



Manifestation of Resistance between PTPN II Plantation Corporation and Persil IV Farmers in Tadukan Raga Village, Deli Serdang Regency

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ABSTRACT

The increasing reports of agrarian conflicts and farmer protests in Indonesia highlight that Sumatra and Kalimantan islands are prone to land disputes between farmers and plantation companies, particularly those involved in oil palm cultivation. The Persil IV Farmers community is located in Tanjung Morawa, specifically in the Sinembah Tanjung Muda Hilir District of the Deli Serdang Regency. The Persil IV Farmers represent a collective of farmers who are experiencing agrarian conflicts with PTPN II in Deli Serdang. The purpose of this research is to examine how the application of rimbo culture and borong labor serves as a form of resistance by farmers against PTPN II plantation companies in the Tadukan Raga village, Sinembah Tanjung Muda Hilir District. This study adopts a qualitative research method with a case study approach. The conflict between the Persil IV farmers and the PTPN II company is analyzed using Dahrendorf's conflict theory. The findings indicate that consensus between the Persil IV farmers and PTPN II has not been reached due to ongoing government intervention, which acts as a trigger for the conflict. One of the negative impacts of the conflict is that the Persil IV community has become more isolated from the broader community. This is evident in one of the cultural practices of the Persil IV Farmers, who now exclusively hire pieceworkers from within their area, indicating a sense of fear towards outsiders.

Keyword: Rimbo Culture, Wholesale Labor, Farmers of Persil IV, PTPN II



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1. Introduction

The increasing news coverage of agrarian conflicts and farmer protests in Indonesia highlights that the islands of Sumatra and Kalimantan are hotspots for land conflicts between farmers and plantation companies, particularly those involved in oil palm cultivation. West Kalimantan ranks first in terms of the number of agricultural conflicts, followed by North Sumatra. Farmers in North Sumatra have long resisted plantation expansion through strikes and rebellions (Bakumsu, 2011). During the Orde Baru period, which implemented development policies following the agricultural

industrialization model, the space for farmers to maneuver was further restricted due to increased land grabbing by plantation companies. Consequently, the farmers' movement shifted towards underground activities to evade militaristic repression.

The Rimbo culture is an agricultural cultural system practiced by the Jambi people, originating from the process of shifting agriculture. Additionally, this culture has been adopted by laborers in Jambi's plantation communities. Rimbo culture is often understood as a process of human interaction with forests. It plays a significant role in shaping land ownership patterns, particularly within Jambi society, and is employed to safeguard community land. This cultural practice is widely recognized as a characteristic of traditional society (Brata, 2012).

The emergence of Rimbo culture has led to the development of a commercial culture within Jambi society. This cultural phenomenon has resulted in the establishment of an economic organizational structure and the development of economic infrastructure. The economic organizational structure has brought about changes such as the emergence of men and landowners. The system created by the community through Rimbo culture operates based on principles of ecology and conservation. Rimbo culture also serves as a significant marker in the context of social land ownership, as agreed upon by the community. It is essential to preserve Rimbo culture in the landscape to ensure its contribution to biodiversity (Brata, 2012).

Borong labor, often abbreviated as BB, refers to a type of work that is not part of the plantation worker structure. Generally, borong workers are compensated using a piece-rate system. For instance, once a worker completes a task, they are immediately paid by the contractor or mandator. Additionally, borong labor is characterized by payment solely for the hours worked; if a borong laborer does not work, they do not receive a daily wage (Aristanti, 2019).

The Persil IV Farmers community is located in Tanjung Morawa, specifically in the Tanjung Muda Hilir Sinembah District of the Deli Serdang Regency. This community represents a unity of farmers who are experiencing agrarian conflicts with PTPN II in Deli Serdang Regency. Historically, the Persil IV Farmers have pursued various forms of resistance to defend their land rights, including both legal and extralegal means. In addition to legal resistance, farmers have also engaged in extralegal resistance. This form of resistance often takes the shape of revolutionary social movements, which tend to be confrontational and may involve violent means of challenging state power openly. This model of protest movement eventually leads to a radical movement that opposes state hegemony and employs methods that are considered illegal by the state and violate government laws (Kuntowijoyo, 2002).

In its development, extralegal protests are often regarded as a new social movement (GSB) characterized by autonomy, anti-institutionalism, and anti-authoritarianism, as they reject state intervention. One form of extralegal protest undertaken by farmers from Persil IV in Tadukan Raga

Village, Sinembah Tanjung Muda Hilir Subdistrict, against PTPN II plantation companies involves secretly planting sweet potatoes on the land owned by PTPN II, which is intended for oil palm cultivation.

