?
- How does the conversion of traditional and indigenous practices of the Dayak manifest in Pampang Dua?

1.1. Study Site

The following sections present the specific study site of this thesis, to give a clear context for the following analysis and discussion.

History of the Frontier around Pampang Dua

Pampang Dua is a village in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. In the 1970s, multinational corporations began to establish themselves in Kalimantan with the aim of exploiting natural resources (de Jong et al., 2017; Hall, 2011; Lounela, 2015; Peluso, 2005; Tsing, 2003). Engaging with the history of frontier spaces in Indonesia helps understand the processes that lead to the frontier dynamics in West Kalimantan today. With the promotion of privatization in the early 1990s, this establishment only increased. (Tsing, 2003). The passing of the Foreign Investment Law, various concessions such as cost free permits allowed foreign corporations to exploit uncontrolled (Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Lounela, 2015; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). The growing demand in gold, coal and biofuels lead to the establishment of new frontiers on the island (de Jong et al., 2017). The establishment of the palm oil industry represents a shift from these resource economies towards industrialized, governed agriculture (Kaartinen, 2020). In Jambi on the island of Sumatra, palm oil plantations have challenged existing, traditional land-use practices such as rubber production and shifting cultivation (Hein et al., 2016; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). So how did the push towards industrialized agriculture manifest around the village of Pampang Dua?

Before the establishment of palm plantations, the Sanggau Regency, of which Pampang Dua is a part, was dominated by the rubber tapping industry (Kaartinen, 2020). The indigenous Dayak population started to engage in rubber production in the 1950s, after Indonesia gained independency from both Dutch and Japanese occupiers and the resulting redistribution of land along ethnic lines (Kaartinen, 2020).

While in remote parts of the regency, rubber tapping persisted up until 2012 (Kaartinen, 2020), the production of palm oil had already started to established itself in Meliau, the subdistrict Pampang Dua was a part of: In the 1980s "Project Sanggau" was initiated, spearheaded by the state plantation corporation PTPN[3]. It consisted of the establishment of 18'000 ha of palm plantations (Li, 2015). The establishment of the nucleus-plasma estates trough so-called "transmigration" resettlement programs ushered in an era of industrialized agriculture in West Kalimantan (Kaartinen, 2020). In "Project Sanggau", the government proposed of bringing 4500 families from Java and Bali to tackle the "issue" of under-population and have smallholders to manage the land (Li, 2015).

In the village of Pampang Dua, this project manifested in 1991 through the "Nucleus Estate and Smallholder" (PIR-Trans) program[4]. The palm oil corporation BHD[5] started palm cultivation in 1994, reallocating the land to locals and transmigrants in 1997. This reallocation was a profound shift in land ownership in the village and will be further discussed in the analysis.

[3] PTNP: PT Perkebunan Nusantara III is a state plantation corporation and one of the first in the region surrounding Pampang Dua.

[4] PIR-Trans: Development scheme by joint government-private sector trough the expansion of the palm oil industry, launched in 1986 (McCarthy & Cramb, 2009).

[5] BHD: PT BHD Indonesia Group, major palm oil corporation in Pampang Dua

Picture 2: Map of Pampang Dua (Source: Google Maps, December 2025)

Today: Governmental push towards Replanting

By 2012, 65'000 ha of palm plantations had been established in Meliau, which constitutes for almost 50 percent of its total area (Li, 2015). While the area of palm plantation land has grown in Indonesia over the past decades, the production goals of the central government have not been met on several occasions. As a response, the government has issued a national oil palm smallholder revitalization program for both plasma[6] and independent famers. Named PSR[7], the program plans to replace palm trees of non-productive age. These are more than 25 years old and make up about 42 percent of smallholder land, totaling in 2.78 million ha. This should lead to a doubling in yield per hectare, resulting in the increase of smallholder household income and foreign exchange. While first planned in 2007, implementation only began in 2017, with the focus on areas with more aging plantations, one of which is West Kalimantan.

So how does the revitalization program work? Since the beginning of 2025, grants of 60 million Indonesian Rupiahs, which equals approximately 3000 CHF, are issued per ha to each smallholder. These grants have steadily increased since the implementation of PSR, to promote

[6] Plasma Farmers work on the land they retained from the reallocation through the PIR-Trans program. This land is not connected to the core plantation of the palm corporation.

[7] PSR: Government scheme to promote replanting of palm-trees to increase the industries productivity.

replanting amongst smallholders. These do not receive the grants in cash but as agriculture inputs like high-quality seedlings and fertilizer, or forms of agriculture infrastructure. The government finances these grants through export taxes, microcredits from banks and partnership schemes with private corporations. The Oil Palm Plantation Fund Management Agency, short BPDKPS, is the government body which organizes and distributes the grants through farmers' groups or cooperatives. Such a farmers' cooperative, which are called KUD, which stands for "Korperasi Unit Desa", which translates to village cooperative, is one of the focuses of this thesis and will be discussed later on (Chapter 4). Further actors such as financial institutions, palm oil companies and other state agencies participate in the management of PSR funds.

Around Pampang Dua, the two established palm oil corporations are BHD and DSE. The Makarti Jaya KUD was the local farmer cooperative which forms the connection between the corporations and smallholders. Both the cooperative and the corporations are pushing for smallholders to replant their unproductive trees, but the procedures are facing difficulties from different angles. These difficulties are explored by this thesis.

Mining

The connection between mining and plantations in Kalimantan has been discussed in frontier (Toumbourou et al., 2020, 2022). This thesis adds to that discussion. The following section will thus give a brief context on mining in Pampang Dua.

In 2021, Mandara Prima Nusantara (MPN)[8] had expanded its bauxite mining operation to Meliau, also in the area surrounding Pampang Dua. They presented themselves as an economic alternative to oil palm cultivation, and locals were excited about the prospects. Some smallholders began selling plots and working for the corporation, dividing their livelihood.

What exactly is bauxite? The mined bauxite is used to refine aluminum. To reach the bauxite in the earth, the top, partially organic layer must be scraped off by a couple of meters, exposing the ground beneath (Purwanto et al., 2021). This process leaves behind residuals containing radioactive elements, which can be categorized as hazardous waste for the environment (Damayanti & Khareunissa, 2016; Purwanto et al., 2021). As explained by some villagers, this waste gets into river, polluting and making it dirty. In Pampang Dua, this has led to the inability of traditional spearfishing, an important livelihood for the Dayak. Due to rising water levels of

[8] MPN: Indonesian mining corporation active in Meliau

the river and degraded soil quality, risk of flooding increased. Such floods could pose an issue to palm cultivation, as submerged trees struggled to grow.

The establishment of the palm oil and bauxite frontier clash with each other, creating new dynamics and structures which are analyzed in this thesis.

Population

In 2012, population density in the subdistrict of Meliau was 32 individuals per km^2(Li, 2015). According to village records, there were 587 families living in Pampang Dua in 2024, with 100 of them not owning plantation land. 487 households owned less than 10 hectares of plantation land. 1'933 individuals lived in the village and surrounding area, of which approximately 70 percent were registered as engaged in farm work.

The population in Pampang Dua consists of different ethnical and religious groups, which often coincide with each other: The Dayak make up the largest percentage of the population, of which the Kancing are the largest tribe in the village. The Dayak are mostly of Catholic belief. The other part of the population is made up by transmigrants from Malaysia and other Indonesian islands. They vary in ethnic background, depending on where they originated from. This is also the case for their religion, with Islam being the most prominent amongst transmigrants. While some had arrived in the area by themselves, other transmigrant families had been in the village for multiple generations. Some had married with local Dayak and see themselves as part of the indigenous community. The Dayak speak their own language next to the nationally standardized and -thought Bahasa Indonesia, with each tribe having its own dialect.

This group of people, with a distinct focus on the Dayak, and their movement through the frontier is highlighted in this thesis.

1.2. Structure of thesis

A review of literature follows this introduction, where I discuss different key concepts in the literature on frontiers, frontier characteristics, research gaps and the analytical frameworks I used to analyze the dynamics and local life in the frontier (Chapter 2). In this section, I present links between my frameworks and my research question. Following the literature review, I discuss my methodology (Chapter 3): Next to describing my thoughts on the methods and ethics during preparation, this section also engages with my fieldwork experience, critically reflecting on my positionality, the agency of the participants and adaptation of methods.

I then present my findings and analysis by connecting the data I collected from interviews, conversations and observations with the theoretical frameworks. This section has two focuses: For one, I focus on the specific frontier dynamics in Pampang Dua, analyzing the way the palm-oil industry and bauxite mining perpetrate frontier structures. Building on this, I shift the focus to the perspective and agency of people living in the frontier to answer the question of how smallholders in Pampang Dua see, engage and negotiate the frontier dynamics, and how they reshape them (Chapter 4). By framing the space around Pampang Dua as a space of hybridity, where pre-existing and modern, capitalist orders come together and cause friction and moving past the understanding of people as passive subjects, this thesis delivers a rich analysis of the frontier in Pampang Dua.

To conclude my thesis, I summarize the information gathered and analyzed, with which I answer my research questions (Chapter 5). I discuss how this thesis contributes to knowledge production on frontiers and what considerations I would make for future research.

2. Literature Review

The following chapter aims to discuss key concepts and theories in exploring frontiers and their dynamics. It covers different relevant studies, to present how variously the topic of frontiers is looked at, also specifically in the context of palm oil, Southeast Asia and Kalimantan. It goes over gaps in the literature and explores how my thesis can help fill these. Finally, I present my conceptual frameworks which will guide my analysis, in order to help answer my research questions with the focus of the lived experience of smallholders in the village of Pampang Dua.

2.1. Conceptualizing frontiers

Historical ideas on frontiers

Frontiers have had shifting conceptualizations and analysis throughout time. The following section discusses these shifts. Historically, the concept of the frontier can be traced back to the colonizing of the American West by European settlers (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). Turner's (1921) book "The frontier in American history" is the first to conceptualize what a frontier is. For him, the frontier is where civilization and savagery collide (Turner, 1921). He highlights in his 1893 address how the Western frontier is significant to building of the American nation (Tsing, 2003). His description of the American West as "a wild place" gave ground for its colonization (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). He describes how the emptiness of the American west and its seizure trough settlers laid the foundation for American development (Turner, 1921). Such imaginations still play a role in the frontiers of today, to give reason for capitalist and state expansions.

For him, frontiers were linear movements through space and time (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018; Turner, 1921). This understanding oversimplifies the complexity of actors and dynamics in the frontier space (Barney, 2009). While Turner's (1921) book describes distinct waves of arriving actors such as pioneers and entrepreneurs, such a description of frontier migration and its actors falls short of contemporary reality.

Debates shifted before the turn of the century, with frontiers being seen as spaces on the periphery and being absorbed by the expansion of capitalist systems (Barney, 2009; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). While such conceptualization offers more nuance than the linear development of frontiers, it also reproduces the modernist conception of progress (Rasmussen & Lund,

2018). This thesis wants to move passed such understandings of developed and undeveloped regions, also by centering itself around the realities and knowledges of people living in and with frontier dynamics.

Still, while frontier spaces do not open linearly through space and time - nor do they sit passively while being engulfed in capitalist structures - the historical conceptions of frontiers hold value in understanding such spaces today. In the following sections I discuss different characteristics/processes which are part of the production of frontier spaces, while highlighting how these could come into play in my specific case study of smallholders in Pampang Dua.

The making of a resource

At the center of each frontier is the discovery of a (new) resource (Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). The term "discovery" falls short in describing how a resource comes to be, while also obliquing previous valuations (Li, 2014a; Tsing, 2005; Yarrow, 2006): While resources are material, they are simultaneously social (Li, 2014b, 2014a; Tsing, 2003). This means, that while they have a material reality, resources are only made to "resources" by the human application of a value (Li, 2014b; Lounela, 2021; Peluso & Lund, 2011). Such valuation isn't static and depends on the observer of the resource (Li, 2014b; Lounela, 2021). It is an important part of the process of commodification, with markets revaluating nature, humans and other parts of the environment as resources and commodities (Lounela, 2021; Lounela & Tammisto, 2021). The local understanding and valuation of natural resources gets suppressed and replaced with modernist, capitalist ones (Tsing, 2005; Yarrow, 2006).

Land grab

Land too is a made resource: Different actors, from villagers to scientists and corporations, have varying views on what the land is and what functions it has, dictating how humans should interact with it (Li, 2014b; Lounela, 2021; Peluso & Lund, 2011). The valuation of land can fluctuate over time, especially through the introduction of cash crops. This introduction can re-evaluate the land to a commodity, opening it up to market dynamics (Li, 2014b; Lounela, 2021; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Semedi & Prasetya, 2014). In the resource frontier, parts of the frontier are stripped of their previous value and turned into a wild resource (Tsing, 2003). This can conflict with the inhabitants' valuation of their land, since land can represent more than a monetary value. It is located and has a materiality, and can take on different functions such as a source of food or work (Li, 2014b).

Global trends indicate that each year, there is a large increase in land acquired by institutional actors, with the aim of industrialized agriculture, driven by increasing food prices. Here, the idea of economy of scale plays a crucial role: The use of productive and efficient technologies in agriculture can only happen at a large scale (Li, 2014b). So, in order to increase profit, corporate investors try to scale up their businesses through the acquisition of large areas of land, specifically in frontier spaces (Andrianto et al., 2019). In Indonesia, local governments, due to budget limitations, support and enable such corporate activity under the guise of infrastructure development through the private sector (Hall, 2011; Li, 2014b). The border between public and private, between state and capital, becomes more blurred (Tsing, 2003).

The making of land and other resources ties into the imaginaries of people and land, which the following section discusses.

Imaginaries of self and others, development narratives

Imaginaries play a role in not only how land is discursively produced, but the people inhabiting it as well: Frontier spaces are often depicted as underpopulated (Bächtold et al., 2020; Barney, 2009; Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Li, 2014b) and local, Indigenous communities are often imagined as backward and in need of guidance (Hall, 2011; Hein et al., 2016; Li, 2014b). The conception of *terra nullius*, of land as ungoverned and empty, still holds power in the narrative and material production of contemporary frontier spaces (Hein et al., 2016; Li, 2014b; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). The conception of terra nullius produces frontiers as spaces of desire, with untouched wilderness and resources (Eilenberg, 2014; Li, 2014b; Tsing, 2003). Land is seen as idle, in need of capital, technology and people to make it productive (Li, 2014b; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). This encourages different forms of resourcefulness and entrepreneurship (Tsing, 2003).

State language discursively produces frontier spaces to advance the establishment of modernist and capitalist structures (Barney, 2009; Li, 2014a; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). The emptiness must be produced where it didn't exist before (Barney, 2009; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009).

This is also the case in West-Kalimantan, where government agencies frame the land as under- or wrongly used (Eilenberg, 2014; Hall, 2011; Semedi, 2014). The island of Kalimantan is depicted as rich in resources and poor in people. (Kaartinen, 2020; Semedi, 2014). Through such a framing, the central government gains legitimization for economic development in the region. Such development takes form in large-scale projects like the centralized promotion of oil palm plantations in West Kalimantan (Eilenberg, 2014; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009).

Development itself becomes a tool for the state to increase legitimacy and control in West-Kalimantan (Eilenberg, 2014).

Development programs in Laos aim to turn rural famers into market-oriented, modern, governable practices (Barney, 2009; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). Practices of subsistence are replaced by wage labor, which is seen as progress (Li, 2014a; Lounela & Tammisto, 2021). The usage of land is labeled as deficient, legitimizing its change (Li, 2014b). In Jambi, Sumatra, settlements were established on the basis of providing land and agriculture possibilities for landless and poor locals and migrants who were seen as backwards and undeveloped (Hein et al., 2016).

In West Kalimantan, the Dayak population is often-times depicted as ungovernable and antinational (Eilenberg, 2014; Semedi, 2014). They were seen as undisciplined and unreliable (Eilenberg, 2014). Low population density was another obstacle emphasized by government officials when developing the region (Eilenberg, 2014). This further legitimized transmigration programs from Java and Bali, which led to different forms of friction between the local and transmigrant population (Andrianto et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2011; Semedi, 2014).

