

Navigating Oil Palm Swamps

Rethinking the Role of Go-Betweens in
Palm Oil Cultivation at the Kalimantan
Frontier in Indonesia



Runavia Mulyasari

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Frans Wijsen, Toon van Meijl & Edwin de Jong

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

APL	<i>Area Penggunaan Lain/Other Areas of Use</i>
AMAN	<i>Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara/Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago</i>
AMDAL	<i>Analisis Dampak Lingkungan/Environmental Impact Assessment</i>
Bappeda	<i>Badan Pendapatan Daerah/Development Planning Agency</i>
BPS	<i>Badan Pusat Statistik/Statistics Indonesia</i>
CPO	<i>Crude Palm Oil</i>
CSO	<i>Civil Society Organisation</i>
CUP	<i>Cahaya Unggul Prima</i>
DAD	<i>Dewan Adat Dayak/Dayak Councils</i>
DPR RI	<i>Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia/House of Representatives of Republic Indonesia</i>
DPRD	<i>Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah/Regional Legislative</i>
FDI	<i>Foreign Direct Investment</i>
HMI	<i>Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam/Muslim Students Association</i>
HPH	<i>Hak Pengusahaan Hutan/Logging Concession</i>
IUP	<i>Izin Usaha Perkebunan/Plantation Business Permit</i>
KKPA	<i>Kredit Koperasi Primer Anggota/Primary Cooperative Credit for Members</i>
KUD	<i>Koperasi Unit Desa/Village Unit Cooperative</i>
LBH	<i>Lembaga Bantuan Hukum/Legal Aid Institute</i>
MADN	<i>Majelis Adat Dayak Nasional/National Dayak Customary Council</i>
NGO	<i>Non-governmental Organisation</i>
PBS	<i>Perkebunan Besar Swasta/Large Private Plantation</i>
PD	<i>Partai Dayak/Dayak Party</i>
PERDA	<i>Peraturan Daerah/Regional Regulation</i>
PIR	<i>Perkebunan Inti Rakyat/Nucleus Estate Scheme</i>
PIR- Trans	<i>Perkebunan Inti Rakyat-Transmigrasi/Nucleus Estate Scheme-Transmigration</i>
PKI	<i>Partai Komunis Indonesia/Indonesian Communist Party</i>
Pungli	<i>Pungutan Liar/Illegal Levies</i>
REDD	<i>Reduction Emission</i>

RSPO	Rountable on Sustainable Palm Oil
SNIP	<i>Satya Indah Perkasa</i>
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

Introduction

I first met Mils Robi, a famous middleman and former regent of the district of Sintang, West Kalimantan, in October 2015. He was sitting on his beautiful, carved chair in his big large and fancy house decorated with Christian ornaments in the wall, in Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo. He is of medium height and exudes energy. During our conversation, he spoke profusely and would often use English words. Some aspects of the way he spoke were in contrast with his formal appearance. He was undoubtedly charismatic and this made me cautious about raising questions. The mood of our conversation contrasted with a few moments previously, when I saw him talking to villagers in the local Dayak language. He seemed more relaxed with the villagers – sitting with one leg up on his chair – when he listened patiently to the requests they made of him. He offered them cups of sweet coffee, the favourite drink of the Dayak people. His style was different again when he talked to a government official and adopted a more professional, formal demeanour. The government official had given him three envelopes and asked him to sign a piece of paper. It was allotment money or *uang jatah* from oil palm activities. Mils occupies a strategic position in this scene and would often receive for the range of contacts and possibilities he could create. After talking to him for about one hour, I turned to the topic of oil palm. His face changed instantly, but not for long as he managed to get control over his edginess. He admitted that he had invited the oil palm companies to invest in the district of Sintang. He explained to me, ‘I flew to Jakarta to meet with the heads of the companies to reassure their investments. I offered information about the district, maps of the potential plantation areas, and tax free investments for the companies that show interest into investing in the development of palm oil plantations in our district’. He suddenly stopped the conversation, and I saw him thinking. Finally, he said, ‘I still meet with the company’s managers or directors in Jakarta or Pontianak’ (Mils Robi, Conversation, 2015).

My encounter with Mils Robi led to various remarkable insights about the nature of middlemen or brokers, or what I will refer to as go-betweens, especially about their ability to subtly change in attitude, gesture, and language. It also made clear that he knew how to interact with people from various social-economic backgrounds without losing his charisma and reputation. He explained that the development and maintenance of oil palm cultivation in Sintang attracted various actors

competing to reap the benefits of the (potential) oil palm plantations. According to *Pak Mils*, a person with a particularly strategic position can have the power to control and access land, people, and other resources, giving rise to an actor's dual role in resource-rich regions, such as Sintang. In this sense, understanding what is allowed and not in the local community could provide a strategic actor with the necessary room to manoeuvre to reap benefits from the available natural resources in the area over which he establishes authority. Moreover, competition between actors over access and control over "new" natural resources in Kalimantan requires flexibility of go-betweens in manoeuvring and dealing with unpredictable situations and persons, such as firm owners and managers.

My conversation with Mils also revealed that competition to gain access and control over new natural resources is a common happening in Indonesia – especially where new opportunities for extraction suddenly become available in frontier lands of West Kalimantan. Examining the go-betweens, who appear pivotal in this competitive process, requires investigating social structures that underpin local societies and the individual characteristics that have potentially facilitated or encouraged the rise of these intermediate actors. These two aspects seemed to be cleverly used by go-betweens, such as Mils Robi, to arrive at a strategic position in-between different actors and parties, with varying interests, worldviews and access and control over capital. The go-betweens sometimes even speak other languages, depending on who the go-between is talking to, to help be bridged and negotiated by the ones at the crossroads. Once at these positions, go-betweens need to deploy their individual abilities to access information about natural resources, have knowledge about regional and local laws, regulations, and customs, and have networks that support their mediation role. I explore how existing social structures contained values and norms that led local communities to accept the role of such go-betweens.

The change in actors who possess power and are in control over natural resources has primarily been driven by the implementation of the regional decentralization and democratization laws of 2001. These laws were implemented in the years shortly after the fall of the authoritarian regime of President Suharto. Decentralization led to the creation of new institutional arenas in which centre-periphery relations became negotiated and renegotiated, resulting in new forms of political mobilization and alignment (Goodhand, Klem, & Walton, 2016). From this time, specific actors managed to claim positions in the interstitial spaces that have emerged in-between the local and the national administrative and governmental levels to reap benefits through manoeuvring, claiming territory, and seizing power and control over access to networks and natural resources.

Similar accounts to that of my conversation with Mils above are likely to be found in other regions of Indonesia, especially those rich in natural resources (see De Jong, Knippenberg, & Bakker, 2017; Li & Semedi, 2021 for other regions in Kalimantan; McCarthy, 2012 for Sumatera; and Chao, 2018 for Papua). Moreover, as we have learned from studies in Latin America (Bebbington et al., 2018; Larson & Mendoza, 2012), Africa (e.g., Laube, 2007; Ribot, 2003; Ribot, Agrawal, & Larson, 2006) and other countries in Asia (e.g., Ribot & Larson, 2012; Larson, 2012), these democratization and decentralization processes certainly attract various actors to exploit the region's natural resources by competing with local and national actors. The complex situation that results in these contexts, and the tough competition among numerous actors that comes along, triggers a kind of dynamics in these natural resource-rich regions that raise a number of questions about the ones who are at the center of this dynamic process: the go-betweens. Who are these actors, in terms of characteristics and background? What do they have in common? Are there any specificities that are required to become a go-between? What do they offer, and how are they acting after they have arrived at intermediate positions? Furthermore, how did they arrive at these positions in the first place? Is there a specific pathway that you need to follow? Alternatively, is it because of their former position in society, their networks, or individual characteristics that they possess?

Kalimantan as A New Extraction Frontier

The exploitation of natural resources involves a large number of actors who are driven by a variety of interests. These actors include local communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations, politicians, the military, the national and informal power brokers, and multinational media companies, amongst others. Efforts by these actors to gain access to or control over natural resources may lead to cooperation or, more often than not, to conflict and violence. Many natural resource-rich regions have transformed into so-called 'new resource frontiers' (De Jong, Knippenberg, & Bakker, 2017). In these 'new frontiers,' around which the situation is very dynamic and different from the old 'wild' frontiers (Tsing, 2005), many actors are at play. In natural resource-rich regions, actors are grabbing resource-rich land through cheating, lobbying, speculation, new arrangements around claims, and regime changes (Tsing, 2005).

These actors, to varying extents, are the masterminds behind the exploitation of natural resources disguised by the promise of security, support of legitimacy, money, and valuable access to and information about these areas. The role of

go-betweens can not only be understood from a structural perspective nor simply from an actor's point of view. The emergence of these actors, in addition to ambiguous rules and laws, contributes to the complexity of power relations in the natural resource-rich regions. Thus, the dynamics in the new frontier areas have prevented the 'old' go-betweens from being in the same position and given other, 'new' actors the opportunity to jump into competition with the old ones.

Dynamics and complexity have become the attributes of new natural resource-rich frontiers all over the world. Indonesia, which is rich in natural resources, including oil, gas, minerals, and timber, is an example of a country with many new frontiers (De Jong, Knippenberg, & Bakker, 2017). Many authors note that the newly established regional governments of natural resource-rich regions try to strengthen their authority by increasing the profit from exploiting natural resources (see Wadley & Eilenberg, 2006; Bakker & Moniaga, 2010; Eaton & Schroeder, 2010). In the transition period between centralization and decentralization (2001-2003), local actors who derived from a Dayak ethnic background, strategically used this five year power-vacuum to re-establish their power in Kalimantan (Tanasaldy, 2012). This was followed by several political actions, such as demonstrations in Sintang district and the capital of the province of West Kalimantan, Pontianak, as a way of gaining further control over one of the richest natural resource areas of Indonesia.

After the Suharto era, the "peripheral areas" of Kalimantan had the opportunity to manifest themselves as active agricultural frontiers by seeking connections to the global market (see De Koninck, 2011; Potter, 2011; Bissonnette, Bernard, & De Koninck, 2011; and Cramb, 2011). Currently, the global market penetration into Kalimantan is represented by the increasing number of multinational companies operating in the region across sectors, including logging, mining, pulp-and-paper, and oil palm cultivation. In new frontier areas such as Kalimantan, a kind of interstitial space emerged in which specific actors, the go-betweens, play a game of manipulation and negotiation through their dual role as regulators and rent-seekers. Go-betweens are actors who are involved in processes of generating, interpreting, organizing, or communicating for a particular purpose to particular people, social groups, organisations, firms and so on. Go-betweens are utilized in many contexts as conduits for different resources, such as money, materials, or even drugs or guns. In the context of the new frontier, these actors include government officials, NGO workers, members of local communities, multinational companies, and even academics who may fulfil multiple roles simultaneously. International market expansion into Kalimantan is most visible, through the increase in the total area

of oil palm plantations to nearly 2.1 million hectares in 2021 with total production rising to 5.6 million tonnes (Directorate General of Estate Crops, 2021).