This action was taken by the farmers as an attempt to address their economic needs, as the land they own is occupied by PTPN II and managed as an oil palm plantation. The farmers planted sweet potato trees around PTPN II's oil palm plantations. This initiative is reminiscent of the Rimbo culture of the Jambi people. Intrigued by this, researchers sought to investigate how the application of Rimbo culture and the Borong labor culture in the plantations of Tadukan Raga Village, Sinembah Tanjung Muda Hilir District, serves as a resistance strategy against PTPN II plantation companies. Researchers also aimed to explore the strategies employed by farmers in dealing with these conflicts and their relationship to the Borong Labor culture phenomenon observed among the Persil IV Farmers of Tadukan Raga Village, STM Hilir District.

2. Research Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a literature study and case study methodology. Data collection methods include observation, interviews, and literature review focusing on Rimbo culture and Borong labor culture. According to Embun in Melfionora (2012), a literature study, also known as a literature review, theoretical study, theoretical basis, or theoretical review, involves gathering data from previous research works. The findings of the literature study are then compared and adjusted to the case studies conducted in the field. This research gathers information from several informants among the Persil IV farmers who reside in the PTPN II plantation area. Additionally, Ralf Dahrendorf's conflict theory is employed as a tool for analyzing the case.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. History of Persil IV Farmers' Conflict with PTPN II

The area currently owned by the Limited Liability Company Perkebunan Nusantara II-PTPN II (Persero/BUMN) is known as "Persil IV". Located approximately 30 kilometers from Medan City, it is situated in the Tanjung Morawa District of Deli Serdang Regency. In 1956, a government policy referred to as Persil IV authorized communities in five villages to cultivate an additional 525 hectares of land using the Persil system. These villages include Lau Barus Village and Batutak Village, which are part of the administrative area of Lau Barus Baru Village; Tungkusan Village, within the administrative area of Tadukan Raga Village; and Sinembah and Limau Mungkur Villages, which fall under the administrative area of Limau Mungkur Village. These three villages are located in the STM Hilir Sub-district, Deli Serdang Regency.

The conflict in the community and the land seizure by oil palm companies originated from an announcement made by the Limau Mungkur State Plantation (now PTPN II) prior to the mid-1972 rice harvest. The plantation informed the farmers that they were required to relinquish the land they were cultivating on Persil land. It was communicated that the land and crops owned by the residents would be taken over and compensated. Additionally, the plantation requested that farmers apply for permission to cultivate the Persil land through the plantation, within one month of being notified about the compensation. This event serves as the background to the conflict within the community and the subsequent land seizure by oil palm companies, as documented by Aditjondro (1998).

Perusahaan Terbatas Perkebunan Nusantara II (PTPN II), a state-owned enterprise company, is engaged in plantation agribusiness. North Sumatra and Papua are producing areas for sugarcane, cocoa, latex, palm oil and sugar. When farmers realized what was happening, they reacted by speeding up the harvest time and taking turns guarding the land for a few days.

A week after almost half of the landowners began harvesting, the state plantation company, assisted by the army and police, deployed all plantation workers to the farmers' land with tractors and other heavy equipment. In one unexpected night, all the farmers' sheds were burned down, and the crops still growing there were severely damaged. Dozens of state security forces remained on-site to oversee the construction until the following day. Since the land seizure in 1972, there has been no goodwill between the farmers and PTPN II. To initiate and develop the plantation in the administrative area of Limau Mungkur plantation, PTPN II started contracting the land in late 1972, clearing oil palm and rubber seedlings, and making all necessary technical preparations. At the same time, farmers began losing their jobs. It appeared unlikely that they would be able to reclaim their land. The lack of land to support them became a problem faced by all the farmers of Persil IV.

The loss of access to their land, which was their primary means of production, made it increasingly difficult for farmers to sustain their livelihoods. In the early 1970s, this led to mass proletarianization and a subsistence crisis. Farmers faced various challenges in attempting to survive under these circumstances. They could no longer access the land needed for their production activities. To avoid a family food crisis, farmers resorted to using options that they found distasteful. They converted reserve land areas, originally not intended for farming, entirely to staple food crop cultivation. Fruit trees on these reserve lands had to be cut down to make room for rice or sweet potatoes to be grown.

As a result, the process of impoverishment and economic instability in farm households continues, further entrapping farmers. In such economic processes, farmers transition from being landowners to becoming cross-professionals and workers in the unorganized sector. Additionally, there is a vertical progression from medium-scale landowners to small-scale farmers. These changes in production patterns have led to conflictual relationships between farmers and plantations. Based

on differences in needs, this relationship has further fueled farmers' radicalism, leading to both overt and covert forms of resistance. According to Scott (1993), unilaterally seizing farmers' land—their means of production—will push them into a cornered position, eventually leading to collective resistance and rebellion when the situation allows.

3.2. *Implementation of Rimbo Culture of Persil IV Farmers in facing plantation conflicts with PTPN II*

The conflict between PTPN II and the farming community of Persil IV in Sinembah Tanjung Muda Subdistrict had a significant impact on the loss of the farmers' identity. In the 1970s, PTPN II began cultivating conflict-prone farming areas. The crops planted by PTPN II on this land were rubber and oil palm trees. The activities carried out by PTPN II left farmers facing difficult choices for survival. While they may still reside in the vicinity of their homes, which are located within the forest land now cultivated by PTPN II, they no longer have access to land for their production activities.