2.2. Establishment of governance and regimes, erasure of existing/indigenous orders

Territorialization

Frontier dynamics are often accompanied by processes of territorialization: Institutional order and resource governance are reshaped by the introduction of extraction corporations (Peluso, 2005). New territories emerge and clash with old ones, struggling for control over certain spaces. Central to this is the effort to control people and resources (Kaartinen, 2020; Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Peluso, 2005), by excluding and including people in specific bounded space (Lounela & Tammisto, 2021).

Territorialization processes are an important aspect of frontier emergence in West Kalimantan. Territories established through state and palm-oil corporations clash with communal territories (Eilenberg, 2014; Peluso, 2005; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). Still, the people living in these clashing territories navigate, contest and shape them with their own agency (Kaartinen, 2020), which will be the focus of this thesis.

Access

An important aspect of territorialization and frontier processes is the concept of access: For the local people, access to resources and land are shaped by the conflicting territories, as well as the establishment of palm-oil plantations. Different people may have less or more access, depending on their background (Hall et al., 2011; Hein et al., 2016; Li, 2014b, 2014a; Ribot & Peluso, 2003). Here, access can be seen as an individual's ability to benefit from material things, institutions and people, as well as property as recognized, rights-based access to land (Hein et al., 2016; Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Li, 2014a; Lounela & Tammisto, 2021; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). Such ability can come from capital, which can enable people to buy land (Li, 2014b; Ribot & Peluso, 2003).

In West-Kalimantan, through the establishment of palm oil industry and hand over of customary land, poorer and landless people were pushed into low-wage labor on the plantations (Eilenberg, 2014). Access can be given or taken through different mechanisms, some of which don't always seem so obvious (Ribot & Peluso, 2003). It produces a categorization of people into landless and those who own land, which shapes the people's abilities and livelihoods.

Property Regimes

The management of property and its accompanying practices is an important aspect of frontier dynamics: Different regimes, old and new, clash with each other in frontier spaces.

This is also the case in Kalimantan: The introduction of the oil-palm reshuffled the distribution and ordering of property, and has led to frictions between small holders, hamlet heads and palm-oil corporations (Peluso & Lund, 2011; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018; Semedi & Bakker, 2014; Semedi & Prasetya, 2014). De Jong et al. (2017) describe a conflict in East Kalimantan between the state, the Kutai Kingdom, indigenous Dayaks and Bugis migrants that had sprung from clashing ownership claims on a plot of land which a palm-oil corporation bought. The clash of older and newer property regimes can culminate in violent conflict (Lounela, 2015; Peluso, 2008).

Communal lands rarely stand a chance of recognition when being confronted by modernist orders (Li, 2014b; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). In West-Kalimantan, communal systems of tree-tenure, in which farmers held lifelong ownership over the rubber trees they planted, were replaced by lease arrangements with corporations and states (Kaartinen, 2020). With the introduction of palm oil plantations, the Agrarian and Forestry laws in Indonesia ended its recognition of customary land: The law states that the land has lost its indigenous connection

with the community due to the oil-palm cultivation (Andrianto et al., 2019; Kelly & Peluso, 2015). As such, regaining customary rights to their land becomes more difficult for indigenous communities, also in West Kalimantan.

New property regimes trying to break and engulf existing ones are accompanied by control strategies. Industrialized, corporate actors bring with them technological and certification procedures which limit the independence of smallholders in Kalimantan (Kaartinen, 2020; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). Formalization of land helps make land, its usage and transactions governable (Bächtold et al., 2020; Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Li, 2014b). Surveying and mapping of land do not merely serve as a representation of reality, but bounds space on the basis of power holder claims (Li, 2014b; Rasmussen & Lund, 2018). The introduction of the Javanese governance system through land categorization in Jambi, Sumatra further erased customary land tenure (Hein et al., 2016). In her paper, Li (2014) uses the term inscription devices, which includes all strategies used to give value to land, for example through classifying it. These devices also obscure the intentions and motives of the actors who use them, supplying rational legitimacy to them.

While such procedures are used to control and bound space, their inappropriate and unclear process can weaken the agency of smallholders in negotiating land ownership (Andrianto et al., 2019).

2.3. Identification of gaps in literature

A lot of literature on frontiers focuses on conflict or contestations between state or multinational corporations and local communities (Regassa and Korf 2019; Schetter et al., 2022) or on changes in property regimes (Lund and Peluso 2011). However, not much is studied on how local populations in frontier spaces navigate changes in livelihoods, property regimes and emerging opportunities and challenges (Sarma et al., 2022). Rather, a focus has often been paid to conflict and the impacts of frontier dynamics on local communities. For instance, ethnic violence between Madurese migrants and indigenous Dayaks broke out during the 1990s in West Kalimantan (Li & Semedi, 2021; Peluso, 2008; Tsing, 2003). While the focus on these aspects of frontier life is valid, it is important to avoid the naturalization of violent dynamics. Frontier populations aren’t violent perse, but different histories and politics produce specific situations of violence.

While capitalist and state powers, and their exploitative practices towards nature and local people are important for the Marxist analysis of frontier spaces (Sarma et al., 2023), such focus runs the risk of reproducing colonialist binaries of developed and undeveloped. Such framing leads to the production of local communities as passive victims. While still regarding the different, macro-level dynamics driven by state and capital, this thesis wants to shift the focus to the agency of actors often regarded as powerless. The communities in West-Kalimantan do not always comply or oppose development schemes of the central government, but actively engage and negotiate with them (Eilenberg, 2014). By focusing on the smallholders in Pampang Dua, this thesis wants to showcase how they, in their everyday life, negotiate the frontiers dynamics. Their decision-making, reasoning, and temporal strategies will be centered on. As an example, in the region of the Upper Kapuas in West-Kalimantan, the people modified their surrounding landscape in consideration of their descendants (Kaartinen, 2020), clearly showcasing their agency and desires.

In the aspect of governance and social orders, this thesis also aims to move on from a binary understanding: Erasure of old, traditional orders by new, modernist ones falls to short in explaining the complex structures ordering frontier spaces. By not conceptualizing how new orders replace old ones, but how they meet and entangle, creating new forms, can the specificities of frontier spaces be analyzed.

My thesis wants to add to the debate on frontiers by analyzing a specific multilayered frontier in West Kalimantan. With the introduction of bauxite mining in the region around Pampang Dua, discussing how the two resource frontiers come together can help us understand how specific dynamics are produced. Such an engagement with multi-frontiers is lacking in frontier literature, something this thesis would like to help change by applying the following conceptual and analytical frameworks:

2.4. Conceptual and analytical framework for this thesis

I will draw from various authors to conceptualize the frontier, focusing on the frontier as a space of friction and negotiation (Tsing, 2005): While gathering force from a distance and entangling local and global scales (Tsing, 2003), capitalist and state processes do not solely produce the frontier and its dynamics, but are met and negotiated by local actors, practices and structures. The frontier produces its subjects, as do the subjects produce the frontier.

Contemporary Concepts of Frontiers

This thesis moves past the binary of nature and culture, by understanding that nature and its resources have social and cultural values beyond material services or as a commodity (de Jong et al., 2017). When looking at frontier spaces, it becomes evident that society is shaped by natural processes, as is nature by human interaction (de Jong et al., 2017).

While different literature argues that frontier dynamics are accompanied by the erasure of existing social environmental relations (Kaartinen, 2020), I would call for a more nuanced approach. Here, the new does not erase the old, but both structures challenge each other and become entangled (Gururani & Vandergeest, 2014; Hein et al., 2016). Such an understanding of frontier dynamics can more accurately describe the frontier dynamics in Pampang Dua. Identifying the various forces ranging from the global demands for palm oil over government agendas of development the agency of local communities is key to analyzing the entangled frontier space (Eilenberg, 2014).

Seeing frontiers as spaces of hybridity can better define their complexity (Gururani & Vandergeest, 2014): Power holders, such as state and corporations, draw boundaries to try to insert control and capitalist development in a region, to clearly demark what is seen as civilized and uncivilized, developed and undeveloped. In this process, spaces around these imaginary boundaries don't fall into this binary, but become less-clear zones (de Jong et al., 2017). Frontier spaces can even be produced through contradicting forces: In Kalimantan, plantations and mining operations engage in environmental protection while simultaneously degrading the land (Tsing, 2003).

These spaces are not static, but fluid and complex, always being renegotiated through different powerholders (de Jong et al., 2017). Sarma et al. (2023) conceptualize this constant temporal and spatial movement of frontiers as their remaking. As Rasmussen & Lund (2018) put it, "frontiers take place"[9].

This thesis also draws from Tsing's (2005) concept of friction, which describes the dynamic in which different forms of culture and knowledge come into contact with each other (Tsing, 2005; Yarrow, 2006). For her, globalization is not an unhindered process towards a new era, but an uncertain, chaotic one, connected to local processes (Yarrow, 2006). While capitalism might be understood as universal, rational and definable, it engages with a variety of actors,

[9] Rasmussen, M. B., & Lund, C. (2018). Reconfiguring Frontier Spaces: The territorialization of resource control. *World Development*, *101*, 388–399.

cultures and understandings, producing singular, heterogenous situations (Tsing, 2005; Yarrow, 2006)

As we will see, the frontier around Pampang Dua can be described as a space of hybridity, where different resource frontiers, governance and social orders, modernist and traditional practices clash and engage with each other to create a specific space surrounding the village. It is also a place of friction, where capitalist laws and practices don't just fall into place, but are met by a distinct group of people, environment and culture.

Living in the frontier

While in historical conceptualizations of the frontier, actors and power seemed more clearly defined, contemporary perspectives on frontier spaces argue to include a variety of power holders (de Jong et al., 2017). As seen in Pampang Dua, these can include different people like local and spiritual leaders or members of farmers' cooperations. Small actors play an active, relevant role in the making and unmaking of the frontier (Barney, 2009; Kaartinen, 2020; Sarma et al., 2023; Tsing, 2003). People use localized coping strategies to deal with the struggles of living in a frontier (Sarma et al., 2023): Riverine peoples in India and Thailand mobilized and legitimized their knowledge to challenge national policy (Gururani & Vandergeest, 2014). In Laos, local people facing displacement due to state land reforms, developed new livelihood practices such as cross-border wage labor or adapted agriculture strategies (Barney, 2009). In South Kalimantan, local villagers asserted customary resource laws during logging practices in the 1980s (Tsing, 2003).

How people experience the frontier space is very individual and influenced by many factors (Andrianto et al., 2019). Different aspects of their life and livelihood such as land, home and health are entangled with frontier dynamics (Sarma et al., 2023). Village heads can practice their position of power during the establishment of frontier industries (Tsing, 2003). During the transition to industrialized, cash crop agriculture, economically strong individuals may profit from the commercialization of land and resources (Barney, 2009), while already landless may see an opportunity for more and better wage jobs (Li, 2014b). For some, the ability to practice their livelihoods such as foraging and shifting cultivation might be disrupted by the frontier, while other forms such as mining are met with opportunity (Li, 2014a; Tsing, 2003). Individuals might even have to weigh out conflicting needs and valuations: In Kalimantan, villagers have agreed to the establishment of palm plantations, regretfully losing access to large parts of their customary lands, if it meant that a road would be built (Li, 2014b).

Applying a feminist, intersectional lens to the issue of frontiers in West Kalimantan means to focus on how people live with frontier dynamics and how their ethnic, gender and class identity, shape their interaction with the frontier (Li, 2015; Sarma et al., 2023). Intersectionality explains how each individual, through their varied background, has a different relation with the frontier, that shape an individual's movement through the frontier (Li, 2014b). The local community is not a singular entity, but diverse, also in response to the frontier (Li, 2014b, 2015).

While individuals navigate the frontiers, the frontier is simultaneously (re-)produced in the process. Racialized production of ethnic groups is a part of this making and living in the frontier (Sarma et al., 2023). In West Kalimantan, the racialized production of the indigenous Dayak community has served as a legitimization for state and corporate intervention in the region. Ethnic tensions between transmigrants from Java, Sumatra and other parts of the archipelago and the local, indigenous communities have been heightened by the erasure of customary land laws and subsequent land grabs by palm-oil corporations. Here, racialized production of the indigenous Dayak further pushed frontier dynamics (Tsing, 2003).

While such racialized conflict has been widely discussed in frontier literature, also regarding West Kalimantan, this thesis focusses on the perspective of the Dayak people in Pampang Dua, without making any predetermined assumptions: In what ways do they see themselves and their practices being racialized in the frontier?

Two perspectives on the frontier in Pampang Dua will guide my analysis and discussion: Conceptualizing frontiers as spaces of hybridity helps to understand the encounter of state and capitalist orders with local, indigenous ones. This encounter will be mirrored in the experience of smallholders and other actors in the village.

This thesis also centers on the lived experiences of the villagers, to highlight their interaction with the various dynamics of the frontier they inhabit.

These two perspectives, connected to the data collected during fieldwork in the village of Pampang Dua, should deliver a rich analysis for a specific frontier setting.

3. Methodology

To collect or produce adequate data to discuss the research questions of this thesis, I thought of fitting methods for data collection. In the following section, I will be discussing the methodological preparation I made before my departure to West-Kalimantan: What are my guiding principles/ideas regarding methods? By drawing from different feminist literature, I will engage with the critique of the neutral scientist of conventional science (Llewelyn, 2007), to guide me through my fieldwork process.

I will then turn to the description of my experience with participatory fieldwork during my time in Pampang Dua: While describing different instances of data collection, I will showcase the usefulness, but also the issues and limitations of participatory methods, specifically structured interviews. I will describe how power dynamics, my positionality and the context of my field work reshaped the methods used.

3.1. Preparation: feminist and decolonial knowledge production

To take a critical approach during the different phases before, in and after the fieldwork, I wanted to draw from feminist and decolonial writings on knowledge production. In the following section, different guiding principles will be discussed.

For one, I wanted to move past the notion of an objective, value neutral researcher who is not connected or invested in their research project (Howe, 2022; Llewelyn, 2007; Massaro & Williams, 2013). Researcher neutrality is neither possible nor desirable (Llewelyn, 2007; Wright et al., 2021). Drawing from Haraway (2013), Llewelyn (2007) showcases how scientific objectivity produces hierarchal social orders by discrediting knowledge production outside of the western, scientific realm. This has also led to the lack of attention to emotions in research, since these stand in contrast to the assumed objectivity and rational of western science (Wright et al., 2021). In decolonial studies, it is argued that knowledge production in social sciences can be linked to the aim of controlling societies and legitimizing colonial rule (Brown, 2022; Caretta & Riaño, 2016). Here, I would like to contribute to decolonial knowledge production, which aims to highlight ongoing projects of racialized frameworks of colonial knowledge production which shape our social world (Peake & Sharp, 2024). By moving past the notion of a single vision of truth towards understanding how social and personal position shape our perception of reality, I tried to apply the idea of situated knowledge during the course of my

research project (Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Massaro & Williams, 2013). As Llewelyn (2007) puts it,

> *"Accurate knowledge claims can only originate from a position that is explicitly partial, located, and therefore accountable."*[10]

With this, I wanted to center my field work and thesis around the perspective and lived realties of the participants of my data collection. Participatory approaches can be defined as practices where researcher and participants work together to solve a problem, ideally leading to a balancing of the relation between knowledge and power (Brown, 2022; Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Gallagher, 2008; Howe, 2022; Wright et al., 2021). Such practices try to address hierarchical dynamics between researchers and participants by handing responsibility to participants and thus acknowledging their expertise on the topic (Brown, 2022). It is further said that methods can have an epistemological advantage over other methods, producing more nuanced and accurate knowledge (Gallagher, 2008).

I engaged with different aspects of feminist participatory methodologies, while acknowledging that I was not able to fully apply all ideas. This was the case with co-determination, where through a variety of participatory methods, the participants of my thesis would be involved in all phases of knowledge production, from developing the research question to the phases of analysis (Brown, 2022; Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Gallagher, 2008). While I would have liked to approach my thesis in this manner, I was not be able to include the participants in other phases than during my fieldwork because of the language barrier and the limited time I was in West-Kalimantan. My research project thus orients itself more according to the concept of involvement: The participants didn't have control in every phase of the thesis (Brown, 2022).