The rent-seeking mechanisms and practices of local ‘warlordism’ play an important role in paving the way for these plantation practices. Today, palm oil has become a highly demanded commodity worldwide (Pye, 2019). This new commodity is considered a valuable investment that attracts local and international players to take up an intermediate role in rent-seeking activities. Understanding the mechanism of go-betweens at the local level allows us to come to grips with the extending role of these kind of ‘cementers’, or rather ‘wielders and yielders’ in the palm oil chain.

Therefore, my study aims to understand the role of these specific actors in the dynamic and complex new resource extraction frontiers. By focusing on the go-betweens who are at the centre of the palm oil plantation development process, this study aims to provide a better understanding of the profile and role of these specific actors.

Palm Oil as *Lahan Basah*

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, which led to a significant transformation (in economic, political, and social terms) of Indonesia, the country emerged as a decentralized democracy, where regional governments obtained far reaching authority to govern their areas (Cramb & McCarthy, 2016, p. 14). Consequently, lower as well as higher-level political and economic actors became increasingly involved in the district’s legal and institutional mechanisms in managing natural resources, in various and complex ways (McCarthy, Gillespie, & Zen, 2012). Different interests of state and non-state actors (such as multinational companies, NGOs, Civil Society Organisations or CSOs, indigenous leaders, mediating actors, military and police, local communities, and migrants, and so on) and the hybridity in the long-chain process of palm oil production, have created an interstitial space – which can be defined as ‘a space in between, possibly formed by the openness of specific spaces and interests’ (De Jong, Knippenberg, & Bakker, 2017).

The idea of interstitial space is similar, but different yet comparable to that of *lahan basah* (commonly translated as ‘wetland’). The term ‘interstitial space’ evokes ideas of hybridity, fluidity, complexity, and which provides space for various actors to interact, meet, and define something as capital or a resource. Meanwhile, the term *lahan basah* in the Indonesian language refers to a space or strategic position that provides opportunities through ‘monopoly or discretions’

utilized by specific actors to gain their interests, such as acting as intermediaries or committing corruption (see Schütte, 2009, p. 84). Based on this definition, *lahan basah* is a 'betwixt' arena with high flexibility that each actor could observe or notice although not every actor has access to this space.

Lahan basah can also refer to positions of formal or informal work. In Sintang, for example, several administrative positions were considered as *lahan basah*: these include that of head and deputy head of the district, heads of government offices, or departments tasked with managing the district's development agenda. This idea is explained by Wessing (1996) in his study, seeing that official positions were generally seen as *basah* (wet) when they gave access to divertible funds or as *kering* (dry) when a job or position had fewer opportunities (see Wessing, 1996, p. 263). Many people will compete for these strategic positions at any level, especially in areas with many development projects, because such projects are considered an inexhaustible source of prestige, wealth and opportunities. The idea of *lahan basah* has often led to the general impression of a corruption opportunity (the project money could be embezzled and transferred to private accounts). In the past, Java and Bali were categorized as *lahan basah* due to their better housing, facilities, and jobs, which attracted many people to come and live there for better opportunities. During the New Order (1966-98), Indonesian commodities (e.g., mining and forest products) experienced a global boom. More recently, oil palm plantations are considered as *lahan basah*.

Moreover, a strong interest in palm oil investment and higher global demand for palm oil products – such as biofuel, food manufacturing, beauty product ingredients, etc. – have prompted the Sintang government to provide enough land for oil palm plantation expansion. In the case of palm oil, the *lahan basah* is not only limited to the actual roles of government officials, but also the Indonesian palm oil industry (especially after regional autonomy), which is dependent on “public-private partnerships” (Cramb & McCarthy, 2016, p. 16). On the other hand, the export price of Crude Palm Oil (CPO) has continued to climb, especially after the financial crisis in 1998 (see Potter & Lee, 1998), and has continued to rise over the last two decades. Many investors, including some of the wealthiest Indonesian companies, have begun to take an interest in palm oil cultivation since the possibility for sales increased substantially after the market expanded, especially in other parts of Asia, such as in China and India. As such, palm oil as *lahan basah* has not only attracted people from in and outside Kalimantan to compete over resources, but it has also attracted companies from well-beyond Indonesia.

As a global commodity, the palm oil comprises a long chain that connects many different actors, from people working on plantations in local villages, such as in

Sintang, to the global production and sales industry elsewhere in the world. The very start of the process involves the dealing and negotiating between actors to ensure that forest land can be transformed into oil palm plantations. The chain continues with the commodity cultivation and maintenance phase, involving various actors in the plantation zone, followed by trading the CPO between the company, government, and buyer from outside the region, and ending up selling the oil palm production on the global market between product producers and consumers. And in all these phases go-betweens fulfil a specific role for smoothing and making the process work.

Sintang an Oil Palm Haven

I selected Sintang District in West Kalimantan, for this research due to the region's traits as a new extraction frontier. These included the large scale of land seizures and changes in ownership and functioning, through the massive cultivation of oil palm, a monocrop, and the new arrival of a variety of actors with different interests that came along with it. Unclear rules and laws governing access and control have also driven many actors to the new frontier. This condition also influences the high mobility rate of both residents and migrants who are attracted to come as seekers of new opportunities in the newly opened plantations.



Map 1. Sintang District, West Kalimantan, Indonesia

Source: Peta.web.id (modified by author)

Sintang has long been a frontier region. The name Sintang comes from *Senentang*, a word in the Dayak language that refers to the intersection of two big rivers, the Kapuas and the Melawi, where the centre of the town of Sintang, the capital of Sintang district, is located. The area was considered a strategic area in the upper Kapuas river region and had been governed by a Sultanate before it was taken over by the Dutch in the 1700s. These past regimes shaped the region as it can be found today. The Sultanate ground and Malay ethnic groups were located in the Southern section between the Kapuas and Melawi River. The area of the Dutch colonisers was located strategically at the intersection, in front of the Sultan's palace. Meanwhile, the Chinese used the area opposite the palace and the Dutch sites across the Kapuas and Melawi rivers for the economic center. The intersection of the two rivers was considered by some authors, as a suitable location for the emergence of go-betweens¹ (Cooke, 2006).

Sintang is one of the nine administrative districts of West Kalimantan Province. Sintang, which is in the eastern part of the province, has a population of 421,306, and is still dominated by the three major ethnic groups: the Dayak, Malay, and Chinese (BPS Sintang, 2020). The history of power relations in Sintang has left its marks on the region today and most of the Dayak ethnic people still live in the upstream area of the Kapuas and Melawi rivers and are spread along the creeks of those two big rivers. In contrast, the Malay live in the downstream region and in the capital of Sintang where they share the town with the Chinese. Transmigration and other development programs have brought various migrants from outside Kalimantan, such as Java, Bali and Sumatra, to the region.

Geographically, Sintang has a total area of 21,635 km², or 14.74% of the total size of West Kalimantan (BPS Sintang, 2020). It is the third-largest district in West Kalimantan after Ketapang and Kapuas Hulu. However, most of the land in Sintang district consists of infertile peatlands. Only some of it is fertile, basically on the hillsides, for example in the south of the district, such as Dedai, Serawai, and Ambalau sub-districts. The geographical characteristics of Sintang have been highly influential for the development direction of the region. Data from the government of West Kalimantan show that in the past ten years, the amount of land clearance for oil palm plantations in Sintang has been higher than that of other districts in West Kalimantan, as palm oil trees grows relatively well on peat soil.

1 In the case of Sintang, for instance, the Malay kingdom played a dual role by cooperating with the Dutch Empire to collect tax from the local people while at the same time acting as a merchant who distributed goods to the highlands. As stated by Wadley in Cooke (2006), that the Malay became traders by delivering goods from other places in the interior to Singapore, while several firearms were brought that way from Singapore to Sintang.

Currently, one can find three different phases of oil palm plantation cultivation in the district. The first phase includes obtaining access to land, land clearing, and oil palm tree planting, while the second phase includes plantation maintenance and crop harvesting. The issuance of many oil palm plantation permits has dominated the first and second phases. Unlike these phases, in the third phase, local communities get involved in maintaining and replanting oil palm trees in collaboration with the plantation cooperatives.

The implementation of the laws on regional autonomy in the district of Sintang in 2003 set in motion this complex, rapid and widely increasing process of palm oil cultivation, which created an even more ambiguous and insecure situation, pictured well by Potter (2008, p. 74):

Oil palm extends eastwards to Sintang but with reduced impact as infrastructure level declines. Some Sintang villagers had earlier suffered the trauma of estates withdrawing and closing their factories, leaving plasma farmers nowhere to sell the fruit. At present, there is only one factory near Sintang city to service a wide area. The local government is actively trying to attract investors, distributing 240,000 ha among twelve new companies.

The first oil palm permits were issued in 1996 to five multinational companies. The issuance of permits has continued ever since, and increasingly so since the early 2000s. As of 2024, there are, in total, 47 oil palm companies operating in an area as large as 557,431 hectares. As much as 177,000 hectares have already been cultivated. This number represents 35% of the total area of oil palm plantations in West Kalimantan. The total production of palm oil reached 319,464 tons per year in 2021, or supplied 18% of the total production in West Kalimantan (Agriculture and Plantation Office of Sintang District, 2021).

This study offers a new understanding of the situation of oil palm plantations by looking at specific roles of go-betweens in the Ketungau Hilir sub-district of Sintang, where there are currently 11 national and multinational companies operating. Furthermore, most studies that look at the development process only look at the obvious actors such as governments, NGOs, or multinational companies and have neglected to consider the role of go-betweens (see Wong et al., 2022; He, 2020; Grabosky, 2013; Fukuda & Muchhala, 2020; Spratt, 2020). This study will therefore focus on the emerging and important role of *perantara* (go-betweens) in the process of oil palm development and maintenance.

Ketungau Hilir sub-district has a capital in Nanga Ketungau, located relatively close to the capital of Sintang District. It takes three to four hours in the dry season

but six to seven hours in the rainy season to get there from Ketungau Hilir by motorcycle or car (around 85KM). This road access is relatively new, after many oil palm plantation roads (*jalan kebun*) have been built around Ketungau Hilir. Previously, access to the area was only possible by river by taking a boat, and it took almost a day from the capital of Sintang to get there.