This situation led farmers to make several efforts to survive, resorting to choices they did not actually desire (Afandi, 2013). One such effort involved secretly planting crops in PTPN II's rubber and oil palm plantations. Farmers who had lost their land began farming activities by clandestinely planting sweet potatoes in PTPN II's oil palm and rubber tree farms. This action was taken in an attempt to meet the basic living needs of the farmers who, at that time, had no other means of survival. Considering that rubber and oil palm trees are plants that do not require irrigation and can thrive in dry areas, and sweet potatoes can grow in various soil conditions as long as the soil is fertile and do not require high irrigation, Persil IV farmers chose sweet potatoes as an alternative crop that could be temporarily planted in PTPN II's oil palm and rubber plantations.

The efforts made by Persil IV farmers are reminiscent of the Rimbo culture that exists in Jambi society, aimed at protecting community land. Therefore, the farmers of Persil IV undertook these efforts to safeguard their farming area by planting crops in the oil palm plantation area under PTPN II, even though the land had previously belonged to the Persil IV farmers themselves.

Over time, following the conflict that claimed lives in 2010, initiated by PTPN II against the farming community of Persil IV, the conflict began to subside from 2012 to the present. The heirs of Persil IV land who still reside in the area currently work as sweet potato farmers, on average. The land that was in conflict with PTPN II is now widely utilized by the community, especially by the heirs of Persil IV land.

3.3. *Implementation of the Borong Labor Culture of Persil IV Farmers in the current plantation conflict with PTPN II*

The conflict between PTPN II and Persil IV farmers had a significant impact on improving the economic status of the community, especially the Persil IV farmers. Sinembah Tanjung Muda

Hilir District has become one of the largest suppliers of sweet potato crops in Deli Serdang Regency. Therefore, it is not surprising that today, most of the heirs of Persil IV land have become sweet potato producers. The heirs of Persil IV land, who own sweet potato fields, mostly employ laborers in the cultivation process due to the extensive size of their land. These laborers, employed by Persil IV farmers, are known as "borongan laborers" or "borong laborers" (BB). While these laborers only work during the harvest season, the process of planting sweet potatoes by the Persil IV farming community is carried out in rotation. Therefore, the work as a borong laborer is continuous every month.

The community itself organizes the planting schedule to ensure that contract workers or borong laborers can continue working to meet their basic needs. One notable characteristic of the Borong Laborers working in the Persil IV area is that they are all residents living in the vicinity. This requirement was intentionally implemented by the heirs of Persil IV land as an effort to maintain their sweet potato plantation and to foster a sense of community among the residents in the area. This characteristic was not introduced to minimize the relationship between the farmers on the land and the broader community, but rather as an effort by the heirs to protect their land and provide employment opportunities for residents in the surrounding area where they live.

3.4. The Analysis of Ralf Dahrendorf's Conflict Theory in the Implementation of Rimbo Culture of Persil IV Farmers in Facing Plantation Conflicts with PTPN II.

Based on the case experienced by Persil IV farmers, the author analyzes it using Dahrendorf's conflict theory. Dahrendorf posits that society has two faces: conflict and consensus. He argues that society cannot exist without both conflict and consensus (mutual agreement), suggesting that conflict will not occur if there is no consensus (mutual agreement) in place. In the case of Persil IV farmers, initially, there was no consensus between the farmers of Persil IV and PTPN II, a government entity. This lack of consensus led to the conflict between the two parties.

After several years, the conflict situation began to ease, leading to the emergence of a society with new values. The community acquired these new values from the Rimbo culture, which brought about a change in the community's culture. Initially, they only planted rubber plants and left some parts of the land unused. However, after the conflict, the community began planting sweet potato plants on the previously unused rubber land. However, the conflict also had negative impacts. The Persil IV community became more isolated from other communities. This isolation is evidenced by a cultural shift within the Persil IV plantation community, where they only hire piecework laborers from their area. This reflects a sense of fear within the community towards outsiders.

4. Conclusion

Farmers Persil IV is a community of farmers located in Tanjung Morawa, specifically in STM Hilir District, Deli Serdang Regency. This community represents a unity of farmers who have

experienced agrarian conflicts with PTPN II in Deli Serdang. The efforts made by Persil IV Farmers are reminiscent of the Rimbo culture that exists in Jambi society, aimed at protecting their land. Therefore, Persil IV farmers undertook these efforts to safeguard their farming area by planting crops in the oil palm plantation area under PTPN II, even though the land had previously belonged to the Persil farmers themselves. Additionally, the culture of borong labor often takes place in the process of processing sweet potato crops owned by the heirs of Persil IV. This phenomenon is closely related to the efforts made by Persil IV farmers in defending their land rights from PTPN II companies.

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