A feminist approach should also try to highlight the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed, by taking them as a starting point (Gallagher, 2008; Llewelyn, 2007; Massaro & Williams, 2013). I tried to observe and analyze local power dynamics, since these take on different social, economic and cultural forms and are hard to predict in advance. The notion of intersectionality becomes important: It describes how power functions across differences, creating unique forms of oppression and violence for those at intersections of marginalized groups (Peake & Sharp, 2024).

[10] Llewelyn, S. (2007). A neutral feminist observer? Observation-based research and the politics of feminist knowledge making. *Gender & Development*, *15*(2), 299–310.

Furthermore, I needed to be aware that there are limitations to collaborative work. I needed to stay aware of my responsibility and role in the research project (Brown, 2022). As much as I wanted to create an equal relationship during my research process, there are always inequalities and imbalances between researcher and participant (Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Peake & Sharp, 2024). Llewelyn (2007, P. 305 – 307) discusses how during her fieldwork in Chandpur, India, the social status and nature of the work of female domestic servants prevented them from engaging in open conversations about their realities. Similarly, relations between company, smallholder and day laborer prevented open discussions on life in the oil-palm plantation on some occasions. Furthermore, during the writing process, I, as the author, had control over the knowledge production, limiting the power of the participants (Caretta & Riaño, 2016).

When it comes to research projects, their design can reach from very little participation to full egalitarian, whereas most sit somewhere between the two (Brown, 2022), which is where I see my own.

I chose different qualitative methods during my preparation for the fieldwork. Observations during social events and work hours could lay out a foundation from which to develop research focuses from. Walk-alongs on the plantation would allow specific insight into working conditions and relations. As my main method, I planned on using semi-structured interviews, into which the next section delves.

3.2. Why use Interviews?

As my ideas were forming during the preparation phase for this thesis, I had to start thinking about fitting methods for data collection. With a focus on lived experiences in the oil-palm frontier, a focus on qualitative data which could be saturated with quantitative data seemed right for my research questions. To collect a different range of data, I aimed to use different methods, with the aim of triangulation: Through the use of different methods and theories, researchers can try to broaden their understanding and perspective on the topic (Longhurst, 2023). Such an inclusion of various viewpoints and methods increases validity of the research project (Della Porta, 2014).

According to Longhurst (2023, P. 105), Interviews can be defined as

“verbal interchanges where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person.“

The difference between a normal conversation and an interview becomes evident: While during conversations, each participant gives and receives information. In interviews, respondents provide information while interviewers guide the interview with their questions (Della Porta, 2014).

As my main method, semi-structured, in-depth interviews are one of three types of interviews, next to structured and unstructured interviews. Interviews can unravel details about participants' experiences (Allmark et al., 2009; Fujii, 2018) and are a fitting method to highlight aspects of phenological reflection, meaning how people perceive their environment (Della Porta, 2014). For Geographers, semi-structured interviews are one of the most commonly used qualitative method, as they can be used to research different topics (Longhurst, 2023). Within the three types of interviews, semi-structured, in-depth interviews functioned as my main method, next to structured and unstructured interviews. By choosing a semi-structured approach, through a prepared catalogue of questions, the conversations should have an aim and stay on topic, while still allowing participants to guide and shape the topics by bringing in their own ideas (Longhurst, 2023). This catalogue is revised after each interview. Semi-structured interviews have different guiding principles: The researcher's focus should be listening to the participants, while also being open, non-judgmental and careful with the things they have to share (Fujii, 2018; Longhurst, 2023). I try to not platform my own ideas or argue with participants, even if I disagree (Della Porta, 2014). Questions should enable open responses from the participants (Longhurst, 2023). This is important for the formulation of interview questions: After engaging with the topic through literature and conversations with my supervisors, I developed a list of themes which I wanted to discuss with the participants (Longhurst, 2023). From this list, I developed a catalogue with questions, which would give me a backdrop to lean on during the field work. To gain an idea of the experiences and interests of the participants, I wanted use more open questions, following with more structured ones to talk about each topic (Della Porta, 2014). Starting point for the interview guide were questions related to the background of participants, before moving to the topics of my thesis. This should create a comfortable environment in the beginning of the interview (Longhurst, 2023).

During the interview, the questions don't need to be asked in order, so that the conversation can develop naturally and the focus can lie with the participants' ideas (Gallagher, 2008; Longhurst, 2023). Contrary to a positivist approach which sees a necessity in extracting information from a participant, I wanted to apply a constructivist perspective, which sees the interview as an interactive process and product (Della Porta, 2014).

Selection of participants is another important aspect of conducting interviews. Participants should be chosen based on how their experience is related to the research topic, since the aim is not to create a representational sample, but to highlight and understand an individual's experience (Fujii, 2018; Longhurst, 2023). I tried to shape my sampling on a conceptual basis: By moving continuously between sampling and theoretical reflection, I aim to assemble a group of participants which represents different types of people living in the oil-palm frontier (Della Porta, 2014). For my thesis, I had gained access to participants through my collaboration with the students and professors at UGM, who had a network of contacts in the area. This would be my entry point (Longhurst, 2023; Massaro & Williams, 2013), from which I could, with references from participants (Zhao, 2017) and together with the accompanying students Dila and Fahmi, find other important voices who wanted to share and help my research project. Here, I went with whom was most accessible to me and easy to interview, since there was already a certain relationship established (Della Porta, 2014; Zhao, 2017).

During interviews, I had to decide on a form of data collection. I prepared a recording device, which would allow me to fully engage in the conversation and saturate my written notes (Longhurst, 2023). Recorded interviews would then need to be transcribed, so that I could extract information by codifying the transcript (Longhurst, 2023). In an optimal case, this would happen quite quickly after the conduction of the interviews. This will be quite difficult in West-Kalimantan with not always guaranteed electricity, which is why transcription will happen as soon as I return to Zurich.

3.3. Preparation: Thoughts on Ethics

Concerning ethical aspects of and within my research project, questions and issues of power dynamics as well as reimbursement of money and time came up, specifically in relation to the University I would be visiting and the students accompanying me during my fieldwork. It is important to note that issues in ethics cannot be resolved in advance and to continuously reflect on how to deal with them during the research process (Brown, 2022; Fujii, 2018; Peake & Sharp, 2024).

Generally, ethical research values the well-being of participants and researchers, specifically through the process and not the outcome of research (Howe, 2022; Peake & Sharp, 2024). An ethical approach should center around respect, responsibility and care (Howe, 2022; Wright et al., 2021).

In the context of semi-structured interviews, the interviewer must be able to grant privacy and confidentiality (Allmark et al., 2009; Della Porta, 2014; Goundar, 2025; Longhurst, 2023). They must also know that they can withdraw from the interviews and retract their data at any time (Della Porta, 2014; Longhurst, 2023). Anonymity must be guaranteed, specifically during the use of quotes (Allmark et al., 2009; Della Porta, 2014). That is why, in this thesis, all individuals have been given false names.

Furthermore, the participants should be able to continuously grant informed consent [11](Allmark et al., 2009; Howe, 2022; Peake & Sharp, 2024). The interviewer must inform the participants thoroughly on the use of their data and the process of the research project. I will also try inform them on the results of my research thesis (Della Porta, 2014; Longhurst, 2023).

When conducting fieldwork, researchers take something from the participants, be it time or information. Here, questions of reciprocity come up: What do we as researchers take from the participants, what do we give back to them (Peake & Sharp, 2024)? While I took their time and gained knowledge, what was I going to give back? Through a purely Marxist lens, monetary compensation for participants, especially those economically marginalized, seems to make sense, but such compensation can reinforce paternalistic and neocolonial power dynamics. Furthermore, the involvement of money would produce new power dynamics which would affect the field work. I was faced with feelings of ambiguity. Finally, I decided on not giving any financial reimbursement, since I deemed it counter-productive and hierarchical (Della Porta, 2014). I was planning on paying for food, drinks and other goods during interviews, observations and walk-alongs, but to do this with respect towards customs and the participants.

3.4. Scope and Limitations

The scope of this thesis is the local context of Pampang Dua and how its community negotiates and engages with frontier dynamics brought about by local and international power holders and -structures. While it discusses global, capitalist processes, the focus is the realities of people in the frontier. Here, the main group of people discussed in this thesis are the smallholders:
During our time in village of Pampang Dua, our access and contact with the community was strongly shaped by local smallholders. They would invite us to different occasions and tell us

[11] While written consent would be preferred, the settings and situations may only allow spoken consent. I have prepared a consent form in both English and Bahasa Indonesia, in case the participants wish for these. These should be used with care, since written consent forms may remind participants of bad experiences they had with signing forms, for example regarding the leasing of their land.

with whom we should talk or visit. While their position gave us access to different settings and people, it strongly shaped the information we gathered. This led to a level of disregard for certain perspectives: Landless people barely come to voice in this thesis. The perspective of women is less shown, as we also struggled to do interviews with them. The settings for the different forms of data collection were often male dominated. Transmigrants experience of the frontier can vary strongly from an indigenous villager, which would have allowed to broaden the understanding on how people move through the frontier.

As a border region with Malaysia, West Kalimantan has been subject to processes of militarization. The entanglement of frontiers and border region is a topic discussed in political geography (Korf & Raeymaekers, 2013) The military has played a role in producing the frontier, materially and narratively (Tsing, 2003), something this thesis doesn't explore.

It is important to mention that the focus of this research project lies on the local context of its case study: The expansion of the palm-oil industry creates various, unique situations by entangling with local structures and practices. This thesis thus contributes to the understanding of local contexts while engaging with different studies on frontier dynamics.

3.5. Experience in the field: Positionality, Challenges, Adaptation and Guidance

Following this description of my methodological preparation, I will now turn to my experiences during the fieldwork in Pampang Dua in West-Kalimantan. I will be discussing how my ideas from the preparation transferred into the field, highlighting the challenges and adaptation of methods during my time in the field. By aligning my experiences with literature on participatory methods, I will showcase the necessity for critically analyzing participatory methods and continuously exploring alternate knowledge production.

Positionality

An important part of every research process is engaging with and reflecting on the researcher's positions, and how these factors influence the research process. The perspectives, values and worldviews of a researcher can be described as his positionality (Goundar, 2025). This feminist concept calls for a continuous engagement with how difference between the researcher and the subject in constituted during the research process (Peake & Sharp, 2024). Reflecting on my positionality is important during all the phases of my research thesis. How does my background

in terms of gender, race, economic status and others influence the data collection and analysis (Brown, 2022; Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Goundar, 2025; Kusek & Smiley, 2014).

In the following section, I describe how different aspects of my positionality shaped the process and product of my research. I describe what role gender, religion, my position as a student at the University of Zurich and my relation to Indonesia influenced my perspective and research process.

My (perceived) gender played a role during my time in Pampang Dua. This was to be expected, since gender identities not only influence the interests of the researcher, but also their research process (Goundar, 2025; Kusek & Smiley, 2014). During my fieldwork, it was easier to approach men and enter male spaces. I was more often approached by men than by women, specifically also regarding what I was doing during my stay in their community. With gender roles among the Dayak community in Pampang Dua seeming distinct but equal (Li, 2015), I would find myself more often amongst only men during work and leisure time. Still, there were a few instances, during our trip to a wedding or while accompanying a group of female day laborers while they fertilized a field, we found ourselves among only women. These instances provided us with insights into their experience in oil palm frontier.

My position as a student at a European University gave me different powers and privileges which influenced the field work in Pampang Dua. These need to be critically analyzed:

For one, there was danger of reproducing colonial structures, by extracting knowledge from a former colony. Coming from an Institution in the Global North to do research in the Global South could perpetrate western hegemony in knowledge production (Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Llewelyn, 2007; Sarma et al., 2023). The thesis could be exploitative and have paternalistic tendencies by analyzing and critiquing a topic or issue to which I am an outsider. I tried to be aware of my position as a student before and during my fieldwork, how it affected my relationship to the community and the students who accompanied me during my trip, and tried to adjust my methodological approach to tackle these issues.

Relationship with Students from UGM

During my stay in Pampang Dua, I was accompanied by two students from the University of Gadjah Mada in Jogjakarta, Indonesia. While they assisted me in my fieldwork, they themselves were collecting data for their anthropological theses. My relationship with them shaped the fieldwork and was subject to different (power) dynamics.

The financing of our stay mostly fell on my budget. This created a hierarchy, where different costs such as snacks or day trips dependent on my willingness to pay. The two rarely asked, so I tried to offer. This may have strengthened this hierarchy, which the students tried to break by paying for their own costs or avoiding costly situations. I tried to engage them more in conversation about this issue, while critically analyzing my own position in the hierarchy and moving towards breaking it down.

In her paper, Zhao (2017) describes how her friendship with local research assistants shaped her fieldwork in Dali, China. They helped facilitate contacts and allowed the researcher entrance into specific spaces. The same can be said about my friendship with the students from UGM: They helped facilitate different relationships in the community, enabling us to gain diverse perspectives.

The writing of their own theses helped alleviate the dependencies that had shaped our relationship. By engaging in their own production, they too produced and gained knowledge from our stay in Pampang Dua. Through this, we tried to move past the western domination of scientific knowledge production, to shift power to the Global South and local understandings.

Insider and Outsider positions

During my fieldwork in West-Kalimantan, the dynamics around my positionality became evident. In the following section, I will be discussing benefits and issues regarding these, to then critically examine participatory methods in social sciences.

Here, I would like to draw from Zhao's (2017) experience and thoughts on her positionality and fieldwork in Dali. She discusses how her position as an in- and outsider, depending on who she was with, shaped her fieldwork and research product (Zhao, 2017). She was simultaneously a local insider as well as an outsider researcher.

While I had expected to have some sort of insiderness, as being born in Indonesia to a Batak mother, the reality was that I predominantly was perceived as an outsider researcher. Whenever I met new people in Pampang Dua or other communities, I was greeted with *bule*, the word for (white) foreigner. I got a description of every meal I ate. My positionality influenced how I was seen and where I had access to (Goundar, 2025). Still, this position as an outsider wasn't only an obstacle, but also helped in certain situations: My position as a Swiss-National was always a topic, with participants always asking about (my) life in Zurich. When I shared from my life experience, this seemingly helped for participants to open up more. Furthermore, when we

went along for work or other activities, especially in the beginning I would receive explanations from different people regarding what we were doing. I felt taken care of.

What made me feel quite isolated were the language barriers: Difficulties communicating with my research partners from UGM due to my lackluster Bahasa Indonesia and their limited English led to difficulties in the organizing of interviews. Additionally, during conversations and interviews, I was very dependent on the students from UGM, who often did not have the capacity to translate in the moment, leaving me to guess what was said. As such, I had at times difficulties engaging with interviewees to develop their answers (Della Porta, 2014). I was an outsider, who was enmeshed in pre-existing and new power dynamics with the participants and the students (Gallagher, 2008). Quite clearly, returning 'home' to Indonesia for my fieldwork didn't make it run more smoothly, but brought its own challenges regarding the research process (Zhao, 2017).

3.6. The multivalency of power: interview settings and topics

I wanted to choose neutral grounds, also away from the workspaces of the participants, so that they would feel free enough to talk about their relation to their work (Llewelyn, 2007). While a lot of the conversations and interviews took place in neutral spaces like for example Warungs[12], a lot of the data collection happened during different go-alongs during work on the plantation. Seemingly against the assumptions I had before going into the field, talking about plantation work in the plantation seemed comfortable for the participants, even beneficial. It also didn't matter what job or position the participants had, conversations were informative and went smoothly when conducted during the work itself. It became evident that the participants themselves guided the selection of settings where knowledge would be produced for this thesis. They would also make suggestions about where we should go next, on who is important to talk to. As I was entering their space of living and work, they decided when they would pass what kind of information: While in the homes of the participants, they seemed far more comfortable to share stories and experiences. Here, it became evident how participants in research projects aren't without agency, as can negotiate and sometimes even determine the conditions of their participation (Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Gallagher, 2008).

[12] A warung is a small shop where you can buy different goods. You can also sit down, eat and drink, making it a space for leisure in Indonesia.