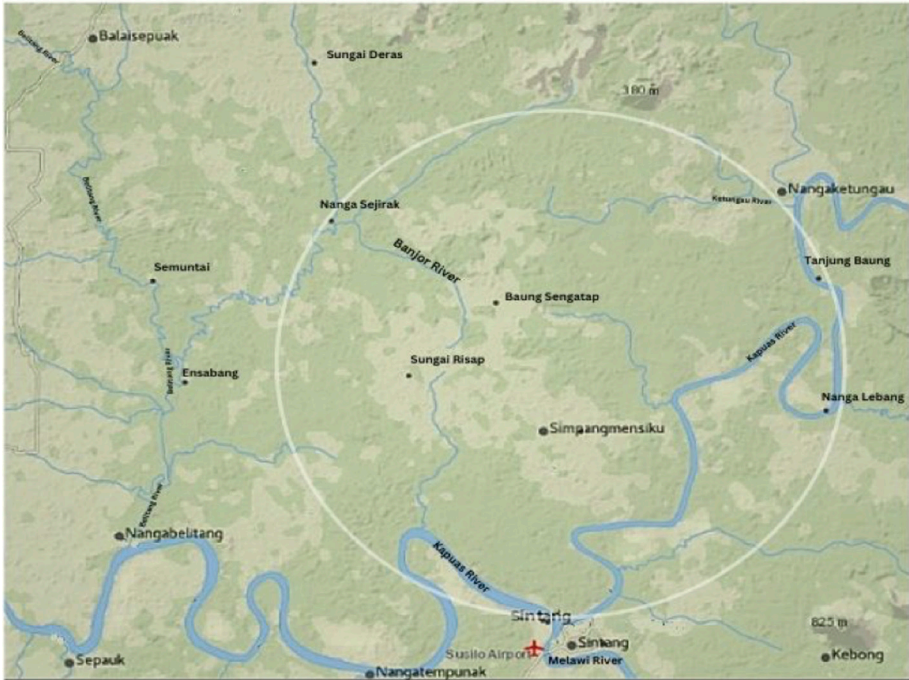
The expansion of oil palm companies in Sintang has opened access to remote areas in this sub-district, including where the ethnic group, the Dayak Banjar, are living and where my initial research took place.

Searching the Go-between Amongst the Dayak Banjar

I started looking for go-betweens amongst Dayak groups in Sintang, West Kalimantan. The Banjar Dayak group lives alongside the Jungkit River, a tributary of the Kapuas River north of the city of Sintang. The Banjar ethnic people are dispersed over several kampungs in the Ketungau area, such as Pedadang, Sungai Risap, Binjai, Semoeboek, Semuntai, and Belitang. In the past, the Banjar people used the Jungkit River as a means of transportation to keep in contact with other Dayak communities or Chinese merchants in the nearest towns, Sintang and Belitang (the latter is now part of Sekadau District). Banjar's living areas were considered relatively isolated until palm oil companies arrived by the end of 1994.

But who exactly are the Banjar Dayaks? In anthropology, it is customary to adopt local terms to enhance understanding of social organisation. In the past, the term Dayak was used to generalize specific ethnic groups that lived on Borneo Island who are different from the Malayu.² As Riwut has emphasised, however, many groups under the name of Dayak groups have different cultures, customs, beliefs, physical appearances, and social institutions (Riwut & Mantikei, 2003). This is also the case of Dayak Banjar.

2 The term Malayu refers to indigenous people as individuals or communities that have adopted the Malay and Arab immigrants' faith and culture (Hose & McDougall, 1912, p. 6). Locally, this term is also used to refer to Dayaks who have converted to Islam, known by the locals as *turun air* or *masuk Melayu* (Oesterheld, 2016). In this sense, the term Malayu is more a political, social, and religious status than an ethnic one.



Map 2. Living area of Dayak Banjar

Source: map.nusantara-atlas.org (modified by author)

Most of the Banjar population lives in villages in the Ketungau area of Sintang district and small parts of Belitang in Sekadau District. Many scholars have pointed to Borneo's cultural diversity through the complex classification of ethnic groups, sub-groups, and languages. Earlier studies show a different classification for the ethnic groups in this area and placed the Banjar under *Banyur*, *Bandur*, or *Banjur*. This sub-ethnic group is classified as part of the Ketungau ethnic group (Lontaan, 1975; Riwtut & Mantikei, 2003) and categorized into a larger group of Dayak Klemantan or Dayak Darat Klemantan (Ibid, 2003:74). Some authors considered the Ketungau ethnic group, including Banjar, as part of the Sea Dayaks or Iban group (Hose & McDougall, 1912; Sellato, 2002; Rahmadian, 2023), which referred to the location, ritual practices, and the language of this group.

Other research shows that in the past, the Banjar conducted head hunting or *ngayau*³, while the Dayak Iban were considered as their enemy. As explained by Walker (2002) the *ngayau* activity could be used as basic knowledge to categorize

3 Headhunting or *ngayau* occurred between groups who had different territories and backgrounds and became a symbol of power of a specific group.

the Dayak ethnic groups, while *ngayau* was only done against other interior groups. This fact helped me agree with Lontaan (1975) and Riwt and Mantikei (2003), who classified the Banjar as part of the Dayak Ketungau.

Traditionally, the Banjar consisted of a larger group of people dispersed over various communities. Each community lived in a specific area within a longhouse (Rousseau, 1980). Although living in different longhouses, some people from different houses were still connected through kinship. This meant they regularly visited each other during the planting period (*masa tanam*) and harvest feast (*gawai*) periods. Up to now, those two activities were essential to the Banjar, as they are related to gaining and renewing the collective spirit through paddy.

The Dayak Banjar lived harmoniously with other *bilek* families in longhouses especially from the same groups. Although, the connection between nature and other longhouse members was disturbed after many environmental transformations happened in the areas, especially during periods of logging. Suharto's regulations of the 1970s concerning independent housing further created a period of upheaval amongst the Banjar. Under this regulation, the central government forced the members of longhouses to leave their longhouse and live with their compartment members in an independent house. This top-down regulation has impacted the form of the social organization in Banjar. It was followed by shifting roles of important figures under this new structure.

The Dayak Banjar Area: One Giant Oil Palm Concession

There are four plantation concession areas in the region of the Dayak Banjar. One is a timber concession, which has been in operation since the 1980s, and the other three are oil palm concessions, which have been in operation since 1994. The timber concession did not change much the social structure of the Banjar. However, it gradually shifted the use of and access to the forest. This was different with the oil palm concession in 1994, which caused rapid environmental changes around the Banjar area.

The introduction of oil palm as a new commodity has had a heavy impact on the environment in West Kalimantan and upon the lives of the Banjar peoples. The habitable land has been damaged; heavy equipment is ubiquitous; the air is filled with dust; and the sounds of excavators create a din in the kampung. The peat lands contour transformed into a new plantation design. Rivers have dried up and have been replaced with new roads that were built as the central infrastructure of the plantation. The setting of the oil palm plantation was initially set in the living

area of the Banjar. However, this massive infrastructure brought no fear to the Banjar for many believed it would be a source of new wealth.

In 1994, the Dayak Banjar territories of Sungai Risap, Binjai, and Pedadang were turned into one significant oil palm concession managed by the Nusantara Oil Palm Company under the Primary Cooperative Credit for Members or *Kredit Koperasi Primer Anggota* (KKPA) scheme.⁴ Under this scheme, the Banjar communities of Sungai Risap and Pedadang were required to relinquish 7.5 hectares of land, in exchange for a two-hectare oil palm plot. Unfortunately, prior to the distribution of these plots, there were two takeovers of company licences within a year, first by Ivo Mas Company, which was later acquired by SNIP in 1996.

After five years, this unclear situation prompted the community to inquire about their rights over two hectares of oil palm land. Their request, however, remained unresolved as the company changed the scheme into Large Plantation Company or *Perkebunan Besar Swasta* (PBS), implying that the farmers sold their land in exchange for monetary compensation. In line with the increasing worldwide demand for crude palm oil, palm oil commodities became a popular monocrop in Kalimantan in the following years, intensifying the Banjar community's effort to reclaim their rights over oil palm plots. The company, however, ignored their claims. This indifference instigated a demonstration by the Banjar communities in Sungai Risap and Pedadang who blocked access to the plantations with rituals and the area with two big vats (*tempayan*) for six months. This action showed the anger and communal power of the Banjar communities.

In addition to the existing plantation run by SNIP, in 2013 and 2014, two Indonesian companies received a permit from the district government to open plantations in Dayak Banjar in Sungai Risap and Pedadang under a partnership (*kemitraan*) scheme. This scheme stated that the company would handle the oil palm cultivation process while the farmers would receive a part of the harvest in the form of a monthly payment and a plot of oil palm. These two companies successfully persuaded the community members to hand over their land to become part of the oil palm concession. The success of the initial process applied by these two companies should not be seen as a single strategy of the company through offering a new scheme. It was the accumulation of a negotiation process and the

4 Primary Cooperative Credit for Members or *Koperasi Kredit Primer untuk Anggota* (KKPA) is considered as a refined version of the previous scheme *Perkebunan Inti Rakyat* (PIR). The KKPA scheme emerged at the end of the 1980s and was associated with the transmigration project (McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). It was designed for the transmigrants to be eligible for subsidized bank loans (Potter & Lee, 1998). It had a similar structure to the PIR scheme, which included a partnership between a company and stakeholders.

contribution of excellent mediators to translate the aims of the government, companies, and society to one another.

The development of these three oil palm plantations and the complex process that followed, including the variety of stakeholders, and differential socio-cultural and geographical conditions, constitutes the background for my research on the role of the go-betweens that have been smoothening this palm oil cultivation process.

Understanding the Go-betweens

I explore the structural aspects (norms and values, laws and regulations), individual characteristics (e.g., charisma, physical, gesture, way of thinking) of the go-betweens as well as their embeddedness in social relations and networks as a means to theoretically position their role in natural resource frontiers. In previous studies, the practices of go-betweens that have been enabling the extraction processes in natural-resource-rich regions have been discussed in various ways. Go-betweens are generally referred to as middlemen, brokers, intermediaries, gatekeepers, local bosses, or local strongmen (e.g., Scott, 1972; Bonacich, 1973; Spaan, 1994; Dove, 1994). These previous studies, coming from a range of disciplines, such as sociology, economics, development studies, and anthropology, have offered different angles to understand the role and practices of these actors.

Some scholars have used a structural approach to explain the acts of these actors as resulting from norms and values that form the basis of social organization. Social organizations and status relationships make up the basis of structural perspectives on specific actors in the literature. In this light, it is assumed that structure, to some extent, exists independently of individuals who fill particular positions such as through brokering or mediation. This argument presumes that for certain intermediaries to emerge and influence action, scholars must pay attention to how a society is socially structured. In essence, the social organization of society is seen as crucial for enabling the emergence of such go-betweens and shaping how such go-betweens operate.

These studies showed that patron-clientship and clientelism-based social organizations often lead to the emergence of a kind of go-between. This is not only caused by the lack of rigid structures, but is also caused by their acts that are legitimated and underpinned by the values and norms on which these systems are based. Different forms of social organization, in which patron-clientship or ideas of clientelism prevail, lead to the emergence of different go-betweens, such as *compa-*

dres in Mexico, *Big Men* in Melanesia, and local bosses or warlords in African and other Southeast Asian countries (see Honna, 2006; Hadiz, 2010; Govers, 2006; Sidel, 1997; Aspinall, 2013; McCauley, 2021; and Eilenberg, 2011).

Specifically in Kalimantan, there is a kind of social organization based on longhouses as a form of community, where each member of the longhouse is responsible for the house and for the care of other members. However, this mechanism also causes the longhouse community to see other values from different communities around them. Generally, people who live in a longhouse differentiate between 'we' as insider and 'other' as outsider (e.g., Helliwell, 2006; Slamet-Velsink, 1995). In the Dayak community, the existence of longhouses creates a type of figure who becomes the head of the longhouse, known as *tuai rumah* in the Dayak language. This term is used for people with a role as a go-between among the longhouse community to make contact with other people from outside the longhouses or within the members of the longhouses.

From these studies on different forms of social organizations, several important lessons can be drawn about the go-betweens in these structures. First, mediators operate in the state's empty or, at least, less ordered and less structured spaces. Second, go-betweens use multiple and often ambiguous relations to establish their position and increase their power. Lastly, the mediators use the values, norms, trust, and social relations and networks to create, maintain and secure their position. While these structural approach studies are essential in pointing out the structural aspects that legitimize the emergence and acts of the mediators, they also have faced substantial criticism for neglecting the individual characteristics and capabilities of the actors.

Therefore, to thoroughly understand the role of intermediary actors, it is also necessary to take into account actor-oriented studies that paved the way for a new perspectives on go-betweens, in which the Manchester School of Anthropology has played an important role. These studies have shown that mediators are actors at the interface of different worldviews and knowledge systems, and their importance lies in their negotiating roles, relationships, and representations (Mosse & Lewis, 2006). The actor-oriented approach makes a good starting point for grasping brokerage-related issues. Contrary to the structural-functionalist perspectives, studies with an actor-oriented approach show that the practices of actors are influenced by the agent's capabilities rather than strictly following the structure that exists in society (Bierschenk et al., 2002).

After an extensive review of the studies based on actor-oriented approaches (see Scott, 1972; Sidel, 1999; Calvo & Murillo, 2004; Hilgers, 2012; Szwarcberg, 2012; Stokes et al., 2013; Larreguy et al., 2016) under the terminology of brokers,

middlemen, and local strongmen, several common characteristics can be distilled, and to some extent, it can be concluded that their practices not only “reproduce larger structures” (Sud, 2014). They have a genuine personality combined with a flexible identity *vis-à-vis* their mode of operation. The actors can be rule makers, not just rule takers; they are expected to link or operate at the interface of two world-views and knowledge systems by using trust. They speak multiple languages; they are familiar with idiomatic nuance-official, business, and local languages and offer their services of translation. The go-betweens deal with people and information not only for profit, in the narrow sense of immediate reward, but also more broadly in maintaining coherent representations within society and in shaping their identities. These actors use specific capabilities, such as charisma and gesture, when they act and sometimes even create fear or use violence.

A helpful concept to further theorize go-betweens is the notion of translation. Callon (1986 in Meyer, 2010) defines “translation as a process involving several moments: defining an actor, testing, stabilizing, and specifying the roles of these actors; and, finally rendering it mobile” (p. 121). In Law’s (2002) words, “to translate is to connect, to displace, to move, to shift from one place, one modality, one form, to another while retaining something”. Mosse and Lewis (2006, p. 13) note that the concept of translation refers to mutual enrolment and the interlocking of interests that produces project realities. Go-betweens are sublime translators. In the translation process of go-betweens, these actors preserve the lack of access to natural resources by using their networks. Moreover, in this translation process, the actors potentially modify or accommodate their interest with structural aspects and combine it with their characteristics.

I investigate the social spaces in which translation processes, and the related networks, are embedded. A social space, in this sense, is viewed as a bounded network of relations rather than a specific geographical space. Interactions, norms, and values form the social space. This ‘space’ is constructed by society’s agents, groups, and institutions. Peltier (2009) argues that the interactions inside the social spaces of ‘frontier-like regions’ emerged out of the empty space and biased conditions, which he called an “ungoverned space”. However, this space is not empty but instead connected to the social space where the space is bounded by legitimating rules, collective dealing, and personal or group interests. It is a dynamic space where different kinds of actors negotiate their interests. The flexibility of this space often creates an opaque situation that benefits go-betweens who often play dual roles. In this sense, go-betweens use the ‘ungoverned space’ to their advantage

by combining their capabilities and knowledge about the cultural context. Besides that, the go-betweens also use the flexibility of this space to build their relationships with strategic people and their embeddedness in wider social networks.

Social networks are the set of relations or ties among actors (De Jong, 2013, p. 60). It means that the actors cannot stand alone within the network, but are linked to other actors by social ties. It should be noted that networks often have no boundaries and no clear internal organization since any person may consider himself or herself at the center of a network (Eriksen, 2010, p. 84). Social network approaches emphasize multiple relations, which may serve as a new window to understanding the phenomena of go-betweens. This approach is different from the structural-functionalist or actor-oriented approach in which individuals are either considered as 'puppets' whose acts are defined by the structures in which they are embedded or as self-interested agents completely disembodied from their social and cultural surroundings. Therefore, rather than solely perceiving go-betweens as 'atoms' (structured or as agents), this study includes a social network approach; the actions of go-betweens are considered embedded in dyadic relations and the overall structure of dyadic relations (Granovetter, 1973).

According to Mosse and Lewis (2006), "within these networks of practices, both human actors and nonhuman actants (such as artefacts and devices) are related through a series of negotiations and defined in terms of the ways in which they act and are acted upon" (p. 14). In this interaction, the actors' identities, the strategies of practice, and political representations are taking place between the actors. The system can be stabilized only when the actors can reconstruct their network of interactions, in which the go-betweens play a significant role.

This perspective on networks of actors has been mainly overlooked in analytical terms as many of the people and networks working as intermediaries do so in isolation from each other. This isolation and the lack of conceptual analysis around intermediaries and their work provide the rationale for this research, which is designed to raise the profile of this emerging viewpoint. From this theoretical discussion, it can be concluded that to thoroughly understand go-betweens and their practices, we need to include structural aspects (norms and values, laws and regulations), individual characteristics (e.g., charisma, physical, gesture, way of thinking) as well as their embeddedness in social relations and networks.

Research Objectives and Questions

This study aims to develop a better understanding of the various roles of go-betweens. I aim to obtain more insight into these intermediaries' specific roles in developing and maintaining oil palm plantations. Furthermore, I aim to discover a possibly shared identity or at least closely related characteristics amongst them to develop a better conceptual and practical understanding of these intermediaries alongside a greater understanding of their potential contribution to resource management processes.

I have construed the following central question to meet the above objectives: 'How do go-betweens position themselves, act in and navigate the interstitial spaces of the new extraction frontiers during the development and maintenance phase of oil palm plantations in Sintang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia?' From this central question, I have abstracted the following set of sub-questions:

1. What are the values, norms, rules, and laws that have led to the emergence of these go-betweens and that legitimize their existence and actions?
2. Which individual characteristics do go-betweens in the frontier context share in their practices in Sintang?
3. To what extent is the position of go-betweens the result of their embeddedness in specific social relations and networks?
4. What are go-betweens' practices in bridging and translating between two worlds?
5. Who are the go-betweens that facilitate the development and maintenance of oil palm plantations? What do they have in common concerning characteristics, practices, and social embeddedness?
6. In what ways do go-betweens use their power to obtain objectives beyond the role of mediation but lead to their establishment as local leaders (politically or economically)?

Research Methods

Exploring the action, behaviour, and functions of go-betweens in a particular network cannot be achieved by entering a conventional, single-site location with an independently delimited set of relationships and activities simply because go-betweens work within and through their networks. Due to these conditions, I used multi-sited fieldwork and information from multiple sources. As Van Eerbeek and Hedberg (2021) mention, multi-sited fieldwork provides a thorough under-

standing of actors on the move, such as migrants and go-betweens. The approach of ‘following the people’ as Marcus (1995) calls it, is aimed at obtaining a holistic picture of the go-betweens in the oil palm chain. In this approach I adopted ethnographic field research.

I conducted the initial research in 2014 for one and a half months. During this time, I started by searching the existing go-betweens in West Kalimantan. My first investigation started in the West Kalimantan province, Pontianak, which I explored through the official office’s eyes, where I gained valuable information about the process of massive land transformation in several districts such as Sintang, Kapuas Hulu and Ketapang.

I gained little access to bureaucrats and the places of work, so, I moved on, looking for other opportunities. Referring to various literatures that showed the openness of NGOs and concern of palm oil, especially international NGOs, led me to start seeking access to NGOs in this limited time. As an outsider, I built connections and social networks from scratch and started visiting most of the NGOs in the province. The information I got was more comprehensive, not only limited to the process of land transformation into oil palm, but also enabled me to follow more than 50 persons considered vital in the process. The proposed research areas from the NGOs in Pontianak were the same as the provincial officials, exploring three districts – Sintang, Ketapang, and Kapuas Hulu. This relationship with members of the NGOs in Pontianak became my first network for exploring target areas in other districts in West Kalimantan.

In the last three weeks of the initial research in 2014, I started exploring the presence of go-betweens in Sanggau, Sintang, and Kapuas Hulu. I eliminated Ketapang because it is a relatively new district and the development of oil palm plantations is relatively new. I started my exploration in the Sanggau district because it has three stages of oil palm and became the oldest oil palm plantation along with Sintang. The condition in Sanggau did not fit the regional characteristics for the emergence of new go-betweens, as the region is dominated by established third-stage oil palm plantations. Therefore, the existing go-betweens were only found in the maintenance stage with clearly defined roles. This forced me to continue my search to other areas to the north of West Kalimantan, the districts of Kapuas Hulu and Sintang which are mostly in the first and second stages.

In both Kapuas Hulu and Sintang district, oil palm development is taking place on a massive scale. However, historical and geographical conditions have shaped different responses to the presence of various actors. Kapuas Hulu was relatively close to various actors. Meanwhile, Sintang had responded by opening the areas for investors and other actors who saw Sintang as *lahan basah*. Historically,

Sintang had engaged with the old form of go-betweens, and the presence of these go-betweens could be felt even when I arrived in the area. To access certain information or resources, I had to deal with people who acted as mediators or connector, even for simple daily needs. Second, Sintang has different stages of oil palm (initial, second, and last stages), and each process leads to specific actors in the oil palm chain. Thirdly, the political conditions of these areas are considered active, as this region would hold the election for the head of the district in which the process would involve many actors and massive money from the investors. This exploratory research therefore made me decide to conduct research in Sintang district.