This agency also showed itself to be dynamic, spatially and temporally: Depending on the space of conversation, different people would share stories and information. In one instance, we were gathered for lunch with a group of women we had accompanied in spreading pesticide on a kapling. In this setting, these women spoke more freely and decided the topics, specifically when compared to evening settings where drinking was involved. Who spoke about what was always dependent on the setting, the time and the constellation of people. Each participant held a different form of power depending on the time and space (Caretta & Riaño, 2016). Furthermore, our positionality as researchers and students from UGM and UZH also dictated when and what knowledge we would receive.

Not only did participants display agency in deciding on data collection settings, but also in guiding the research topic: While I tried to lay the focus of my questions on the life with oil-palm plantations and issues of frontier processes, conversations often shifted away from these towards other topics (Chapter 4).

Gallagher (2008) describes in his paper how he approached participatory research with children. He argues that power isn't a static binary, but displays a multivalency depending on research spaces (Gallagher, 2008). This multivalency of power in research also showed itself during my fieldwork, as described above. We must thus move towards critically analyzing the power dynamics during research and not falling into assumptions on the position of researcher and participant, since these are dynamic.

3.7. Emotions and Fun in Research

The agency of the participants and the shift it brought in the research methods also influenced how interviews were conducted. While there is an expectation for fieldwork to be rational and organized to be taken seriously, the advantages of fun and emotions in fieldwork showed themselves during my stay in Pampang Dua (Wright et al., 2021).

Some settings for data collection involved a form of leisure or fun. An excursion to a wedding lead to us participating in a traditional healing ritual as well as different conversations about entanglement of indigenous practices with modern, capitalist lifestyles. There were a few instances where, after being invited for dinner and drinks at somebody's house, very informative conversations followed after some shared arak, which is local alcohol, laughter and singing. Wright et. al (2021) describe how such spontaneous happenings can present themselves as very informative and how music and fun can help foster the relationship between

participants and researchers. This was similar in my case, as I was quite often asked to sing Karaoke in different households. This helped establish a form of trust with the community in Pampang Dua, by even overcoming the language barrier.

Fun also helped make the research project more accessible for the participants (Wright et al., 2021). While many struggled with the planned, semi-structured interview, conversations during or after a leisure activity seemed more productive. In one instance, a participant used my camera to take pictures of us and the social gathering we were attending. The participant then asked me to add these pictures to my thesis and to send them to them. The fun of taking pictures, and their participation in a form of data collection, made them seem more integrated in the research project.

It became evident during the fieldwork in Pampang Dua that we should follow the desire that a research process can feel fun, which will also help us moved passed the notion that research needs to be objective or neutral (Wright et al., 2021). Still, while I had established forms of friendships with some participants, it is important to critically reflect and recognize the relation between them as participants and me as a researcher (Zhao, 2017).

Pride was another emotion which showcased itself during my fieldwork. It emerges in sociohistorical and political contexts, is a public and circulating feeling, making it relational and specific (Wright et al., 2021). The community in Pampang Dua showed their pride in two ways: For one, they celebrated and showcased their traditional practices through cooking and healing methods. One participant told a story about how his daughter had broken her toe. A local healer looked at the injury and gave advice and medicine for the broken toe. The injury healed without compilations. The participant explained how well the traditional healing methods work, and that he prides himself on relying on them. Pride also became evident in their produce. Similarly, Wright et. al. (2021) describe how a queer community took pride in the vegetables they grew together. Such recognition of communal labor was also visible in Pampang Dua: While accompanying a smallholder and a couple of day laborers during a day's work of weighing, they would always present the biggest palm fruits to us. They tried to engage us in the manual labor, trying to give us insight into the work on oil-palm plantations. The pride for their labor also showed itself during the interviews, with one participant saying:

"Not farming feels like something's missing. It's not about lacking other resources. But farming, even on a small scale, is exciting. It's an activity."[13]

My experience in Pampang Dua revealed the importance of fun and emotions during fieldwork. We should move past banning them to private settings (Wright et al., 2021) and start recognizing their validity in research. With participatory research offering participants a gateway to claim pride (Wright et al., 2021), they help make research more accessible and engaged. Giving more attention can reveal the significance of certain moments or change (Wright et al., 2021), because emotions and fun did not discredit my research process, but allowed it to be more accessible and engaged.

3.8. Methodological Adaptation through Guidance

In the following section, I will describe how I modified my methodology from my preparation with the aim of producing balanced knowledge alongside the participants.

The context determines which research methods are applicable. This became evident in one instance, where the participant stated towards the end of the interview that they would have liked to "practice" beforehand, thinking the interview would have gone better. Simultaneously, this opened doors to other methods and modes of knowledge production: During our time in Pampang Dua, we were often invited to different activities, be it work or leisure. We were often invited to the homes of different people, invited by the homeowner or sent by our hosts. In these informal settings, we were able to have informative and free conversations about life in and with oil-palm plantations. These allowed for the participants to determine their sharing of knowledge, which often took on the shape of stories. Here, we tried not to interrupt their narration and flow (Della Porta, 2014). We were also able to establish a key contact at the wedding we attended, showcasing the importance of engaging participants' suggestions (Llewelyn, 2007). My initial ideas for the methodology of this research project shifted due to the participant's perspectives (Llewelyn, 2007). With this, informal conversation became an additional, very useful method to produce knowledge. Even times of difficulty, of failure during the research process can lead to new perspectives on how to produce knowledge (Caretta & Riaño, 2016). Diffraction describes how research projects can change their course during interactions with participants, which calls researchers to critically analyze how their

[13] Interview with Smallholder Bang R., May 2025, Pampang Dua

background and position influences decisions in the research process . Still, a more extensive review of literature on the field would have helped (Della Porta, 2014).

This is also why practicing reflexivity during the whole research process is so important: By critically examining each interaction between the participants and me and how my positionality shapes these and other parts of the research process (Caretta & Riaño, 2016; Fujii, 2018; Goundar, 2025; Zhao, 2017), I was able to adapt my strategies and produce knowledge with the participants more easily. By acknowledging the difficulties I had and the influence of the interaction with the participant on my research process and outcome, I have also been able to gain more validity from a feminist perspective (Caretta & Riaño, 2016). By moving past my own frameworks for data collection, I have been able to have insightful interactions with the participants (Llewelyn, 2007).

Still, it is important to note that even if the participants have taken great influence in the field work, we cannot describe this as a co-production: While in some cases, we were specifically invited or sent in the context of our research, a lot of the times we joined them in their every-day life or at social events.

4. Analysis, Discussion

During an interview, a smallholder was asked what scares him in the coming years. His answer was the following:

"Palm-oil land that's already been sold to bauxite. Even if we don't want it, it's happening. If the majority give in, that's it. And if this company itself switches to bauxite, game over. Let's hope not."[14]

This quote demonstrates the complexities and peculiarities of the frontier dynamics in Pampang Dua. It also highlights the local populations engagement with and perception of these dynamics. The discussion and analysis of this thesis focus on these two aspects of frontier life in Pampang Dua.

To start off, the chapter will discuss different ways how the frontier manifests in Pampang Dua. It will go over imaginaries of the land and its people, and how these people engage with them. These imaginaries lay the foundation for land commodification and subsequent land grabs. The resulting property regimes shape and are shaped by the practices of the villagers in Pampang Dua.

The chapter then moves to the life and practices of the local population inside of the frontier. Here, the focus lies on two aspects: Firstly, how does the community in Pampang Dua perform their traditional culture, and how is it entangled with the modernist frontier? Secondly, the section will highlight the agency of different individuals and groups when it comes to making and remaking the frontier.

As a finishing part, this chapter looks at the moment of replanting: What exactly is the process of replanting palm trees, and how does the village community participate in it? In what ways are property regimes reshaped? This section describes different actors and their perspectives in the replanting process, highlighting their visions and wishes for the future and how these shape their participation in replanting.

[14] Interview with Smallholder Bang S., May 2025, Pampang Dua

4.1. The making of the frontier

The following section engages with the different ways the palm oil and mining frontiers and their dynamics show themselves in the village of Pampang Dua. It discusses different aspects of this manifestation, moving from the narrative to structural production of the frontier and its people.

Imaginaries of Kalimantan

By analyzing in which ways the land in Kalimantan and around Pampang Dua is discursively produced by government, corporations and local actors, this section highlights underlying reasoning for their practices in the frontier.

Governmental and state actors, transmigrants and indigenous Dayak all give varying values to the land in Pampang Dua. This valuation becomes evident through the ways they talk about the land and gives key insights into the motivation behind their actions in the frontier. Further focus of this section is on these valuations.

In frontier spaces, discursive production of land by power actors such as governments and corporations often brush the historical and colonial depiction of untouched and empty landscapes. The uplands of Kalimantan have been described by government agencies as a virgin landscape with unlimited resources (Eilenberg, 2014; Semedi, 2014; Tsing, 2003).

Such governmental narratives about the land in Kalimantan can serve different, even contradicting goals. While the area around the border with Malaysia has been militarized due to the Indonesian government's narrative production of its neighbor as a threat to national sovereignty and need of a buffer zone, that same area was pushed by the government as oil palm development area. Malaysian palm-oil corporations took the opportunity (Eilenberg, 2014). It is quite evident that narrative production of land always serves a purpose, detached from the words used by powerful actors, attached to their diverse agenda. But how do people living in the village see the land they live on and with?

Imaginaries of the Land and the People

Before my departure to Pampang Dua, I was staying with my family in Jakarta. This is because I was born in the city, and my mother spent most of her adolescent life here, while my family originally hailed from Lampung on Sumatra. My family is of Batak origin, an ethnic group from Sumatra. We are Christian Protestants, like most Batak. My ethical background would

shape my relationships in the village, but also a conversation I had with my family during a dinner before my departure.

I remember being asked, why I am specifically going to Kalimantan. Explaining my access through the researchers at the University of Gaja Madah, the topic then turned to the local population of my field site. Different voices explained to me how the Dayak were seen as a violent group of warriors and spoke of bewitching, beautiful women who would capture me tough dark spells and potions. While such stories about the Dayak had come up during my reading (Semedi, 2014), I was surprised to see my family warning me about the indigenous people of Kalimantan. The following section dives into this narrative production of the Dayak, its underlying aim, and how the produced themselves engage with the narrative.

"People outside say palm oil is bad and destroys forests. I mean, it's not even Indonesians saying this. It's outsiders who claim palm oil is like this, a threat. They see it, probably from big corporations, I think. For large-scale companies, sure, it makes sense they exploit forests—thousands of hectares, even hundreds of thousands. But locals and communities also benefit economically, supporting livelihoods and all."[15]

Global discourse on palm oil and the environmental damage it causes shape the perception of the local populations who work in its production. Here, a Dayak smallholder in Pampang Dua engages with this perception and calls on critiques to reflect on questions of responsibility. The Dayak engage with their narrative production.

The national government has historically produced Dayak as undeveloped (Semedi, 2014). This production acted as legitimatization for the first transmigration programs in the region which brought in settlers from Sumatra and other islands. As migrants from Sumatra had experience in industrialized agriculture, they were seen as more efficient and modern than Dayak farmers (Kaartinen, 2020; McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). Such production allows governments to push top-down development, while citing progress as their reason (Eilenberg, 2014).

Government aid policy

To demonstrates the governments perception of the people in Pampang Dua, this section will turn to cash distribution event called BLT: Originally implemented by the government under

[15] Interview with Smallholder Bang S., May 2025, Pampang Dua

President Widodo as financial aid for citizens struggling with issues related to the Covid virus, the current national government continued the program.

During our stay, we attended such a distribution event. It took place at the village office. The room was filled mostly with elderly men and women, while younger people waited outside the office. On one side, a table was set. Here, representatives of village and district government as well as from the military and police were seated. Other village officials were scattered to the right, at the back, or seated among the attendees. The proceedings began with speeches—first by the village head, followed by the police sector representative, who warned against hoaxes and fraud while reaffirming the police's position in the village. The concluding remarks came from the village secretary, as he instructed on how the BLT distribution would proceed.

Picture 3: BLT event (Source: Tobias Graf, May 2025, Pampang Dua)

Recipients' names were called. They had to take photos with officials, counted the cash, and took selfies holding papers displaying their names. There were 30 BLT recipients. Each received Rp 1,200,000, which would need to suffice for 4 months. According to a village official, qualification criteria included low-income status, disability, unemployment, and living alone. Recipients were called one by one, photographed at each station, culminating in a final photo holding a paper reading '2025 Pampang Dua Village BLT Distribution' with their names, all maintaining neutral expressions. Occasionally, officials and the policeman joined these photos, which I was told is a standard bureaucratic practice in Indonesian government. While observing this procedure, different ideas came to mind: The constant photographing and posing

during the process felt like it was sending a message to other levels of government, but also the public: We, the different representatives of the Indonesian government, are here in this village and helping the poor people by giving them money. This transfer seemingly only happens under the condition of self-presentation as saviors and the depiction of the locals as helpless.

How do the Dayak see themselves and others?

How do the indigenous Dayak engage in such discourse along ethnic lines? When talking to a Dayak villager in Pampanga Dua, the conversation shifted to the topic of land release to transmigrants through the implementation of Project Sanggau:

"There's social resentment, of course. Take my grandfather, for example—he surrendered, say, 10 hectares and only got 4 hectares back. Back in the day, migrants came here, were given land and housing. They bought land - our land actually. That's why they could survive and even thrive. They have that mindset, you know? Migrants have to be that way - otherwise they can't survive. Meanwhile, we here... we feel like we can just live off nature. That's the real issue - it all comes down to mindset."[16]

The clear differentiation between the approaches of transmigrants and indigenous Dayak in engaging the frontier and its dynamics demonstrates a form of grouping (Semedi, 2014). At the same time, this farmer engaged in the modernist and capitalist narratives of how Dayak are portrayed as lazy and unproductive, specifically when compared to groups from other islands.

While such a historic divide persists narratively, through property regimes and capitalist procedure (Semedi, 2014), the binding factor of working and living under the frontier creates a different understanding along the ethnic lines. The farmer would add to his statement:

"Well, nowadays, we've just accepted it. That's how it was back then. What else can we do? We still have our things. Life goes on, right? They still have theirs. We can't just seize it back—that's impossible. It's government policy. Since Suharto's era, they've had regulations for migration and resettlement programs. It's not about ethnicity—we don't look at it like 'this tribe, that tribe'.[17]

Centering government policy as the issue and understanding transmigrants and himself as negotiators in the frontier indicates a clear shift from the ethnical divides that had previously led to eruption of violence in the region (Semedi, 2014; Tsing, 2003). During my stay in

[16] Interview with Smallholder Bang S., May 2025, Pampang Dua

[17] Interview with Smallholder Bang S., May 2025, Pampang Dua

Pampang Dua, people of different ethnical and religious background would hang out together. These identities would always be relevant, when it came to food, drinks and music, but each was respected in their way. These identities also mixed, as people of different ethnic and even religious backgrounds married each other, shifting the ethical perception of themselves.

Still, it was always evident that the Dayak were proud of their historic and momentary identity and culture. When talking to different Dayak villagers, they would more often than not refer to the Dayak with the term “kami”, which is Bahasa Indonesian for “us”. There was a clear sense of ethnic belonging and pride amongst the community in Pampang Dua.

The pride of the Dayak also showed itself in their tattoos. A lot of men would have, next to more conventional styles, indigenous Dayak tattoos. While these used to be made through a traditional method, artists nowadays use electrical tattoo machines. The modern and traditional clash and melt together.

Picture 4: Two Dayak men gathering wood for cooking (Source: Tobias Graf, May 2025, Pampang Dua

The men would often flaunt these tattoos, sitting topless during leisure time. It didn’t take long till they noticed my tattoos. Different people urged me to get a Dayak tattoo. I was skeptical, as I didn’t want to fall into any tropes. This didn’t matter to them. They persisted: If I got a traditional Dayak tattoo, I would become part Dayak, a little bit like them. I would also bring

their culture out into the world, needing to explain in every encounter what kind of tattoo it was. I would also carry a piece of remembrance. In the end, I got a tattoo.

The members of the Dayak community in Pampanga Dua engage and negotiate their produced perception. They understand and see themselves as different, but as equal and natives to the land. They want to move past ethnic divides and demonstrate in what ways the modernist perception of their ways of life are wrong. This understanding of themselves underlies their movement through the frontier.