The in-depth field research was conducted in Sintang District, West Kalimantan, from February 2015 to February 2016. There were three different steps to obtaining information during my fieldwork. In the first three months, I explored the research areas until I finally decided to choose Ketungau Hilir as my main research area. The next six months was the in-depth phase, where I continue to seek information and data regarding my research topics of the role of go-betweens. The remaining three months was a winding-up phase.

The field construction of multi-sited research was insufficient to grasp the depth of single-site research. In terms of collecting information from socio-cultural, economic, cultural, and historical perspectives, I needed to adjust my research situation and the techniques and methods used for data collection. Like many go-betweens, I, therefore, became one of them, lived and conducted fieldwork in the 'go-betweens field' that eliminated the geographical boundaries and connecting societies through social relations and networks. This means that I followed them and their networks and travelled a lot during the field research. This is similar to what the De Jong (2013, p. 26) says about 'involving the wider networks' rather than simply visiting the go-betweens.

I took two steps to get involved in the wider networks and obtain information. The first was based on the social networks (local communities) in which the go-betweens are embedded. I obtained information from the social networks on how the go-betweens operate, their strategies, and whom they interact with. The second was based on snowball sampling to access go-betweens. This technique was used to identify the relations and actors in palm oil activities in the Sintang district. These data provided more detailed information about their identities, embeddedness, and dependency on specific networks.

I conducted ethnographic research by hanging out with my informants. The primary research techniques I applied to collect data were open-ended, semi-open ended, and life history interviews with people who play the role of go-between. During the interview, I used *bahasa* Indonesia and occasionally Dayak. I started by

asking my informants about their life history, their involvement in the process of developing and maintaining oil palm plantations, their opinions on the development agenda in Sintang, and the extension of networks to support their role. Life history techniques were also used to create temporal references by referring to important families, social, political, cultural, and environmental events (Atkinson, 1998). To gain in-depth information on the role of go-betweens, I selected 20 key informants who have extensive networks, are well positioned culturally, politically and structurally, and are experienced in smoothing and mediating processes of developing and maintaining oil palm plantations. Furthermore, I also considered gathering opinions and information from the rivals of go-betweens that I followed, as well as holistic information about the activities and competition among go-betweens.

To have a richly developed picture of the role of go-betweens, I also used participant observation methods to capture their gestures, positions, expressions, and mimicry. The information obtained from this method helped me see the individual characteristics, perceptions, and acts of go-betweens. To some extent, conducting qualitative research did help me to see the strategies and reasons when and why go-betweens chose specific strategies when playing their role.

The last technique I applied during this qualitative research was participatory appraisals by mapping the actor networks of the community and district levels and their involvement in the development and production chain of oil palm in the Sintang district, as well as the inter-relations of go-betweens, both centred on individuals and on their part of a chain of go-betweens' networks.

Studying Go-betweens

In December 2015, Indonesia was shocked by the news of an attempted backroom deal between the speaker of the House of Representatives and the CEO of a foreign gold mining company. The surreptitious arrangement was brought to light after a minister reported it to the House Ethics Council along with the voice recording of the deal as evidence. The news quickly circulated and was covered by all Indonesian media. People talked about the attempted deal on television, in newspapers, and social media. A few days later, the media published the entire conversation of this attempted deal. According to the media and the conversation transcript, Setya Novanto (the head of the House of Representatives of Republic Indonesia or *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Republik Indonesia* (DPR RI) was not alone; at that time, he was accompanied by business people who arranged the whole deal. Setya Novanto was neither the first nor the only one to play this kind of game. This case

of Setya Novanto reflected the situation in Indonesia, where such illegality was widely practiced at every level by people with a strategic position in the community, also in Sintang District. As Aspinall and Van Klinken in their book, “illegality is notoriously difficult to study directly. In some situations, illegal activities are either fully or partly hidden” (Aspinall & Van Klinken, 2011, p. 12-13). In this sense, to understand ‘illegality’, it is necessary to enter the sphere through a different angle, such as through second-hand stories or becoming one of them.

Having access to various practices of illegality is not easy. I faced difficulties during my research in Sintang District, when I tried to look more specifically at the role of go-betweens in oil palm activities. The go-betweens’ activity is considered in the grey zone of legal and illegal activities. Most of the informants I interviewed and observed in the field had vital interests in shrouding their involvement because they feared legal sanctions or exclusion by their community. It forced me to enter their world and become one of them to understand their roles and the logic behind them.

Being involved in the world of go-betweens and knowing the secrets of the ‘perpetrators’, which are mainly related to illegal activities, I understood that the ethics of this research are sensitive and significant. For that reason, at the beginning of each meeting I always asked each informant I interviewed whether they were willing to talk to me. I also explained the larger picture of my research and the information I would ask them during the interview as related to their role and involvement in palm oil activities. To ensure their safety, I also told them that any information they shared with me would be treated as confidential. Reflecting on this, I got the permission from all informants to share their life story in this study. Needless to say, however, that I kept all information confidential by using pseudonyms of all actors and places, primarily to protect the identity of the participants.

In almost each of my first interview with new informants, these intermediaries had strong suspicions about who I was and what I wanted from them. Some of them chose not to allow me to record the interview. However, they did allow me to write down everything they said in a notebook I carried with me. Occasionally they would look at my notes to ensure that what I wrote down matched with what they said. Although this situation of distrust changed after the first interview was completed, in subsequent interviews and meetings, they were the ones who asked me to make sure my recordings were sound and captured all our conversations. They asked me what I wanted to ask and even invited me to various activities they were doing, primarily related to palm oil and cultural activities.

To reduce any bias, I took every action and wrote it down in a diary to reflect and show the reasons behind my decisions. This diary-writing process allowed me

to reflect on where I was and why I made those choices during the data collection process.

The high risks faced by informants and researchers in studying go-between actors makes it necessary to explain the approach I used to access information and networks and enter the world of the go-between. So, how did I research go-betweens?

Answers to these questions begin with the researcher's flexibility to understand the topic area, research site, and mapping of the actors. Moreover, it is necessary to learn about 'hidden transcripts' (Scott 1985 in Aspinall & Van Klinken, 2011) that allow and sanction activities. What I mean by flexibility here is that (1) it is not fake; as a researcher, pretending to act nicely and care about study samples or respondents is not recommended as it must genuinely come from the researcher's heart; (2) it means one can get along with almost everyone, but they can stand up and walk away when it is necessary; (3) it can be interpreted as a need to understand the personality or individual characteristics of go-betweens, how they act and create a strategy that one can use to build rapport and a bargaining position with go-betweens; (4) to have the "bypass" ability to create ones' networks to gain access to the networks of go-betweens.

Furthermore, it is necessary to pick up information from second-hand stories and rumours about the practices of go-between actors and their networks to be able to access the networks of the go-betweens and have a discussion directly with the actors. I received second-hand stories from the people around the main actors, such as their family, close relatives, and friends. I also considered distancing myself from my informants by asking the opinions of the opponents of the actors. I had the opportunity to interview people in strategic positions, and from this, I could sense my informants' fear during our conversation. During the interviews, most of the informants shared minimal and general information about oil palms, access to natural resources, and the chain of oil palms in Sintang in the first meeting. In this situation, I preferred to keep in contact with the actors and build trust with my informants. Collecting information and second-hand stories from the main actors and the opponents allowed me to obtain holistic pictures of the go-between roles.

Continuing with the method of following the actors' networks, I considered gaining access to the actors. To access the specific networks, I used the 'in-formal' relations and the second-hand networks I built as my networks to directly contact the actors and discuss the issues. In my experience, the go-between at the local level or people around the actors are part of closed networks, making the networks inaccessible to outsiders. This answered my first impression when I arrived in Sintang, where the people were trying to protect their network and withhold

information about why everyone was trying to be an intermediate, broker, and the like to gain benefits.

In making go-betweens openly talk, I always showed my innocence and curiosity about their acts. I struggled to know and research go-betweens for the first three months. Every go-between was 'closed' and careful in sharing knowledge, information, and their networks. I was starting the research in a 'small place' (De Jong, 2013) in one particular location in Ketungau Hilir. Using a small area as a starting location made it easy to see the presence and the logic of the go-between's acts at the local level. However, as 'small' go-betweens, most of them were very closed and protected their networks. Go-betweens became the gatekeeper of their networks and chose who were able to access the network. It frustrated me until I realized I needed to become a go-between myself and act very carefully, share small information, and ask things in return for the knowledge and resources I have. It was a complete success, although I also realised I needed to access 'bigger' networks.

As a woman and PhD student from an overseas university, it was a good background to enter the networks of various actors at the district level. I was considered non-threatening but could provide new opportunities for them and their families in the future. I met go-betweens one by one and started to follow them, which ended up in the same circle as 'small' go-betweens. I moved from district to village areas, village areas to the district, and continued to the other districts and provincial levels. The reflection on the limited access and the go-between's acts made me make a good decision to do a bypass and use my agency to reach the 'higher' and 'powerful' go-betweens in the district.

However, as I was accessing very 'closed' networks, I was placed in a 'dependent' situation. Almost every day during my fieldwork, the right hand man of the important 'go-between' tried to contact and control me. In return for their information, they wanted to know me as a person, who I am, where I stayed, and with whom I interacted to ensure I did not trap or leak them. My phones never stopped ringing while I was conducting my research. The right hand man would also visit my rented room.

The intense situation during the research opened my eyes so that I successfully became part of their relatively closed networks. Rather than stopping to investigate them, I used this and entered deep into the network. I asked them the 'difficult questions' regarding their acts and the logic behind what they did. However, on the other hand, this deep involvement in their networks, to some extent, made it difficult to move from one go-between network to another. As later on, I realised I also needed to be a go-between to move freely from one actor to another. It means

I adopted what Lindquist (2017, p. 4) did through ‘a methodological innovation as a shift of perspective and positioning’ to reveal the importance of social networks and the mobility of go-betweens.

Further, during my research, I always observed my informants’ gestures, the way they sat, and their facial expressions, especially those who play a dual role. These observations helped me see when the go-betweens tried to make a strategy during the conversation and why individual characteristics were essential to playing the role of a go-between. I stayed with several go-betweens in order to observe them when they were playing their roles and when they were together with their families. In sum, this research touches on specific issues that demanded that I acted as a go-between actor myself and be flexible yet constantly aware of the strategy and stand up when necessary.

Ultimately, I realised that researching go-betweens and how they accepted me was because I was becoming a go-between myself. During my research, I followed the go-betweens and their networks and the circulation of goods, money and information in the palm oil world. Therefore, as a researcher, I became a go-between in gaining access and information.

In doing this kind of ethnographic research, I understood that I underwent a transformative experience, where I spent long periods of time with persons from my field, worked with them in places that I studied, lived with my research informants, followed people during my fieldwork, became part of reciprocity networks, learned locally used languages, and tried to understand the life-worlds in Sintang by carefully observing the lives of go-betweens and participating in it. The ethnographic field research that I conducted was not like following a road to arrive at a destination. It was more a journey in which I often felt disoriented and lost in a labyrinth of relationships and networks. Over time, I learned how to be a go-between myself until I got access to the private sphere of go-betweens to understand carefully what they did while acting in the role of go-between. This ethnographic research is an exchange, in which I exchanged knowledge and experiences, shared information, even exchanged social networks as I started to become involved in reciprocal relations with mutual obligations.

Furthermore, diving into the world of go-betweens takes work. At times, getting too deep into the world of go-betweens is always fraught with uncertainty, with some go-betweens trying to control me to show their power by monopolising information or closing access to their networks. Because information, relationships, and connections are potent weapons, they to circulate in interstitial spaces.

Outline of This Study

This dissertation starts with this introduction to show the urgency of understanding go-betweens in the new frontiers of oil palm plantations in the Sintang district. The discussion continues by showing the general setting and structural changes in Sintang in Chapter one and two. It follows by empirical descriptions of the go-between's roles and networks in the research area in Chapter three and four. Chapter five, synthesises the study in line with the empirical findings and arrives at answers to the central questions and draws some conclusions. Below I further explain more elaborately each chapter's objectives and contents.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation discusses Dayak society's process of engaging with oil palm as a new commodity that shifted them into a new social structure. Oil palm brings new hope and opportunities to offer people wealth and access to a new world. Further, it discusses specifically research areas in Ketungau Hilir and Sintang from a historical point of view, including the role of intermediaries in the past. Moreover, the condition of Sintang and its transformation into a new resource frontier are explained as other conditions that led to the emergence of go-betweens in new resource frontiers. The last part of the chapter provides a sketch of the Dayak Banjor territory engaged with the operations of oil palm plantations. By grasping the operations of oil palm plantations, this last section of the chapter describes the palm oil value chain, their complexity and where the go-betweens come in.

Chapter 2 explains the shifting powers in Kalimantan, including the Sintang district, after the regional autonomy. It leads many Dayak people to enter the strategic and vital positions at the district, provincial, and national levels, which never happened before decentralization. In detail, this chapter shows the situation in Sintang after the implementation of regional autonomy, including the establishment of DAD (Dayak Councils), the creation of strategic positions of Dayak, and the specific actions of DAD, such as the documentation of their customary law. Concerning the political shifting, it opens new room for the Dayak ethnicity to have more access and power to control natural resources. Further, it facilitates the emergence of go-betweens from the Dayak ethnic group.

Chapter 3 shows the power of go-betweens in Sintang from the village level to the district level by mapping the work of go-betweens. To provide a better understanding of go-between actors in oil palm development and maintenance phases, in this chapter, I am also addressing their characteristics such as charisma, sweet talker, risk-taker, and *kerampak* (straightforward and harsh). It ends with profiling

several go-betweens to show the importance of individual characteristics in the practices of go-betweens in the oil palm context.

Chapter 4 provides a stronger understanding of the role of go-betweens in terms of constraints and opportunities of the social relations and networks in which they are embedded and which they might strategically apply in the context of oil palm plantations. This chapter tries to unpack the principles of social relationships and connections that underpin the social and cultural organizations of the Dayak people in order to get a grip on the potentialities of specific dyadic relations. It continues by reviewing how social relationships in the Dayak society have been incorporated into other researchers' studies on brokerage, intermediaries, and gatekeepers. How the go-betweens select and maintain their potential networks are also discussed, wrapping it up with a visualization of the go-betweens' networks.

Chapter 5 offers a comprehensive analysis of go-betweens in Sintang. This chapter includes all three dimensions of structure, agency, and social network and returns to the empirical findings described in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 and analyses these findings using a combination of the conceptual framework set out in each chapter. It continues with the abstraction of the diversity of go-betweens who show similar types of characteristics in terms of individual capabilities/abilities, socio-cultural structural embeddedness, and practices that result from the iteration between agency and structure and the way they interact with others and connect people to achieve their objectives or specific interests.

Finally, this study's conclusion and recommendations are included in the last part, where I will argue that the emergence of go-betweens in the current context was triggered by the presence of *lahan basah* that is characterized by shadiness, murkiness, and ambiguity. By means of a multidimensional approach of structure, agency, and social networks, I shall distinguish five different types of go-betweens in Sintang. The principal findings of this study will subsequently be summarized before we finish with a concluding discussion of the central research question of this dissertation and provide a more solid understanding of these important development actors in Indonesian society.

In sum, this study offers a multidimensional approach of go-betweens in Kalimantan, which are also active and visible in different kinds of *lahan basah* in other parts of Indonesia or even other societies elsewhere. In addition, a more specific policy regarding go-betweens will be outlined in order to help reducing leakage, ambiguity, and monopolies in the exploitation of natural resources in Indonesia.

Chapter 1

Towards a New *Lahan Basah* in Sintang

When I arrived in the Sintang district in February 2015, I could feel the sun stinging my skin. The air was humid and filled with dust. In the distance I could see the iconic Kelam Hills, shading the city of Sintang. As I traversed the district's interior, my imagination of Borneo's tropical forests, with their dense trees and tall canopies, was instantly dispelled. I saw flat, bare land stretched as far as the eye could see. All the native trees were gone, replaced by oil palm trees. So much land in Sintang has been turned into large-scale oil palm plantations. Only a few patches of original forest remained: most likely sacred or communal land. Apparently, the process of clearing land for oil palm had started in many places in the district in the last ten years. Sintang is suddenly submerged here, where the global commodity is produced on a massive scale.

Sintang, the district capital, shows the evidence of the intensity of palm oil production. In 2018, total palm oil production was around 260,291 tons (BPS Sintang, 2018). Many trucks were seen carrying palm oil fruits, going back and forth from early morning until midnight, delivering palm oil fruit to palm oil mills spread across Sintang and other districts, such as Sekadau, Sanggau, and Kapuas Hulu. The rivers also bustle with oil palm activities every day. In a journey that takes about a week, vessels and pontoons pass by to deliver CPO from the company's upstream mills on the Kapuas and Melawi Rivers to Pontianak.

Oil palm has long been known as a commodity in some parts of Sintang, but is entirely new to other parts of the district. For example, the western part of Sintang is dominated by oil palm plantations that have reached the third stage. At this stage, oil palm trees have flourished, and communities around the plantations have been involved in the cultivation of the crop in collaboration with the company for more than two and a half decades. Most communities – such as Dayak, Malay, and migrants from Java and Nusa Tenggara – in the western part of Sintang and small areas in the northern part of Sintang depend on oil palm crops for their monthly income. These areas became involved in the oil palm in the late 1990s and early 2000s and have reached the second stage of oil palm plantations, which are filled with five- to twenty-year-old palm trees. In this part of the district,

household consumption of luxury goods, such as televisions, motorbikes and cars, is relatively higher than in communities in other parts of Sintang. Meanwhile, the eastern, southern, and a small part of northern Sintang close to the Malaysian border are dominated by first-stage oil palm plantations, with land clearing and oil palm nurseries as the dominant activities.

To understand the current context of Sintang, the first part of this chapter focuses on the history of Sintang as an ‘old frontier’. Frontierization in Sintang began before Indonesia’s independence from Dutch colonialism. The continuous process of frontierization in Sintang has attracted various actors to come and live in Sintang. Frontierization also affects the community’s way of life, which in turn changes commodities and livelihoods for decades in Sintang. The frontierization process is always full of conflicts, transactions, and negotiations in the social realm (De Jong, Knippenberg, & Bakker, 2017; Li & Semedi, 2021; Rahmadian, 2023). To see the transformation process from the social aspect, in this section, I also focus specifically on the Dayak Banjor community living in the Ketungau sub-district as part of the global transformation caused by the new oil palm commodity.

This chapter explores the dynamics and complexity of the initial process of introducing oil palm in the Sintang district, particularly in the Ketungau Hilir sub-district. The discussion then continues with the massive developments in the region, particularly in the oil palm sector, following the introduction of decentralisation in 2001, which transferred power from the central government to local governments. District governments actively invited multinational companies to their areas. In addition, different schemes resulted in a long and intense process of oil palm development, which significantly impacted the environment and communities. Further, the massive development of oil palm plantation investment in Sintang has turned the region into a new *lahan basah*. To better understand the oil palm development process, this chapter will present case studies of three different oil palm companies in Sintang, namely Satyanusa Indah Perkasa (SNIP), Cahaya Unggul Prima (CUP), and Sawit Khatulistiwa Lestari (SKL) that stand at different stages of oil palm development. The chapter will conclude by explaining how palm oil expansion triggered many actors to participate and created more opportunities for them, especially go-betweens, after their involvement in palm oil through rent-seeking activities. The chapter will conclude that these various actors can operate and compete due to the *lahan basah* establishment.

Sintang *Lahan Basah* in the Making

Sintang is the capital of the Sintang district, one of the nine districts in West Kalimantan. Despite the view that the Dayaks are the original inhabitants of the area, three ethnic groups (Malay, Dayak, and Chinese) have lived together in Sintang for more than two centuries. They have developed a sense that they live in a place known for its strategic and unique position at the confluence of the Kapuas and Melawi rivers. The complex situation of Sintang society is characterised by the relatively independent living situation of each ethnic group that is reflected in the urban layout of Sintang city: the riverbank where the Malays and the Chinese lived (in the colonial period together with the Dutch) and the hinterland where most of the Dayak lived.



Picture 1. Sungai Durian, the centre of economic activity in Sintang

Source: author collection

Sintang was considered the old frontier for the Dayaks, the coastal Malay Sultanate and the Dutch. The process of the old frontier in Sintang started during the 17th century when the Sintang Kingdom traded forest commodities between coastal cities and interior kingdoms (Gin, 2015, p. 96), especially with the Islamic Sultanates in Banjarmasin and Brunei. In return, the coastal Malay traders delivered goods and Islamic knowledge to the upstream and hinterland kingdoms. The expansion of the Islamic Sultanate also affected the people's way of living, further influencing locals to adopt Islam and use *Melayu* term as their new identity.

In 1822, the Malay Sultanate of Sintang was annexed by the Dutch and came under the control of Dutch colonial rule. Under Dutch rule, Sintang was one of several Sultanates in Borneo ruled indirectly by the Dutch (Tanasaldy, 2012, p. 58).⁵ The Dutch were the *de jure* rulers of the region that used the kingdom to maintain the area *de facto* and used the kingdom to impose its tax system on smaller kingdoms in the interior through customary trade or *dagang adat* (*ibid*, 2012, p. 61). Under Dutch colonial rule, the Malay Sultanates only had partial power. To organise the social system, the kingdom adopted the Dutch social stratification that positioned the population into three classes: “(1) the aristocratic class, (2) citizens (*anak negeri*), and (3) subjugated people or slaves” (*ibid*, 2012, p. 61). Under this stratification, the Dayak generally fell into the last group and had few opportunities for upward social mobility in this era.