Commodification of Land

Moving on from narrative productions and understandings, the following section discusses and analyzes the process of land commodification in Pampang Dua. What uniqueness does the space give to the process of commodification. How are the people engaged in it? Again, the valuation of land and what it produces are key to understanding the process of its commodification.

Local Valuations

In Pampang Dua, land has historically been used for different resource extractions. Shifting from timber to rubber production, different frontiers propped up and disappeared again. Since the 1990s, oil palm cultivation has become the dominant industrialized use of land. For government, capital and the local population, this use gives the land distinct values. Its materiality defines its relation to the different actors (Li, 2014b; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Semedi & Prasetya, 2014).

One smallholder and member of the famer's cooperative in Pampanga Dua stated their value for the land during an interview:

"I say, palm oil prices, well, that's our value of our land."[18]

Two aspects are interesting here. For one, their valuation for land is heavily linked with monetary value of palm oil and subsequently oil palm fruit. Such an understanding links modernist and capitalist understandings of land. The farmer engages with the valuation perpetrated by corporate and government actors.

[18] Interview with Smallholder Pak G., May 2025

Secondly, the farmer adopts a collective "we" during the interview, suggesting some kind of grouping. Here, capitalist valuation of land connects with a form of collectivism. The farmer continues on:

"With oil palms, we harvest for 25 years, replant, harvest another 25 years, and repeat. At my age, I can plant for two generations. I'd still benefit for 60 years. That's what I want with oil palms. I'm 39 now—if I plant today, I'll reap the rewards. In 25 years, I'll still enjoy my harvest. Then my children take over. But with bauxite: Gone in a year. My kids get nothing. Try planting chilies—they won't grow."[19]

The land holds a temporal value to the farmer. While modernist ideas of land as a commodity might persist, they are heavily linked to the importance of survival future generations and traditional livelihoods. Time and generational use of land are centered, with mining seen as a disruption to this temporal value.

Shift in values

The introduction of bauxite mining has shifted valuations of the land amongst the different actors. The following chapter discusses these changed values of land and analyzes how they might affect the frontier dynamic in Pampang Dua.

Capitalist and modernist narratives regarding the land may switch with the aim of finding new ways of commodifying the land (Li, 2014b). This was the case in Pampang Dua: New actors such as mining corporations pushed bauxite as an alternative business model to palm oil production. It would bring jobs and prosperity to the region.

With the arrival of bauxite mining at the turn of the decade, land valuation amongst the locals began to vary. While some smallholders with families aimed to secure the livelihoods of their descendants through oil palm cultivation, others saw an opportunity in bauxite mining. People told us of villagers quickly selling their land to the mining corporation PT Visitima. One smallholder explained that the company would pay 50 million rupiah per hectare, which they found was much too low. Still, some landowners proceeded. What were their reasons? Some held large amounts of land, which allowed them to sell parts of it with the aim of gaining hard cash. Others were faced with immediate need for capital, be it due to debt or social obligations. How the introduction of mining shifted their values of land, heavily depended on their personal background and status.

[19] Interview with Smallholder Pak G., May 2025, Pampang Dua

Drawing from (Li, 2014b), the different elements of the land which make it valuable to specific actors become evident. She describes how indigenous highlanders adapted their valuation with the introduction of cacao as a cash crop. Similarly, the introduction of bauxite mining led to a shift in land valuation, depending on their personal background. Some see danger, some see safety. Later on, these valuations will emerge through the practices of the village community.

Land concession

As seen in how the Dayak people engage with their own narrative production and that of others, the land concession issued by the national government in 1991 presented a great shift in land ownership and property regimes in Pampang Dua (Semedi & Prasetya, 2014). That year, the government launched the Estate and Smallholder program "PIR Trans"[20], which allowed BHD to grab 80 percent of the ancestral land of communities in the area, according to one farmer and read literature (Semedi & Prasetya, 2014). In 1994, the corporation began its plantation project, by clearing land and planting seedlings with the help of local and migrant day laborers. By 1997, the company began distributing plots of plantation land back to local farmers, but also to transmigrants. Each smallholder would receive 2.5 hectares of plantation land, with one transmigrant telling us he had additionally received 0.5 hectares as a garden. The farmers were split into two: plasma farmers who had their plots away from the plantation core, and core farmers who worked on company owned land. According to one smallholder in Pampang Dua, every allocation consisted of 7.5 hectares, distributed equally among Dayak, transmigrants and plantation core. They added that this demonstrated their people's patience, as their ancestral land was being shared with others.

The allocation of land came with conditions: The fruit grown on these plots had to be sold to the company allocating the land. Furthermore, the smallholders had to repay a credit of 12 million rupiah, issued for the allocated land, through installments over the next several years. Once this credit was paid off, the smallholders would receive official certificates of land ownership.

The concession was issued for 35 years, meaning it would end in 2026. When asked, one participant explained that the farmers didn't know if there were talks of renewal going on between government and corporate actors. This has led to uncertainty and confusion amongst the farmers regarding land governance. This uncertainty and unclarity on continuation of

[20] PIR-Trans: Development and Resettlement scheme by joint government-private sector trough the expansion of the palm oil industry, launched in 1986 (McCarthy & Cramb, 2009).

concessions is part of the frontier dynamics (Scoones, 2024; Tsing, 2003), and can also be seen later on with the introduction of mining.

Inscription devices

The concession of 1991 was followed by a technical advance by the palm oil corporation BHD into the region. The following section highlights the use of technological methods to capture and organize land (Kaartinen, 2020; Kelly & Peluso, 2015; Li, 2014b). While this happens under the gaze of efficient use and increased production, it often leads to unclarity and confusion.

The following quote is from an interview with a smallholder in Pampang Dua. We were discussing the remeasurement of the plots in the moment of replanting, when the participant explained discrepancies between the recorded and actual size of certain plots:

"That's an error from the initial boundary markers set by the company. Back then, the company wasn't supposed to mess with the community's land. The company had originally allocated 2 hectares per plot to the community. But the field officers, like the foremen, sometimes didn't do their job properly when setting the markers."[21]

While setting markers should have created clarity on land distribution, it created further confusion. Markers were misplaced, and the effective plots were often much smaller than on record.

Some smallholders took this moment of land inscription as an opportunity. The interview participant would continue:

"There were also cases where, say, back then, people didn't understand plantation management. How do you maintain oil palms? When I had a plot next to here, I managed it well. But the one beside it wasn't tended to for almost 10 years. That's where the markers got shifted. Since the neighbor wasn't maintaining it, I moved the marker over here."[22]

While the action of inscription is performed by corporation and government actors, the local population does not passively submit, but becomes active in this moment, to make the frontier (Semedi, 2014). This making will be discussed later (Chapter 4).

[21] Interview with Smallholder Bang R, May 2025, Pampang Dua

[22] Interview with Smallholder Bang R, May 2025, Pampang Dua

Access and Autonomy

The concession from 1991 heavily shapes the way distinct people move through the frontier in Pampang Dua. It had a profound effect on their ability to access resources, but also on their autonomy. These two aspects are discussed in the following section.

- Access

Through the concession, different actors gained or lost access to different resources. Local, indigenous communities' lost access to their ancestral land, while transmigrants received an opportunity of gaining access. Communal lands were dissolved through privatization, which shifted access for community members in Pampang Dua. Where shared resources were found before, enclosure and denied access stood now. This reconfiguration of access was initiated by government policies in support of corporate intervention. The company BHD gained access to the land around Pampang Dua, while simultaneously gaining control on who can access which land resource and when.

- Autonomy

With the concession, the communities' in Pampang Dua lost large parts of their autonomy. While different extractive industries such as rubber and timber have come through the village, none have reshaped property regimes and land ownership quite like the introduction of industrial oil palm cultivation. Through the loss of access to ancestral lands and the dominant use of land for cash crop production, practices of self-sufficiency suffered. Many, landless people went into wage labor for the plantation, creating new, dependent livelihoods. The livelihoods of both wage laborers and landowners are tied to the palm oil industry (Li & Semedi, 2021). During an interview with a smallholder, this and resulting fragility becomes evident:

"So, the farmers' burden keeps getting lighter—provided CPO (crude palm oil) exports aren't suspended again. If they are, prices will crash again."[23]

The livelihood of this smallholder is tied to the Indonesian export of crude palm oil. As it has already happened, this export can be suspended, making it a risky reliance and a fragile livelihood.

[23] Interview with Smallholder Pak G, May 2025, Pampang Dua

Still, the autonomy of the people in Pampang Dua has not completely been wiped out, as they are (re)active actors in and of the frontier (Semedi, 2014).

This chapter highlighted how different actors gave value to the land in Pampang Dua. It showcased contrasting but enmeshed understanding of a Dayak smallholder. Here, modern and traditional valuations clash with each other, creating friction which turns into a new understanding of the land. The chapter also engaged with the introduction of the l991 land concession scheme and its inscription process which transformed the land ownership and livelihoods of the local communities. In the following chapters, this thesis analyzes how the communities engage with this transformation, up until this day.

Hybridity

As seen in the entanglement of capitalist and traditional valuations of land, Pampang Dua is a space where different dynamics and understandings clash with each other, resulting in a zone of a mixture and unclarity. Dayaks, while often not officially owning the land they work on (yet), still refer to it as their property. This unclarity or contradiction stems from the hybridity of the frontier in Pampang Dua, which this chapter explores.

The hybridity of the frontier in Pampang Dua can be highlighted through the unclear distinction between corporate and state actors, between aims and practices. In Kalimantan, state as well as military actors have participated in the capitalist expansion into the region, especially since the neoliberal push by the central government in the 1990s (Tsing, 2003). To push their own agenda and increase their profits, both government and corporate actors collaborated, or even started to hold a position on the other side. Such corruption exists in different industries in Indonesia and persists until today. How does this overlap of power holders show itself in Pampang Dua? To answer this, this section turns to the introduction of bauxite mining in the village.

Introduction of Bauxite Mining

Picture 5: Modas Ceremony (Source: Tobias Graf, April 2025, Pampang Dua)

During our second week, we were invited to attend a traditional Dayak ritual called “Modas”. Two men led the ritual, engaging with the gathered crowd while preparing an offering. They prepared different forms of food and slaughtered a pig for its blood. We attendees later enjoyed the meat. With this offering, they ask their ancestors for permission for initiation of a bauxite mining project in the area and that this project runs smoothly. Different representatives of the mining company PT Visitima[24] were in attendance. This ritual was for these representatives, and maybe the representatives attended out of respect for the community. In this moment, layers of understanding and practices, traditional and capitalist, overlapped with each other.

The company is still in the ongoing process of taking soil samples and getting them lab tested, as different smallholders also need to agree to the sampling of their land. This process will be important for understanding the rigorous and grinding production of the frontier space in Pampang Dua.

New actors in the frontier, in this case the mining corporation, create new dynamics and structures. It produces unclarity in land use and property rights. In Indonesia, national parks

[24] PT Visitama is a mining corporation operating in Pampang Dua and its surrounding area.

and logging concessions can overlap (Tsing, 2003). One mining company operating in the Sanggau District had its license revoked in 2022, with the rumored reason being that they were operating before receiving a permit. This company continues to operate even today. According to the environmental office of Sanggau, the process of shutting down operations takes time so that proper closure of the mines can be guaranteed. The parallels between government and corporate practice and goals are again evident in the regulation of bauxite mining.

PT Visitama is not the first mining company in the region around Pampang Dua. At the ritual, one participant complained about the damage other companies caused to the environments and communities of other villages. The skepticism was palpable and would guide different locals' engagement with bauxite mining.

The emergence of bauxite mining further produced the frontier around Pampang Dua as a space of hybridity. This hybridity does not come to be smoothly, but it is a process full of clashes and friction.

Friction

The entanglement of traditional and capitalist practices is a process full of contestation, pulling and pushing, full of friction.

One day, we were invited to attend a traditional divorce ceremony in a neighboring village of Pampang Dua. We attended this traditional event at the invitation of a civil servant at the village office. Based on conversations with this person and several other men who attended this traditional event, the divorce was filed by the woman on economic grounds and because the woman worked too far away.

During the ceremony, the families of both the woman and man exchanged goods such as rice or pots. This is called "adat"[25] and is also given at births or marriages. Adat is not allowed to be money, as it is understood as a traditional practice outside of capitalist markets.

Still, these traditional practices have come in contact with the dynamics of the frontier. According to Bang S., Dayak people need to put money on the side for these ceremonies, as these are held at all stages of life. Economic status determines if such traditional ceremonies can be held immediately or need to be postponed. The introduction of palm oil and wage labor has tied this indigenous practice to market dynamics, since subsidy livelihoods have been erased.

[25] Adat are customary laws practiced in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia.

Furthermore, credit unions in the region have specific loan products catered for the ceremonial practices of the Dayak. To celebrate certain life events at the time that they happen, families might fall into debt to finance these ceremonies.

The traditional ceremonies and the practice of "adat" have been engulfed in the capitalist order of the frontier. While they have been integrated into the market, with corporate actors making a business out of them, the Dayak people still hold on to these and perform them (Semedi, 2014). There is friction, as different understandings and ways of life come together. They create a new mix, a space of hybridity. Frontier spaces thus become spaces of duality and contradiction, containing a series of twists and paradoxes (Tsing, 2005; Yarrow, 2006).

This chapter has delved into the various ways the hybrid frontier in Pampang Dua manifests. With an understanding of the various narrative production and valuations of the land and people of Pampang Dua, the aims of state, corporate and local actors become clearer. These guide their practices, from land concessions to transmigrant programs. With new and old actors participating in the frontier, the space can be described as a space of hybridity. Such hybridity is produced through friction.

Following this description, the second part of the analysis shifts the focus, by describing analyzing the way in which the villagers of Pampang Dua perceive, resist and make the frontier of hybridity. How do they create friction with the capitalist and modernist dynamics that are imposed on them? The villagers of Pampang Dua instill their culture, beliefs and wishes on the frontier.

4.2. Life in the frontier

A quote from Tsing's (2003, P. 7) paper on natural resources and frontiers in Kalimantan caught my eye during reading. Here, she presents her perception of local day laborers:

"I know they are perfectly capable of stopping anywhere in the forest and, in half an hour, building a cosy, rain-tight shelter of bamboo, palm leaves, or bark. I know, in other circumstances, they would carry rice; they would hunt and fish and gather wild fruits and vegetables and make a tasty meal. But here, surrounded by familiar forest, they observe the proprieties of rain-soaked plastic sheets and a nutrition of coffee and rancid fish. It feels like nothing so much as 'culture' in its most coercive, simplistic form: a way of life that draws us in, ready or not, sensible or not."

This quote demonstrates certain forceful reshaping of culture and practice of the people through the frontier. Their indigenous knowledge and practices are highlighted, but they do not perform these due to the engulfment through capitalist structures. Is this true for the community in Pampang Dua?

During our stay in village, I built up a close relationship/friendship with a man we will call Bang S. He would introduce us to different people, places and events, becoming a key participant in our research. Bang S. also holds a distinct position in the community, as a smallholder, cooperative supervisor and secretary to the village office, giving him specific insights and perspectives. But Bang S. is also a person with wishes and dreams and understandings, all of which will be explored in the course of this chapter.

The following was one of the first things Bang S. told me:

"Here in West Kalimantan, people have a better life than in the rest of Indonesia due to palm oil."

This chapter explores the communities' perception of their own lives in the frontier: How does this positivity and trust come to be? In what ways do people embrace the frontier, when do they fight it? By discussing different aspects of life in Pampang Dua connected to the frontier and highlighting peoples' agency and desires, this chapter wants to shift the understanding towards frontiers as spaces of friction: The establishment of government and capitalist structures doesn't go smoothly but is shaped by the specific context and the people living in it.

Working on the plantation: Process and Challenges

The following section describes the conditions and challenges of plantation work to give context for the analysis of the frontier life in Pampang Dua.

Harvest process

Palm fruit harvesting is done twice a month. On one morning, we joined a smallholder and day laborer to harvest on the smallholders' plot. A roughly 5-meter-long sickle called "egrek" served as our tool to cut leaves and fruit from the palm trunks. The sickle's length can be adjusted to the palm's height, but since these palms were over 25 years old and extremely tall, harvesting became more labor-intensive as it required extra effort. The smallholder was responsible for "ngegrek" which means cutting the leaves and fruits off the tree, while the day laborer transported the harvested palm fruit with a scooter to the roadside, where it would later be picked up and transported by trucks.

During our observation, it became evident how manually and technically harvest work on oil-palm plantations was. Next to the danger from falling fruit or failing tool, the skill and accuracy it takes to cut down palm fruit is quite high. The two men worked from 6 in the morning till 4 in the afternoon. This combined with the conditions resulted in dangerous and labor-intensive work, common in resource extraction frontiers.

Picture 6: Day laborer and his transport bike (Source: Tobias Graf, April 2025, April 2025, Pampang Dua)

Fertilizer

Achieving high yields requires diligent maintenance like regular fertilization. This poses a challenge as many farmers spend funds on immediate needs rather than setting aside money for fertilizer, resulting in the trees being fertilized just once annually. One farmer added that while seasonal factors affect yields, proper fertilization can partly mitigate this. Fertilizer is purchased either in cash or on credit and can be subsidized by the government. When cash-strapped, farmers often borrow from credit unions with the danger of falling into debt traps. One smallholder described the importance of fertilizer:

"Oil palms require heavy maintenance. From planting to fertilizing - fertilizer is the most routine expense. At least three times a year for maximum yield. Once a year? That's pointless—no results. Minimum three times, meaning every four months…That keeps them

healthy. But if you see dry palms in a plantation, ask the owner. Bet they fertilize just once, if they even fertilize at all."[26]

Loans

As mentioned before, farmers face the danger of falling into debt due to the costs of immediate need. To engage in different practices such as replanting and fertilization, but also traditional events such as Dayak weddings, smallholders take out loans at banks or credit unions.

The banks and credit unions promote their loan schemes: At the office of the famers' cooperative, we would find advertisement pamphlets from one of the major Indonesian banks. They would highlight their low interest rates compared to other loan givers. The conditions and challenges of plantation work and life in the frontier pushes individuals to engage in such exploitative systems. It also pushes them further into capitalist practices, as they need to be productive to pay off their loans (Li, 2014a; Li & Semedi, 2021).

This chapter analyzed the working conditions on oil-palm plantations in Pampang Dua. It demonstrated how challenging both the material and physical conditions of this work are. While plantation work is tough, it has not hindered the community in Pampang Dua to engage in their traditional practices. The following chapter discusses these.

[26] Interview with Smallholder Bang R, May 2025, Pampang Dua

Indigenous/Traditional Practices of the Everyday in the Frontier

Healing practices

Traditional healing practices of the Dayak people were present throughout our time in Pampang Dua. The following section discusses instances of contact.

We were invited to a Dayak wedding in a village two hours drive from Pampang Dua. During the nightly festivities, a friend of the groom, who lived in this village, approached us. He had heard that we were doing research on "savit"[27] and came from far away (me a bit further than my research partners). He explained that his brother had gotten into an accident and that they were having a traditional healing ritual at their house. He asked us to join, saying it could be interesting for our research. We agreed and joined him and his family while a traditional healing practitioner performed the ritual.

This villager had perceived us as researchers, and approached us to participate in an intimate, difficult moment. He wanted us to see this ritual. For my relation to injury and death, this was different. He understood that it was different than our practices and found pride in that.

During a conversation with a smallholder in Pampang Dua, the conversation centered around the topic of family. The smallholder starts telling a story about how their daughter had broken her toe. The smallholder had then brought her traditional healer. He would provide remedies and give instructions to ais the healing process. The toe perfectly healed. The smallholder went on, assuring that he could and would have brought her to a "conventional" doctor, but for him and his daughter, the Dayak healer knows best.

The Dayak are confronted by a practice of western medicine which, in its theory and methods, challenges the traditional healing practices of the indigenous community. Instead of facing or engaging in this challenge, this participant gives value to both, while linking each practices usefulness to its location and context. For them, their generational practices work, even in the frontier. They accept modernities' value to them but still rely on their understanding and knowledge.

[27] Indonesian word for palm tree

Food

Picture 7: Sunday Gathering at a river (Source: Bang Regen, May 2025, Pampang Dua)

Coming together to eat was always an important part of the day in Pampang Dua, no matter where and when. As much as we would talk about oil palm cultivation, we would have conversations about food. Every meal was explained to us, with specific dishes coming from certain villages. The same applied to drinks: which village made the best "tuak", and which the best "arak"?[28]

Villagers would ask me about Swiss food culture and practices. Next to the confusing amount of bread I ate, there was one aspect which they found weird: I explained that a lot of the foods in Switzerland were imported and that Swiss products can't compete with the imported. Some would laugh; some would frown. One villager responded: They couldn't imagine importing food from so far away. The land around them can give them everything.

Presented as a value of the land, nourishment here is a space where traditional and capitalist meet: This villager doesn't want to become a consumer in globalized food chains. But what if frontier dynamics threaten his local production and push him towards consumption of industrialized food?

[28] Arak and Tuak are traditional alcoholic beverages in Kalimantan

The introduction of bauxite mining has challenged traditional food practices in Pampang Dua. Different people talked about the muddy river flowing through the village. It had been clean the year before, and villagers would go spearfishing. Now, since there was an opening of a mine upstream, they travel far to go fishing.

The valuation of land as a necessity for food production also plays a role in the comparison of the two frontier industries in Pampang Dua. This interview participant, who was a smallholder, had following to say:

"At least with oil palms, there are still trees—the forest remains. But bauxite? The damage is like the Sahara Desert. Like snow. Try growing chilies in snow—it won't work."[29]

For this smallholder, oil palm cultivation does not threaten their traditional food practices. We experienced this many times, as we were often specifically invited to eat lunch on the plots of different farmers. Mining on the other hand threatens these practices and takes this value from the land, something this smallholder can't accept.

This chapter discussed how the community in Pampang Dua practices their traditions under the conditions of the frontier. The introduction of bauxite mining produced further value for other land uses (Lounela, 2021). Traditional practices are entangled with the modernity of the frontier but at the same time reshape and make it as well through the actions of the community.

What constitutes this community? It is important to critically analyze the differences amongst individuals, and how these differences guide and shape their way through the hybrid frontier. The following chapter analyzes these specifics.

Diversity of Experience in the Frontier

Gender

To join the smallholders and day laborers for a work shift on the plantation, we would get up around 6 in the morning, since working in the afternoon could be too hot for physical labor. As we woke up and made ourselves ready for our first go-along during a work shift, we had realized that there was cooked food on the table. Mak – the mother in the household we lived - had already prepared food and was still in the kitchen. She pushed us to eat, we would need it she said.

[29] Interview with Smallholder Pak G, May 2025, Pampang Dua

This would be the routine during my time in Pampang Dua. Mak had the distinct role of cooking breakfast, and so did – the father - when it came to other times of preparing food. How does the frontier and these distinct roles interact with one another? How do the wishes of women and men manifest in the frontier?

The distinct roles showed themselves also through the tasks on the field (Li, 2015). On one morning, we joined a group of female day laborers on a kapling[30]. Their task for the morning was the distribution of pesticides. This pesticide was subsidized by the government, cutting its price in half. They orderly walked through the kapling, spraying every part of the ground and bush.

They wanted us to participate, and it quickly became evident how physically challenging this work was. While it differed from the male tasks such as harvest and pruning, the women explained how important their part is: Without the spraying, the trees could easily get sick or invested by horn bugs, resulting in bad fruit. The harvest and months of work would go to waste. Each gender was engaged with work on the plantation in their own way but understood their participation as equally important and necessary (Li, 2015).

A lot of leisure time was spent in distinctly gendered groups. At Gawai, a Dayak festival celebrated in each village on separate occasions, we often joined male groups for drinking and singing. Other groups would be exclusively female.

While such a split occurred often, it was not a rule for social gatherings. At festivals in other villages, we would accompany Pak and Mak and their relatives, which resulted in a group mixed in age and gender. Still, in these groups, women and men took on separate responsibilities. Men were always responsible for transport, specifically driving cars and trucks, while women always checked if you still had food on your plate. Again, the roles were very distinct but seen as equally important by each gender.

Before our departure, the researchers at the University Gadjah Mada in Jogjakarta gave me a piece of advice. When I would pay for our stay at the house of Mak and Pak in the village, I should give the money to Mak, the mother. She would handle the money. This advice raised questions: How were the gendered roles distributed when it came to the spending and saving of money? This section discusses certain aspects of the role of gender when it comes to the engagement with money, and how it links to the frontier.

[30] A kapling is plot of plantation land with a size of two hectares.

In different literature, the distinct responsibilities of women and men in Dayak communities also fall on the handling of money: It is said that women should be in control of a household's money, since men tend to go out at spend the money on gambling and drinking (Li & Semedi, 2021). Does this reflect the situation in Pampang Dua? While we couldn't look into the bookkeeping of different households, an alternative form of capital management presented itself:

Different women in the community of Pampang Dua formed what was called a "Arisan": This was a traditional practice where group members would pay a monthly donation, depending on their income that month. If a member of the group was facing difficulties, or a household wanted to make improvements or buy land, the fund could contribute on agreement. This form of democratization and communal handling of capital counteracted many restraints of the frontier dynamics. Debt to banks could be avoided, difficult times of sickness made easier. Here, women engaged with the dynamics of the frontier in their own way. The Arisan stems from pre-frontier traditions but persisted and became a part of the actors in the frontier in Pampang Dua. In contrast to the public sphere, research suggests that women in often act ass treasurers in Indonesian household and hold deciding power in questions of land use, investment and migration (Li, 2015).

Gender roles in Pampang Dua are distinct, but hierarchies are fluid and dependent on context. This resonates with indigenous ideas shared across the Indonesian archipelago where women and men work separately but are equally responsible for the maintenance of the household and finances (Li, 2015). Work distribution is gendered, but each task and role has a value, even outside of a monetary one.

Class and Landownership: The Position of Transmigrants

This thesis has mainly focused on the realities of the indigenous Dayak population in Pampang Dua. To further display the variety of experience in the frontier, this section analyzes how the experience of transmigrants in the frontier relates to their background.

To discuss how the experience of transmigrants is different to the local Dayaks, while still being specifically individual, this section analyzes the perspectives of Mr. TR. He was a nearby neighbor of ours, whose house had a little "warung" in the front of it. We would often go there during our free time, to drink popsicles with powdered taste. My favorite was vanilla blue.

Mr TR. would often sit there when we came, and we would have conversations about his and our experience in the village.

Mr. TR was a transmigrant from NTT[31], who first arrived in Pampang Dua in 1993. He started off as a day laborer, referred to as “buruh liar” or illegal worker. He helped plant some of the first palm trees, which arrived around the same time in the village.

Through the process of land concession from 1991, Mr. TR received a plot of land to cultivate palm trees. Next to 2.5 hectares for palm oil, 0.5 ha were allocated to him as a garden. This is the equivalent to one and half kaplings. Conditions for this allocation were that fruit would only be sold to BPD, who had released the land, as well as 12 million Rupiah credit for the land which he would have to pay off over several years. Once this payment was completed, Mr. TR would receive a certificate of land ownership.

As oil palm was not yet seen as very profitable or promising, many fellow transmigrants sold their land and returned to their place of origin after the introduction of the plantations. Different reasons such as familiar or financial background pushed them to this decision. According to a different transmigrant from NTT, a lot of migrants lived in destitute conditions, with no capital to transition times of less work and harvest. For some, coming from an urban background, life and work conditions were unfamiliar and -comfortable (Semedi & Bakker, 2014).

According to Mr. TR, many of those who left regretted their choice. For him, the cultivation of palm oil enabled structural improvement to his house, like for many others he says.

Distinction along ethnic lines is also seen in the perception of success and entrepreneurship in the frontier. Mr. TR told us stories about his Javanese friends. While they started out as palm fruit weighers, they saved money to collectively buy a plot of land, gradually working towards each having their own land. He praised their mindset, strategy and work ethic as to what makes the Javanese great farmers.

Transmigrants have a specific experience in the frontier of Pampang Dua which is tied to their identity: One transmigrant explained that land use differed along ethnical lines: Migrants of Chinese origins mostly held cows or planted bananas. This shapes their engagement with the dynamics of the frontier.
Mr. TR also engaged in narrative production along ethnic lines, highlighting their persistent importance. The isolation of transmigrants left them with less agency in engaging the dynamics of the frontier, especially compared to the communal practices of the Dayak.

[31] East Nusa Tenggara is a region in Indonesia.

Future making

During our stay in Pampang Dua, the wishes and aims of its community became more evident with time. We would ask people about the future, to understand what guides their actions in the frontier (Lounela, 2021). This section explores the perception of the future amongst local actors in Pampang Dua.

During a casual, late-night conversation with Bang S., he started to talk about his parents' wishes what he used to wish for in his younger days. While initially wanting to become a police man, his parents' wishes pushed him to study in Pontianak, the capital of West Kalimantan. Amongst his friends there, some migrated to Australia or Japan. While he would have liked to join them, reasons held him on the island and in the village:

"I had family responsibilities in my 6th semester. If I didn't have family, I might've gone. But who knows? God didn't allow that path for us. No idea. Ended up in the village, and that's fine. But do I still want it? Of course. The desire is still there. It's still possible, maybe later. Yeah, but the kids can't just be left behind."

While his family's wishes and imaginations of the future pushed him to study, his family duties also kept him from pursuing a dream. The gendered role of a father as breadwinner guides his life path. The importance of family and the wellbeing of the next generations is evident in different actions of local actors when facing the mining and oil palm frontier (Chapter 4).

The future guides smallholders in regard to oil palm cultivation. On one occasion, we joined Pak to look at some of his independently bought land. This land varied as some was still untouched forest, while other areas were covered in freshly planted or older palm trees. We were taken to see the land that was still forested. Pak wasn't planning to clear this land yet, as he considered it an investment for the future.

He hadn't cleared this land yet, as he considered the future of him and his family. Here, it is important to mention that this was one of many plots Pak owned. His position as smallholder with larger landowning allowed him to make these considerations. What if an individual doesn't have this privilege? For individuals with less or no land, immediate costs to cover the family needs can hinder future consideration. This was the case for different people when the bauxite mining arrived. In the frontier, the actions of individuals are guided also by their class background, as it shapes their ability, opportunity and willingness to engage with the frontier

(Li & Semedi, 2021). Frontiers thus become sites of both opportunity and constraints (Sarma et al., 2023), a space of duality and contradictions.

Education

In one interview with a smallholder from the village, the importance of education came up:

*"We're people who care about education, that's why you're here. Students, students. That's why I like my kids hanging out with you. *Names their kids*. You know them, right? They know you're students, they say. So maybe later they'll have, what's it called, appeal. 'Oh, these are students - maybe I want to be like them someday.'"*[32]

This smallholder wants his kids to be inspired by us as university students. He wants them to be motivated for school, but why? What importance does education have? The smallholder goes on:

"Where are we supposed to find members? Who here has an accounting degree? There's none. See? That means there's none. Because a cooperative still needs administration, bookkeeping. If no one's skilled in that, oh, it's tough. Kids these days - they're just lazy about school."[33]

The need for educated individuals who can take on distinct jobs is part of the frontier production. This simultaneously perpetrate and counters the dynamics of the frontier: They should be educated to take on jobs in the frontier, while also having a job which helps them engage the frontier from an economic perspective. Generally, the Dayak want to send their children to college, with the expectation that they return as educated individuals (Semedi, 2014). It can also be seen as an opportunity to work outside of agriculture (Li, 2014b).

The education of children is again dependent on the class background of their family: Monthly tuition for school can cost 30'000 Indonesian rupiah, with annual book fees reaching 100'000, and the enrollment fee being 200'000. This is not a small fee for certain households, and often a barrier to getting them educated.

Decision making in the frontier depends on the future wishes and needs of the family. The need here is education, which is a need not new to agrarian communities (Semedi, 2014) The engagement with this vision of the future is shaped by the individual's financial background.

[32] Interview with Smallholder Bang R, May 2025, Pampang Dua

[33] Interview with Smallholder Bang R, May 2025, Pampang Dua

The future and family hold a strong value to members of the community. This value guides them in their response to and making of the frontier.