In 1846, to counter the British presence in Northern Borneo, the Dutch reorganised Borneo into a new province with its new capital in Sintang. However, two years later, the Dutch abandoned the idea of making Sintang the capital, as the location of Sintang was not strategic and too isolated for effective coordination (Irwin, 1955 as cited in Tanasaldy, 2012, p. 64).⁶ Following this condition, the Dutch government only made Sintang as an administrative centre (Van Hout, 2014). The power was once again shared with the Malays (Sintang kingdom), which operated as a Dutch means to control and extract the natural resources in the region. This political decision was based on the strong political position of the Malays and its domination of inhabitants in the regions.

Under the Dutch colonial government, people in the Sintang areas (Malay and Dayak) started cultivating rubber. In 1907, the first rubber plantation (West Borneo Cultuur Maatschappij), owned by a Dutch company with a total area of 8,000 hectares and held a 75-year lease, was established in Soengai Tapang, Sintang (see Swart, 1911; Gin, 2015). This plantation employed people (*coeli/kuli*) from upper Kapuas, the Dayak group, and Javanese. The Dutch used the Kapuas and Melawi rivers to connect the estate in Soengei Tapang to the port of Pontianak, with a regular service maintained by Chinese steamers. Some scholars have shown that the Chinese migrated to the western part of Borneo in the 1740s and soon began to engage in gold-mining activities (Gin, 2015; Heidhues, 2003). After

5 The indirect rule of the Dutch government often brought intervention and pressure on the king, which restricted his autonomy, such as the king could not even choose his heir without approval from the Dutch colonial government.

6 The Dutch divided Borneo into two administrations, the Western Division, with Pontianak as the capital and the South-Eastern Division, whose capital was Banjarmasin (Irwin, 1955 as cited in Tanasaldy, 2012, p. 64).

Sintang fell under Dutch control, they used the Chinese as labourers on rubber plantations in West Kalimantan. Other scholars have noted that the Chinese in Sintang came to Sintang from the northern part of Borneo to trade with people in the upper streams of the Kapuas and Melawi Rivers (King, 1982; Eilenberg, 2012). While working as traders, most Chinese traders chose to stay in the capital of Sintang to built their business, and occupied most of the area in the old market of Sungai Durian.

Unlike the Malay and most Chinese who have preferred to live downstream (*hilir*), the Dayak people live upstream (*hulu*) along the river. The Dayak community under the Malay Sultanate and Dutch did not have enough power and was subject to taxation imposed by the kingdom. To minimise the potential of Dayak revolts and establish further control over them, the Dutch initiated the *Tumbang Anoi*⁷ Agreement in 1894 to 'unite' the Dayak and made them accept Dutch imperial rule (Usop, 1996 as cited in Van Klinken, 2004). However, after the *Tumbang Anoi* Agreement was concluded, the political position of the Dayaks mainly remained the same.

The process of frontierization in Sintang occurred continuously after Indonesia gained independence in 1945. Kalimantan's forests have been exploited ever since, especially since the late 1960s. Illegal logging has occurred in almost all districts with rich forests, such as Sanggau, Ketapang, Sintang and Landak. In the Sintang District, several rich forest areas, such as Ketungau, Ambalau, Serawai, Kelam and Dedai are the main sites of this illegal logging activity. The strategic position of Sintang, located at the border of Sarawak (Malaysia), made it a good gateway for logging activities, enabling people in Sintang to sell the commodity directly to Malaysia (Eilenberg, 2011).

In the 1970s, the export of unprocessed logs became an essential source of foreign currency. Most logging projects were located in rural and interior regions, with thick forests that were sparsely populated. These logging activities often only benefitted certain actors, particularly the central government, big businesses and past go-betweens, but went against local interests (Tanasaldy, 2012). In the local context, competition in logging activities impacted the practices of past go-betweens within the community, turning many people from villages or out of villages into local go-betweens and local bosses that sell the logs and gatekeepers who decided who can access the forests. The Dayak who lived in the interior

7 For two months, around 800-1000 delegates representing upriver Dayak communities were in this meeting. The *Tumbang Anoi* agreement, thus, was eliminating the noble class in several Dayak communities and stopping the headhunting (*ngayau*) practice by inviting the heads or elders of Dayak sub-ethnic groups.

areas consequently experienced the effects of logging activities. For example, new roads built to support logging activities opened isolated areas, bringing social and economic opportunities. However, the timber industry activities and illegal logging also caused negative effects, such as deforestation and land erosion.

Sintang's position as a frontier continued in the 1970s when the central government of Indonesia issued a transmigration⁸ programme. The programme focused on sending migrants from Java, Sumatra, Bali, and Nusa Tenggara to other regions as an attempt to improve the basic facilities and capacities of the people in the destination regions and to equalize development in low population density areas and thus bring more ethnic diversity to the area. In this first wave of the transmigration program, the central government built settlements next to existing villages to avoid conflicts. Unfortunately, this separation caused mistrust and created a gap between the local community and the migrants.

In the 1980s, some areas in the Sintang district, including Ketungau Hilir, became the targets of the second wave of the transmigration programme. The migrants mostly came from Central Java, East Java, and West Java. This programme encouraged assimilation between the local people and migrants by making them settle in one area to better adapt to one another through daily interactions. The second wave of the transmigration program aimed to better distribute the population in high-density areas such as Java and Bali to prevent overpopulation. The rationality of the central government was that the targeted location is a state land and thus had to accept the program without further thinking about the local inhabitants, their livelihood, and their connection to the cultural lands and nature. The implementation of the programmes caused economic inequality and social problems, often forcing local communities to share their land for development. It made many local people lose their lands and only owned a few lands for swidden agriculture and communal lands for hunting. The condition worsened with the presence of investors, while many lands are claimed as state land and handed over to investors for logging or other commodities. This complex situation of land access made many local people lose access to their lands and the cultural connection to the lands.

However, neither transmigration nor rubber cultivation was the major contributor to the destruction of forests (Tanasaldy, 2012, p. 185) and community lands, despite the significant contribution caused by the practice of logging and illegal

8 The data showed that the transmigration program sent transmigrants to many places in Kalimantan, including Sintang, and had a total of 388,515 transmigrants from 1979 to 1983 and an addition of 343,525 persons from 1984 to 1986 (Levang & Sevin, 1989, p. 5).

logging (Duddley, 2002; Casson & Obidzinski, 2007).⁹ The situation became more complex in the 1990s when the central government introduced palm oil as a new commodity. The government involved transmigrants in the early transformation of the district into an oil palm area in Sintang under the primary credit for cooperative members scheme (*koperasi kredit primer untuk anggota/KKPA*)¹⁰ or as a pilot project. Local people and transmigrants who joined this scheme received a two half-hectare of oil palm plot. The difference between the two groups was that the local people had to hand over five hectares of land to get a half-hectare palm oil plot. Meanwhile, the transmigrants did not. This was followed by the unwritten agreement that inhabitants around the oil palm plantation area would support this new investment program and take part as plantation labour. Similar oil palm programs are continuing today with different scheme names (see Li & Semedi, 2021; Gillespie, 2016; Li, 2015).

Over time, new commodities and different regulation systems in Sintang have turned the city into a ‘wetland’ (*lahan basah*), a land of opportunity. Both local people and outsiders see Sintang as a source of opportunity owing to its rich natural resources, which attract various actors to come to Sintang and make it as we know it today. The continuous transformation from one *lahan basah* into another also impacted the social-environmental connections among people in Sintang.

Making a Living in the Sintang *Lahan Basah*

The environmental transformation, especially over the past 15 years in Sintang has affected the community’s livelihood. The Dayak groups have long been engaged with rivers to support their lives and identify their group and land territory. Rivers were also used to support their livelihood and connect with other groups and villages. The Dayak society built their settlements close to a river in the past. However, with the establishment of plantations, they moved their settlements next to plantation roads. The location of clusters of long-living trees, primarily durian and *tapang* or former community settlements (*tembaway*), serves as markers and shows where the communities have lived in the past (Peluso, 2005). Moreover, *tembaway* has bound the Dayak groups with their ancestors’ living spaces and created an attachment with the place.

9 In 1997 total forest loss was up to 60% per cent in Kalimantan (Dudley, 2002).

10 KKPA was one of the government’s palm oil schemes between 1986 and 2000 and was dedicated to *transmigrants* and local smallholders.

Most Dayak ethnic territory in Sintang is barren land and peat land. Only some parts are fertile land that belongs to the community, even though most of the fertile areas were claimed and privatised by the head of the longhouse. What Dayak groups did has been observed by Peluso (2005), who argues “the power relations that inhere in local territories may involve bio-power (the disciplining of human practice through both coercion and consent)” (*ibid*, 2005, p. 2).

Most of the Dayak communities who live outside the capital of Sintang are farmers. The swidden agriculture practised by Dayaks has created territorial rights over land for individuals and families (Peluso, 2005; Schneider & Gough, 1974; Weinstock, 1983), meaning the right over land belongs to the people who work on it. In other words, the right to land will be earned when someone has cleared the land or works on the land, while the rest of the virgin forest (*rimba*) area remains open and becomes communal land. Over these past years, the Dayak sub-groups’ territory has become very limited, making people having limited access to lands. As a consequence, people started to borrow the owned land for swidden agriculture (*berladang*).¹¹

To support their life, the Dayaks need to open up new areas, a minimum of two hectares, for swidden agriculture once a year, although the harvest is often not enough to survive throughout the year. Swidden agriculture has a deep meaning for Dayaks, as it involves infusing individual and family cosmic energy (*semenget*)¹² into the rice (*padi*). The Dayak and Melayu people believe that only humans, rice, and houses possess cosmic energy. In this sense, planting rice brings life to the family who tills the field yearly. Moreover, the rice from the field consumed every day will renew the cosmic energy of the people. Through generations, this idea of cosmic energy helps maintain the strong connection between human nature and the spiritual world. In this light, although the harvest from swidden agriculture is not enough to support the annual consumption needs, the spirit of rice (*semenget padi*) as a source of life has encouraged the Dayak community to practice swidden agriculture yearly.

To process the land, especially during planting and harvesting, the Dayak have practised a *royong* system or, in Wadley’s terms, an ‘exchanged labour agreement’

11 The harvest will belong to the people who work the land, although it is also necessary to share some of the harvests with the landowner.

12 Dayak people believe that all who experience death will return to *sebayant*. *Sebayant* is the place of origin of the soul and life force (*semenget*). *Semenget* is often understood as human power and vitality (Rousseau, 1998; Sather, 2012). If *semenget* returns to *sebayant* (the place of origin of the soul and *semenget*), after a certain amount of time, it will turn into dew before returning to the world and being absorbed by rice plants when new rice shoots appear (Sather, 2012, p. 122).