This chapter discussed how different identities of individuals shape their movement through the frontier. It showcased how these backgrounds motivated and shaped their actions. Moving on from this, the next chapter focuses on the resulting practices of the people in Pampang Dua: How do they resist but also make the hybrid frontier around their village?

How people engage capitalist and state dynamics, the agency of locals

This chapter highlights the power and agency of different actors in the frontier. Often seen as passive subjects to the process of state and capital, the people in the frontier make the frontier. They are active producers with their own imaginations and dreams which shape their engagement with the frontier. By discussing different aspects, the various ways in which their power manifests become evident.

In historic frontier industries in Kalimantan, indigenous communities became participants in the frontier through their collaboration with frontiersmen. This chapter explores how the people in Pampang Dua are collaborators: How do they make and unmake the frontier?

Alternative livelihoods

"You become a teacher and invest the money into your land - then the income isn't just from one source. That's why many employees here are better off economically - they plant oil palms. Some started as teachers, using their savings to invest in palms. Like the story we heard from P. at the office - Pak J., now a businessman. He bought an excavator, now he's into all sorts of ventures."[34]

Next to work on the palm plantation, the community in Pampang Dua engaged in different forms of labor. A relative of Mak who lived in the center of the village had a small warung and mechanics shop in the front of their house. Especially in the afternoon, after shifts on the field and school hours, a lot of people would gather in such warungs to eat, drink and chat. Some people use their motorcycle to move and sell goods, driving from village to village.

[34] Interview with Smallholder Bang R, May 2025, Pampang Dua

Picture 8: Mobile seller (Source: Tobias Graf, May 2025, Pampang Dua)

As side jobs, some people work as public servants. Bang S. works a couple of days as a secretary for the Kantor Desa, the village office. There, he does admirative work, documenting demographic change such as marriage, divorce or death. Bang S. explained that he enjoys doing such work next to the heavy manual labor on the plantation. Sometimes, livelihood diversification doesn't stem from necessity, but from the wishes of the individuals. Still, Bang S.' opportunity of studying in Pontianak, the capital of West Kalimantan, allowed him to take this job. Diversification is thus strongly dependent on the individuals (class) background.

This diversification of livelihoods is a direct response to the dynamics of the frontier (Li & Semedi, 2021). Inhabitants with less or no land seek other ways of earning money which allow them to partially devolve their dependency on the palm oil industry and its corporate actors.

Further alternatives are seen when it comes to land use (Li & Semedi, 2021). While oil palm cultivation dominates the land use around Pampang Dua, some individuals rely on other resource production: Some hold animals such as chicken, cows or buffalos on their plantation land, as such uses don't conflict. A lot of people have built water basins in their backyard, which are used as catfish farms. On most plots, farmers grow other foods and crops such as casava leaves or bamboo, which don't conflict with the palms and profit from the fertilizer and pesticide distribution.

Picture 9: A smallholder gathering casava leaves on his palm plot, a cow among the palm trees (Source: Tobias Graf, May 2025, Pampang Dua)

One farmer presented their alterative livelihood during an interview: He and his family raise pigs behind their house. They keep pigs because the animals are always needed for traditional ceremonies. Their pigs were bought for the recent Modas ritual we attended. They sell the pigs at Rp 120,000/kg, deliberately keeping prices in line with the market even though they could charge more. Right now, all their pigs are already reserved by people for upcoming Dayak festivities. Even unborn piglets have down payments placed on them for future cooking. This farmer has taken an opportunity, which stems from the traditional practices of his people, to create a form of income. While industrialized cultivation shapes the landscape, famers find ways to fit their own, traditional practices into the palm oil frontier. Still, it is important to mention that some diversification depends on the individual's background (Li & Semedi, 2021). The ability to hold animals and farm fish comes from the amount of land owned by a farmer. Sometimes, diversification of livelihood derives from a necessity brought about by frontier dynamics.

Gotong Royong

Moving on from alternative livelihoods seen in the village, this section describes a specific form of labor engagement which contrasts the capitalist nature of the frontier in Pampang Dua.

Royong stands for mutual cooperation. It is performed upon request. On one occasion, we were invited to a field of our hosts to spray pesticides. This form of work agreement is called Royong

nyolo. In this case, Mak requested help from other women in the village to assist with the distribution of pesticides. As the party requesting help, Mak was required to prepare logistics like breakfast, tea, coffee, water and lunch. However, sometimes other participants also bring food to share. During breaks, they share refreshments like tea/coffee, cakes, and fruit. After finishing, they have lunch together back at the house. While such type of cooperative system is not uncommon in Indonesian agrarian communities, it is unique as the main organizers are women. The organized group often consists of the same members, rotating assistance according to the needs of the group's participants. We witnessed the practice of Royong on different instances, for example when it came to the clearing of land.

Picture 10: Women spraying pesticide on oil palm plot, cutting firewood (Source: Tobias Graf, April/ May 2025, Pampang Dua)

Duties and tasks in the palm frontier are mostly subject to forms of wage labor. Here, the capitalist system of change is challenged by traditional practices of this community. Through Royong, work on the plantation is partly cut off from the capitalist market, allowing for the reduction of class difference. While traditional practices are often suppressed by frontier dynamics, Royong was adapted to the conditions, even thriving in the structures of the frontier.

When mentioning Royong to my Indonesian mother and its practice in Pampang Dua, she responded with a saying: Many hands make light work. For the community in Pampang Dua, many hands make work light in the frontier.

Digitalization

Gaming is very popular among children, teenagers and young adults. They would often come home from school together. After lunch, they would sit together, each playing on a smartphone. On the same day, the village could have a power outage, which would also take the internet signal down. This seemed remarkable to me, as smartphones themselves have gone past the establishment of consistent electrical grids.

This section discusses how digitalization shows itself in Pampang Dua, and how it is connected to the frontier and the people inhabiting it.

Digitalization has also influenced work processes on an off the field: In the Kantor Desa, Bang S. has to learn a new application system for documenting village data each year. Such adaptation is not possible for everyone and can lead to confused and chaotic administration. Here, national government policy creates situations of unclarity for the villagers, leaving them to adapt on their own. Digitalization becomes a tool for government bodies to exert control over the village.

To further exemplify how digitalization shapes individuals' actions in the frontier, this section turns to an excerpt from an interview with a smallholder.

"With that application, he's not very proficient. Sometimes I end up studying it myself - even though he has a PhD in computer science, while I'm just a PE teacher. I'd never even touched a computer before - PE teacher, remember? Suddenly, I dove into this field self-taught. Bought a printer, a laptop... eventually got the hang of it, especially Excel. That's the hardest part. Admin work hinges on Excel. Without Excel, everything's heavier. Once you crack it and the totals add up, it's easy."[35]

This quote highlights how this smallholder saw the need for IT knowledge at the cooperative. He took the opportunity by self-teaching computer programs, which allowed him to take on these tasks for the cooperative. His own initiative and understanding of what is needed allowed him to gain certain positions in the frontier, highlighting the agency of individuals. Modernity must not only be a disruptor to traditional practice but can be seen by local actors as a chance (Li, 2014a).

The traditional work arrangements of women and individual engagement with digitalization display the entanglement of modernity and traditional practices in the frontier life of Pampang

[35] Interview with Smallholder Bang R, May 2025, Pampang Dua

Dua. This entanglement displays the characteristic of friction in frontier spaces, where capitalist and modernist practices are met by a specific people and environment which shapes these practices and bends them to local forms of structures and regimes.

Relation with the government: "Cooperasi Merah Putih"

While we got to know Bang S., conversations about local and national governments would come up. Bang S., while working as a secretary in the villages communal offices, would sometimes call out the government for being corrupt, only taking and not giving to its people. There were other occasions where distrust towards the government bodies came up. This section explores the relationship between the smallholder and the government. The introduction of a new government development scheme, "cooperasi merah puti"[36], and the subsequent reaction from the community showcase this relation.

Later in our stay in Pampang Dua, we were invited to attend an event for the promotion of a new governmental development scheme. It took place at the village office. A representative explained the process to smallholders and leading village figures who were in attendance: The Red and White Cooperative (the colors of the Indonesian flag) is a program from President Prabowo Subianto to improve the village economy. The program wants to establish different industries to help the community through new job opportunities, but also the nation as a whole. The representative used fish farming as an example. One attendee questioned where farmed fish would be sold, especially since the village lacks suitable land and most residents grow oil palms. they responded that the products would definitely find buyers within the community.

The skepticism from the attendee would be reproduced during conversations and interviews: In one instance, a smallholder had this to say about the plans of the Red and White cooperative:

"That's why Kalimantan is different. If the Red and White Cooperative is mandatory, in Indonesia, Kalimantan's products would still be fertilizer, LPG, fuel, or service businesses like heavy equipment, excavators. That's why I told X yesterday - if we don't want headaches, let's just push for this business, okay?"[37]

This smallholder has a clear understanding of what this initiative should bring to his community. As we also heard from others, the trust in such development schemes was low amongst villagers, as past initiations have often been announced to then never be started. When

[36] Red and White cooperative is a new economic development scheme by the Indonesian government.

[37] Interview with Smallholder Bang R., May 2025, Pampang Dua

they were performed, the results often weren't good for the community according to different voices. That is why, as in this quote, the distinction between Kalimantan and the rest of the country is important to the villagers: They understand what is needed, while the central government doesn't. Under the guise of development, it has always tried to push capitalist practices on the population in West Kalimantan. While seen as an improvement, the smallholder's response showcases their failures.

How smallholders use their own knowledge in response to governmental schemes can also be seen in their participation in agricultural assistance scheme. While another village had received rice seeds and a tractor for cultivation, the farmers in Pampang Dua wanted corn seeds from the program. This was because corn could be grown among young palm trees, not coming into conflict with this land use contrary to rice.

The imagination of the government about what people need doesn't align with what farmers express. They have a knowledge and understanding which allows them to improve their livelihoods (Li, 2014a). While development schemes in frontier zones are often met by resistance, the famers here don't completely disagree with the program, as they want funds and subsidies, but the programs must respect their understanding. Only then can they be effective in the community.

For the Red and White Cooperative, villagers must be chosen as representatives. At the meeting, and later during interviews, different names were mentioned. We had made acquaintance with some of them, all of which were respected smallholders and members of the farmers' cooperative. All of them owned land. In the moment of this government development scheme, the position of these smallholders allows them to partake in and shape the negotiation and establishment of this cooperative.

This section highlighted how smallholders react to development schemes from the national government. Here, this thesis doesn't see their reaction as a form of resistance, but a way of how they engage and shape the dynamics of the frontier. While literature often sees locals as passive subjects or resisting activists of development schemes, the smallholders in Pampang Dua use these opportunities to enact their own agency.

KUD

At the end of our first week in Pampang Dua, we visited the office of the local farmers cooperative "KUD". The building contained a big auditorium where larger meetings would be held. A board with each member, their land and production for the month of March was hanging

on the wall, alongside description of the positions at the cooperative and who filled those. Such a public display of each famers production surprised me. The man who brought us along explained, that inside the cooperative, there was less competition and jealousy.

How does, in such a neoliberal frontier environment, such a cooperation emerges? The following section engages with the local farmers cooperative and their ways of engaging with and producing frontier dynamics.

What exactly is the KUD? KUD is an abbreviation for "Korperasi Unit Desa", which roughly translates to village cooperative. Local farmers or farmer groups can become members of the cooperative. Through this, they gain access to plantation schemes and corporate buyers for their oil palm produce. The cooperative is the connection between farmers and corporate as well as state actors. It has policies the members must follow and the cooperative can also act as a money lender. Pak explained that the cooperative was the mediator between the corporation and the farmers.

The monthly payday offers an insight into the relationship and structures in the Makarti Jaya KUD[38]: On the first day of the month, all 21 heads of each famers group come together in the office of the cooperative. These farmers group consist of different numbers of smallholders, which together make up the members of the KUD. Each head receives a pink slip, a receipt for how much they earned during that month. It includes deductions which go to the cooperative, including road repairs, community savings and loans. The money was brought in a metal container by three bank workers, who arrived with a black car during lunch. One farmers' group head explained to us that payday was stressful, since he had to distribute the cash to each of his members by hand.

[38] This is the famers' cooperative operating in Pampang Dua.

Picture 11: Payday at the farmers' cooperative (Source: Tobias Graf, May 2025, Pampang Dua)

While this payment structure offered constant and organized money flow, it also demonstrated different dependencies: Each part of the cash chain needs to function for cash to flow steadily and in time. The cooperative needs to process the production documentations of the group heads, who need to gather the production.

The description of the positions at the cooperative displayed further power dynamics. When looking at the management structure of the KUD, relatives of its chairman fill the different core management positions. According to other members, this is because the selection system is left to the chairman, so the management positions are mostly filled by his relatives.

The cooperative also stands in tension with corporation as powerholders: The palm oil companies depend on them for the timely delivery of palm fruit. They need to trust the cooperatives documentation of monthly fruit produce, as they act as the only control mechanism of the farmers.

What role does the cooperative play in the village? Bang S. explained to us that the government allocates funds to the Kantor Desa with the aim of improving infrastructure in the Pampang Dua. During our stay, the office was preparing the construction of a bridge. While there seems to be some interest in infrastructure improvement from local and national government, our time in the village showcased how much the famers cooperative contributes to the improvement in the village.

One example was the main road leading in and out of the village. While most of it was flattened dirt, certain sections had been covered in asphalt. While driving along this road, Bang R. explained how the KUD had invested funds into paving the road. This was important for trucks transporting heavy loads of palm fruit, so that they wouldn't get stuck in the mud during rainy periods. The KUD, through its policies, was able to improve the infrastructure for the community of the village, demonstrating its power and agency. Still, such infrastructure improvement indicates various motivations, as the farmers' cooperative mainly paved the road for the reduce of costs in the palm fruit transport. It is important to highlight that the farmers' cooperative has its own agenda which can differ from its members: The cooperative generally tried to motivate farmers to replant, even if their specific situation doesn't call for it. The circulation of money, between them, the famers and corporate actors lead to increased interests and resulting budget. The cooperative, as an institution, engages with frontier dynamics based on its own agency and agenda (Peluso, 2017; Semedi & Prasetya, 2014).

The Makarti Jaya KUD and its board members took on high standings in the community of Pampanga Dua: One member, who both served as chairman of the cooperative and a governmental council member, took on a dictating position during a gathering after Sunday church. The people at the gathering attentively listened as he spoke loudly and of many topics. He instigated a karaoke session, pushing us to sing in front of the gathered community, all in good fun. Still, it was evident he took on a specific position in the village, one that comes with power. His position as chairman gave him oversight over a lot of livelihoods of the community, as well as leading and representative role for the village.

It is important to mention that such cooperatives have their own agenda which doesn't necessarily represent the communities. They try to push farmers to replant, even when their situation doesn't permit it, as they receive parts of the government funding when replanting is initiated. Money circulation is generally wished for by the cooperative, as they can earn capital from interest.

There are also power dynamics and agendas which shape the inside of the cooperative: When looking at the management structure board in the auditorium, it became clear that different positions were occupied by the relatives of the Dayak chairman. One farmer explained that this was due to the chairman's responsibility in the selection process. Once again, ethnic and family lines shape how individuals move through the frontier. Power is held in specific contexts and can be practiced in different, obscure ways.

This section highlighted the agency and power of the famer's cooperative, in the village as well as the frontier. It's position becomes evident in different instances. It is an actor who strongly shapes the frontier space around Pampang Dua.

Opposition to Mining

Moving on from the farmers' cooperative and its action and position in the frontier, this section discusses individual responses to the introduction of bauxite mining. By presenting discussions we had on the topic of mining, how personal background shapes their response to the mining becomes clearer (Peluso, 2017).

In another section (Chapter 4), this thesis had discussed a traditional Dayak ritual which was held in light of the start of a mining project in the area. At this event, we heard opinions opposing the mining project: Two villagers agreed that the introduction of a bauxite mine would damage the community, since it wouldn't handle the capital earned from land sale. Another saw the mine as unsustainable. Imaginaries of people and visions of future once again come into play when valuing bauxite mining. As smallholders and Dayak, their position shapes their understanding and perspective of this mining project.

One smallholder, with a high standing in the farms' cooperative and village community, did not attend the ritual, even though he had received an invitation. During an interview later on, he had the following to say about the entry of bauxite mining in Pampang Dua:

"They already hold mining business permits for this area, so it's as if settlements here don't exist - it's insane. It's just... as if there's no community here. Like it's all just empty. So, bro, hold on a second. Imagine - they come here and suddenly have a permit stating our land is part of a mining concession. We're a community that's lived here for generations. We want a sustainable environment, unpolluted nature. We're not even talking about money yet. If it were about money, sure, we would want it, right? But let's think again: what's the long-term damage?"[39]

Different aspects are interesting in this quote: For one, the conception of terra nullius, of empty land, is felt by the smallholder in the introduction and practice of the mining corporation (Eilenberg, 2014; Li, 2014b; Tsing, 2003). An underlying narrative is being made into reality through capitalist practice.

[39] Interview with Smallholder Bang R., May 2025, Pampang Dua

Secondly, the importance of the wellbeing and future of the community is a guiding factor for their perception of bauxite mining. Interestingly, the monetary value of land is seen as less important, while its ability to sustain future generations is center to this smallholder's valuation (Lounela, 2021). The final aspect of this quote is the mention of unpolluted nature. This smallholders' understanding of nature might contradict what my or western knowledges understanding is, his reality in the frontier sets his environmental imaginations opposite to the mining. For them, being able to cultivate corn and keep pigs among the oil palm plantations constitutes what is nature. The history and culture of the Dayak constitute what is nature. This nature is challenged by the introduction of bauxite mining.

The villagers in Pampang Dua reacted to the mining project based on their background: On one day, the aforementioned smallholder had a meeting with a Dayak representative of the mining company at his house. I was dragged into this conversation after passing by the house, as it would often happen. There was drinking involved, and a lot of attempts at learning English phrases. Otherwise, I didn't understand much. The significance of this meeting would only become clear afterwards.

Following the meeting, we went to a neighbor's house where many Dayak villagers had gathered for Rosario prayers. During eating, the smallholder spoke up: The mining company had asked him if they could test the land beneath the church, in the center of the village. He had more or less politely denied.

This smallholder used their position to engage in their own action against the mining initative. Not only did they deny the testing of communal land under the church, but he had also informed his community about the proposition. This gave the participants of the prayer information on the intentions and actions of the mining corporation. The smallholder engaged in the dynamics of the frontier, shaping them according to their own agency and understanding of land, future and community (Li & Semedi, 2021; Peluso, 2017; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Semedi & Prasetya, 2014). This smallholder would always say that they weren't an activist, which is true: They acted in their own specific context, as a smallholder who trusted his palms.

The value of oil-palm cultivation in contrast to bauxite mining becomes evident in this final quote from the interview with this smallholder:

"With bauxite, once we mine it, it's over - no more history. The story ends there with bauxite."[40]

For this smallholder, the value of both forms of resource extraction is strongly derived from their ability to sustain the community and coming generations in Pampang Dua. With bauxite mining, the land gets stripped of its history and story, in which it had sustained their ancestors through different forms of agriculture. That form today is palm-oil cultivation.

This section discussed and analyzed different ways of how individuals navigate, negotiate and make the frontier in Pampang Dua. By understanding how their background and values shape their action (Li & Semedi, 2021; Lounela, 2021; Peluso, 2017), the understanding of frontiers as a space of hybridity becomes clearer: Old ideas and values do not just vanish trough the domination of the frontier, but are met by a specific context, in environment and people. This context shapes how capitalist structures are implemented, which happens with friction.

[40] Interview with Smallholder Bang R., May 2025, Pampang Dua

Replanting

Picture 11: Palm seedling among older trees (Source: Tobias Graf, June 2025, Pampang Dua)

This section looks at the moment of replanting in Pampang Dua. Next to the introduction of bauxite mining, this moment represents a shift and rupture in the frontier dynamics. What does it mean for the hybridity of the frontier space? How do different actors react in this moment? By focusing on the replanting process, this chapter highlights how the frontier is remade by government, corporate and local actors in this specific moment.

Process

The following section will briefly present the government replanting program which pushes for replanting in Pampang Dua:

PSR, short for "Peremajaan Sawit Rakyat", is the Indonesian government's program to rejuvenate smallholder oil palm plantations (both independent and plasma) that have reached old age and are no longer productive. While first being planned in 2007, PSR only began to be seriously implemented starting in 2017 with the aim of maintaining and multiplying state revenue from the palm oil sector. So how does this program support smallholders? Farmers receive not cash but support in other forms: the government provides high-yield seedlings,

optimal fertilizers, and farming infrastructure. To apply for the rejuvenation program, farmers must do this through a KUD.

A farmer may only be able to replant with the help of the government program. Here, dynamics of dependences show themselves. The farmer must submit to a KUD, which would take away parts of his autonomy. The famers cooperative also takes a position in this frontier moment: On the one hand, it tries to motivate farmers to replant, which would lead money circulation. On the other, they too are in relation of dependency when it comes to replanting.

When asked on how independent farmers could join the governmental replanting program, this cooperative member explained:

> *"They must apply to become cooperative members. By paying the primary deposit, mandatory savings, and other administrative fees. Only then are they officially declared cooperative members. Once they become a cooperative member, their palm oil which wasn't originally planted by the company or on company land can qualify for replanting."*[41]

In this quote it becomes evident that replanting is only allowed to happen in connection to a farmer cooperative and the government, further dissolving the autonomy of smallholders (Li & Semedi, 2021).

The replanting process itself takes two years and can be done in two ways: Either you cut down the tree, which is more costly and can lead to debt, or you poison the tree, which cheaper but brings with an issue of bug invasion. The farmers must weigh out these issues for their decision on replanting.

[41] Interview with Smallholder Pak G., May 2025, Pampang Dua

Picture 12: Planting of seedling in spot of cut-down palm tree (Source: Tobias Graf, June 2025, Pampang Dua)

Government bodies push for replanting, with the aim of increased productivity in the region. KUDs engage with this push, finding themselves with in dependency, but also opportunity with the subsides promised by the program. It becomes evident that the process of replanting creates new power dynamics. The smallholders and farmers are exposed to these dynamics. How do they react to this moment? How do they decide on replanting? In the next section, the smallholders' action in the moment of replanting demonstrates their active role in the making of the frontier.

Smallholder

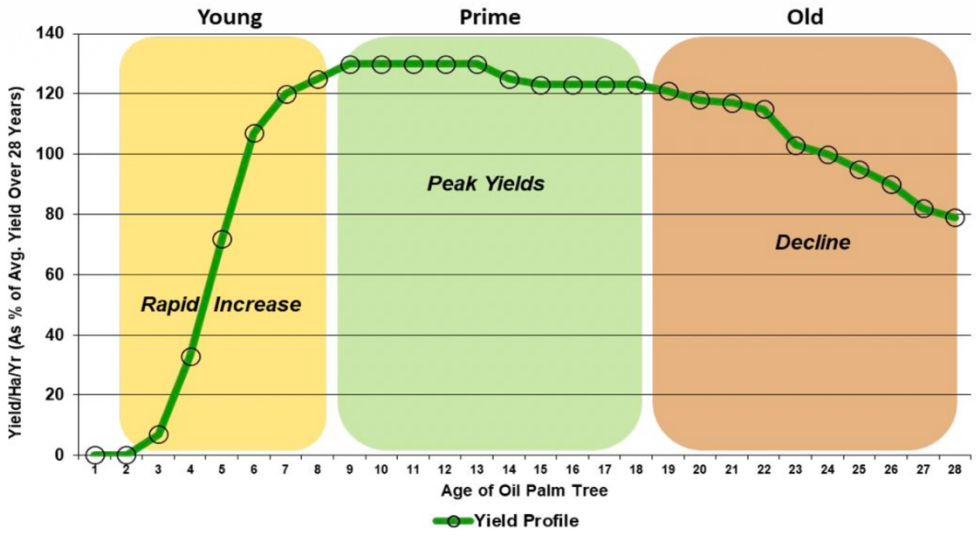
When moving through the area surrounding the village, it became quite clear that not all famers were at the same stage of replanting. Each kapling could contain a tree of different age than the one in the kapling next to it. This shaped the landscape around Pampang Dua: Empty spaces, either being prepared for or just replanted, were surrounded by tall, older palm trees, giving it a pattern.

Picture 13: Palm plots at different stages (Source: Tobias Graf, April 2025, Meliau)

In the following section, the farmers' decision-making in the replanting process is discussed and analyze. Who wants to replant, who doesn't and why?

The smallholders we met during our time "owned" two types of plantation land: For one, they had their "plasma" estate. This was a plot of land they retained from the handover to the plantation, which the often lived and simultaneously grew palm trees on. The other land owned was mostly detached from their plasma estate and was bought through their savings. The amount of plantation land owned varied heavily between smallholders.

One participant explained to us, how the quality and thus price of palm fruit fluctuates with the age of the tree: While trees start to be productive after three years, the quality rises with the age, to then drop off at after approximately 20 years.



Picture 14: Yield over Palm Tree Lifespan (Source: Ara Simanjuntak, UGM, Data: USDA)

The smallholder can improve their production by investing capital into better saplings, pesticide or fertilizer. The amount of land a smallholder owned, the age of their trees and their capital shaped their decision to replant. This is made clear by this interview quote from a member of the farmers' cooperative:

We can't force plantation owners. Maybe their farms are still tied to daily needs - school fees, loans, basic expenses. So, we can't compel farmers to join the program. If the plantation is still productive, still harvestable, still worth tending and the yield is good, that's fine.[42]

Smallholders' decisions on replanting were formed by material factors, but also by their wishes and imaginaries (Hall, 2011; Li & Semedi, 2021): The importance of the next generation and their education can move a smallholder, depending on his land and capital, depending on his and the age of their children, can move them towards or away from replanting. Their social relations inform their navigation through the frontier.

Smallholders also had further individual reasons to replant or not: One smallholder had decided to replant, since he was afraid his "egreg", his harvesting tool, would not suffice for the old, tall trees, which also increased the risk of work injury.

[42] Interview with Smallholder Bang S., April 2025, Pampang Dua

Picture 15: Day laborer using an "egreg" to harvest palm fruit (Source: Tobias Graf, April 2025, Pampang Dua

Others mentioned the momentary good price of palm fruit, saying it would be a shame to reduce production through replanting. Another smallholder, even though their trees have reached the official age for replanting, has not yet started, since he and his workers can still reach the fruits. Different strategies, guided by their individual situation and understanding, are deployed by smallholders during the moment of replanting.

One smallholder encountered the moment of replanting and its shift in the frontier dynamics as an opportunity. During an interview, they explained to us:

"Here's the deal: back then each person could only file for replanting on 2 hectares, 4 max. No more. One person. Downstream I've got 2 hectares, right? One lot is 2 hectares, so I can only file two lots under my name - 4 hectares total. The rest I'll file as two more lots, meaning they're split off. The remainder goes under my wife's name…That's why we used to split parents and kids onto separate household books - so we could tap the funds. If the kids are still on the same book … on the same household sheet, we'd tell them to marry quick and split the book if possible. That's how it was - not cheating, just following the rules"[43]

[43] Interview with Smallholder Bang R., May 2025, Pampang Dua

This smallholder used the moment of replanting to secure more subsidies, by understanding and using the rules set up by the program. While the program pushed dependencies when it came to replanting, the smallholder didn't sit idly but engaged and reshaped the dynamics to his own need.

The moment of replanting brought forth new frontier dynamics trough the actions of the different actors. Government and famers cooperatives could gain trough the procedure, thus pushing smallholders to act accordingly. These didn't do so passively but engaged with their own interests and agency. The moment of replanting was a moment of friction.

Chapter 4 analyzed how the oil-palm and bauxite frontier in Pampang Dua are continuously made through the interaction of state, capital and the local community. The frontier is characterized by hybridity and friction, where modernist and capitalist regimes, rather than erasing them, coexist and clash with traditional land values, livelihoods and social relations. By focusing on the lived experience of local villagers, this chapter highlighted how factors such as landownership, class, ethnicity and social relations shape individuals' movement through the frontier. Smallholders and other individuals aren't passive subjects but actively negotiate planation work, mining expansion and the moment of replanting, while practicing their traditional culture and values.

5. Conclusion

This thesis explored how frontier dynamics are produced and lived in the village of Pampang Dua in west Kalimantan, Indonesia. By centering the lived, varied experiences of the local population, it tried to move past abstract and large-scale analyses of frontiers dynamics. Instead, this thesis examined how global capitalist and state-led processes were encountered and shaped in the everyday life of the villagers in Pampang Dua.

By conceptualizing the frontier in Pampang Dua as a space of hybridity and friction, it can be understood as dynamic, multilayered frontier space which is made and remade in the interaction of different actors and imaginaries. With this, this thesis moves past the notion of frontier spaces as passive peripheries being absorbed into capitalist systems. Instead, they create a specific context of capitalism, a space where capitalism establishes itself in a distinct way. This thesis also doesn't see frontier spaces as something static, but as a something that takes place through land reallocations, replanting schemes, cooperative practices, mining concession and the everyday life of people in Pampang Dua.

This thesis found that smallholders in Pampang Dua were neither passive recipients nor uniformly resistant to the dynamics of the frontier. Smallholders actively engage and negotiate with government and corporate actors. They react to the practices of state and capital, based on their own identity and position. They weigh out gains and losses based on their own value system. Their engagement with farmers' cooperatives, corporations and state agencies is shaped by a differentiated access to capital information and social networks.

The introduction of bauxite mining brought new dynamics to the frontier in Pampang Dua. Rather than replacing the palm oil frontier, it introduced a second layer of resource extraction which competes with and complements the established. For some villagers, mining was an economic alternative and opportunity, while others saw danger and destruction of their own livelihoods in it. The introduction led to a revaluation of land and resources for both large and small actors. Villagers again reacted on their understanding and identity when it came to the introduction of bauxite mining.

The dynamics of frontiers do not simply erase existing, traditional practices and relations. Instead, indigenous knowledge and practices persist, adapt and entangle with modernist, capitalist structures. Communal histories of labor division and land histories continue to shape

locals' action in the frontier in Pampang Dua. This hybridity and friction challenge the binary between modern and indigenous.

5.1. Considerations for Future Research

To finish off, I want to present some thoughts for future research:

This thesis highlights the agency of people living in the frontier. While it wants to shift the understanding of these as passive frontier subjects, a consideration of the class inequalities brought about by a globalized capitalist market is still important. The frontier conditions which the people engage with are brought about by neoliberal perpetration of the market. As such, recognizing both agency and oppression should be practiced when producing knowledge about frontier situations. The issue of collaboration with both the students who accompanied me as well as the participants in my research, wasn't engaged with in detail. While villagers had called on my work to be sent to the government of Indonesia, I can't engage with this request. Further practices towards collaboration should be considered for next time. Discussions on future-making and ideas are important to this thesis. Here, the concept of uncertainty and how it shapes the interaction of individuals with different power structures (Scoones, 2019, 2024) It would have added an interesting aspect to the perspective of the community in Pampang Dua. Specific forms of resistance against frontier dynamics were not discussed in this thesis. It would have been an enrichment to understand local actors, as they would have brought their own values and actions to the thesis. Labor and youth groups, as well as other social movements, are key actors in frontier spaces (Sarma et al., 2023). During a Dayak festival in another village, I spoke with a young man who described himself as an activist. He opposed the gold mining projects in the Kapuas River, on which banks his village stood. He showed me his social media, which was filled with posts of protests and political discussions. This was an aspect of the frontier I would like to have explored but didn't have the capacity for. While discussed in the methodology part of this thesis, the issue of colonialist knowledge production persists. While trying to avoid trough different practices, this thesis still has aspects which perpetrate a knowledge production frontier (Sarma et al., 2023). This thesis tried to shift the hegemony of knowledge production by strongly engaging with local understandings. While intentions may be well, producing southern cultural autonomy from my position int the Global North can reproduce colonial, paternalistic views. It produces the local as something different to the West (Tsing, 2005; Yarrow, 2006). While the conception of friction battles this, this thesis does not fully evade this reproduction.

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Personal Declaration

I hereby declare that the submitted thesis is the result of my own, independent work. All external sources are explicitly acknowledged in the thesis.

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