(Wadley, 1999, p. 598). *Royong* is defined as a group of people (around 50 people or a whole settlement) who work on a rotating basis to help a member of the same group to work the land for the rice fields, and most of the *royong* groups are made up of family units. As such, a family is responsible for their field, and the number of family members determines the number of labourers. Some families with surplus labourers have a chance to exchange labour. Furthermore, a strong person who can work hard would have a large rice field with much harvest every year, enabling him to secure a respectable social status as a wealthy person or *orang mampu*. As *orang mampu*, there is an obligation to help people who have a failed harvest. In short, the swidden agriculture activity by the community is interconnected with *semenget padi* and nature, while in a societal context, it creates solid social relationships.

In addition to agricultural activities, Dayak used the rest of the communal land areas for hunting wild animals to meet their dietary needs. They often hunted in a group (*beruru*) and shared the meat with the community members in the villages. The transformation of forest land and communal land into palm oil plantations left them with little space for hunting wild animals, few of which could survive in this new ecosystem of plantations. This changing ecosystem also impacted the hunting tradition of the Dayak, while few people still embrace the hunting tradition, but the meat sharing tradition from hunting no longer exists. Now, the meat needed for special occasions (cultural and religion ceremonies) and daily consumption, is provided from someone's livestock or purchased from motorcycle traders.

Besides the swidden agriculture, many Dayak people cultivated rubber and forest products to earn cash, driven by high demand. In the rubber period, communal land decreased, leaving only a tiny spot in the peatland, while the land gradually transformed into rubber plots. The new engagement with the market forces continued in the 1970s, while the rubber cultivation plays a more critical role for some villages. The rubber introduction involved the community's respected people who received the first seeds and valuable information about the commodity. While rubber started to be a trusted commodity, the land for planting rubber was very limited. Only a few influential people had access to fertile land, while other members used the unproductive land.

At the same time, Dayaks started to become familiar with logging activities introduced by logging companies and illegal loggers around the area. During this period, the Dayak community opted to be 'onlookers' during the initial appearances

of illegal logging because of the cultural fear or *mali*¹³ of entering an unspoiled area. However, after the areas were opened, some Dayak became unafraid to participate in logging activities. As the territory of each Dayak group is relatively big, it provided the community with substantial communal forests that could support their logging activity.

In the late 1990s, the government introduced two new commodities with different objectives, i.e., premium rubber (*karet unggul*) and palm oil. The premium rubber is used to earn daily income and is maintained by the farmers. At the same time, palm oil is designed to be cultivated on the 'bare' land to meet the government's and investors' developmental agenda. Within two decades, these two commodities have become the primary income source for the Dayak community and have brought them into economical wealth (enabling them to buy vehicles and electronic devices). The noise from televisions and radios fills the air during the night and mobile phones are now part of the Dayak community's life. They contact people outside their villages (family or children who stay in the capital of Sintang), even though their area has a weak cellular signal.

Nowadays, many people in the Sintang district are currently engaged in oil palm activities, the rubber cultivation activity has been partially abandoned. The decrease in rubber prices since 2012 has impacted the local community's income. During my research in 2015, the price of two kilograms of rubber was equal to one kilogram of rice or Rp12,000. The drop in rubber prices has prompted people to leave their rubber work in villages and work in palm oil plantations or small shops in the city (*merantau*); others chose to convert their rubber plantations into palm oil plantations.

Despite the drop in rubber prices, the data from the Sintang government from 2013 to 2014 showed a 23.49% increase in rubber production from 37,449.50 tons to 46,245.32 tons (BPS Sintang, 2015). This increase in production was mainly due to the enhanced expansion of rubber plantations (4.81%), while many local communities transformed their jungle rubber (*karet hutan*) with superior rubber (*karet unggul*) seeds that could produce three times more than jungle rubber. However, the increase in rubber production was lower than the increase in rubber plantations that were transformed into palm oil plantations by the company and local people (Li & Semedi, 2021). The declining prices of rubber and other commodities have prompted the community to focus on maintaining their new palm oil plots.

13 According to Wadley (1999), *mali* can be perilous. If a community or person ignores *mali*, it will deliver bad things.

Pepper cultivation is another source of income for the people of Sintang. In 2014 pepper production in Sintang reached over 500 tons in 2014 (BPS Sintang, 2016). Most farmers who live close to the Malaysian border prefer to sell their produce directly to Malaysia due to higher prices (around Rp25,000/kg) and lower transportation costs. The local community often used the back path (*jalan tikus*) to avoid border checking, which made this commodity selling illegal. This was a living strategy applied by people on frontier borders due to the lack of infrastructure (see Ishikawa, 2010; Eilenberg, 2012). Although the price of pepper is better than that of rubber, the limitation of pepper cultivation to dry areas makes this commodity unattractive.

Besides all these activities, palm oil is an essential source of livelihood for people in Sintang. It increased farmers' interest in making palm oil the main commodity, particularly for people who live in the villages. Some areas in Sintang consist of peat and infertile lands, which are hard to cultivate and become the main reason for people who live upstream to sell or convert their lands into palm oil plantations in collaboration with palm oil companies. In addition, in recent years the price of palm oil in Sintang has been relatively reasonable compared to other commodities. The stability of the palm oil price attracts people to invest in palm oil, including people who live in Sintang or those who live outside Sintang. In a few years, many actors have tried to monopolise the plantations by using their economic and social capital. For instance, in some interior areas, people from the capital of Sintang buy palm oil plots at low prices. The decision to buy plots in the interior areas is possible because they already have information on the people who have no money and no knowledge to maintain the oil palm plantations. This land monopoly has restricted access to land for some and has created a new social class through the emergence of an oil palm plantation labour class. These new classes are vulnerable people who often end up as labourers in palm oil plantations or plots for generations (Li & Semedi, 2021).

In this sense, the population and livelihood system in Sintang has changed over time, making the areas face frontier situations from time to time through the introduction of commodities. Today, palm oil is the primary commodity in Sintang, reinforcing the so-called New Frontier. The environmental and livelihood transformation in Sintang is manifest in various ethnic groups dominating jobs and roles in specific fields. This transformation through oil palm development has also created a new social structure for the labour class.

Living Community in *Lahan Basah*

To better understand the communities in Sintang, specifically Dayak groups, it is necessary to look critically at a specific group of Dayaks. My study starts from the Banjar (also spelled as Bandur/Banjur) community in Ketungau, where Banjar Dayaks live. As a group, the Banjar community has been engaged with different commodities – such as logging, rubber, and forest products. It has undergone a territorial transformation that has repeatedly embedded itself into the frontier situation.

The name Banjar is taken from the name of a river where the tributary of Jungkit River is located. In this river basin, the first Banjar group built its first settlement, and the descendants of Banjar spread to other areas around the Banjar River (now part of the administrative region of Ketungau Hilir¹⁴). Even though the languages of Banjar and Iban are similar, both groups refuse to be classified as the same. An elder in the Banjar community, Kakek Salibah (65 years old), told me:

We are Banjar who lived in this territory (areas from the surrounding Banjar River to Belitang River), referring to the first settlement close to Banjar River. Nevertheless, we are also considered the Dayaks of Ketungau, people who live in the areas of Ketungau. Our language is similar to that of other Dayaks in Ketungau. We can understand each other. Our language (referring to all Dayaks in Ketungau) is similar to Iban's, and people say we are part of Ibanic groups.

The statement of Kakek Salibah made me consider the complexity of ethnic classifications, which primarily sprang from the idea of insiders and outsiders. Thus, it is the way of the Dayak ethnic group to separate one group from another in society. Moreover, socio-cultural changes in Kalimantan, especially in the Sintang district, have influenced the community to highlight their ethnic identity. In this regard I use the term Banjar, as used in the community to refer to this group.

The territory of Dayak Banjar borders with the Iban groups in the north and Mualang groups in the west. In the past, big groups of Dayaks were their competitors in collecting heads (headhunting/*kayau*) to gain power and land in other territories (O'Gorman, 2010). This practice stopped after Dayak delegations made a deal with the colonial power to end headhunting in the *Tumbang Anoi* agreement (Usop, 1994; Widen, 2017). Up to now, the memory of headhunting and enemies

14 Ketungau Hilir is located approx. 100 km² from Banjar. It takes more than 4 hours from Banjar to Nanga Sepauk (capital of Ketungau Hilir) by land road and takes more than half a day by river road.

of the tribes is cherished by community members, who tell stories about their past enemies every day. In addition, they keep some material objects, such as the *mandau* (the traditional sword) used by their ancestors when cutting off enemy heads, and stones that are believed to make their ancestors magical.

The Banjar community had a large area for hunting, cultivating and living in the past. Around the headwaters of the Banjar territory, there were usually longhouses with at least 14 to 30 doors. The Banjar longhouse residence was semi-independent, and every family had a separate apartment (*bilik*) connected to other *bilik* by “a single structure or house (*rumah*)” (Wadley, 1999, p. 598). This residential unit in the Banjar community defined as a social and ritual institution. Moreover, the idea of living in a longhouse also formed the Banjar ownership concept of communalities. This ownership concept means that people in a longhouse have a claim over a specific territory, including what is present and planted on the land. In Freeman’s (1970) words, the community’s daily activities in the areas of their longhouses formed a territory. In this sense, as stated by Waterson (1993), a longhouse is a living house.

The population of the Banjar’s settlements was kept relatively small. When an area became too densely populated, some families would migrate to another area and build a new settlement, which could develop into a longhouse. Typically, the longhouse members are people from the same ancestor and thus share a kinship bond; everyone in the longhouse was categorised as a family and typically owned the same *tembaway* (or *tembawang*), a plot of land from a former settlement built by the common ancestor.

As members of a social organisation unit of a longhouse, community behaviour was governed by a set of rules known as customary law or *adat*. The socio-cultural activities were mainly focused on the longhouse, where elders bequeathed traditions at the end of a working day. The Banjar group was relatively egalitarian in outlook and organisation, similar to Iban or land Dayaks (see Freeman, 1970; Chua, 2012), which are distinguished from the more stratified society in southern Sintang or Central Kalimantan, such as Kayan, Kenyah, or Uud Danum (King, 1985; Sellato, 2021). Although the Banjar group is relatively egalitarian, there were strong positions within the community, such as the longhouse traditional specialist (who knew the practical interpretation of good and bad omens) or an augur (*tuai burung*, which means ‘bird elder’) (Schwenk, 1975, p. 196), or head of the house (*tuai rumah*), followed by the role of a shaman (*manang*¹⁵).

15 There are at least three degrees of *manang*, the lowest being *manang dukun* and the highest being *manang bali*. *Manang bali* has greater potency in the spiritual realm but does not add to his social prestige.

In this light, a longhouse is not only a physical symbol, but is also embedded in relationships among the members in a Dayak Banjor community. Alternatively, as Forth said, “as both a social and a physical place, the house locates persons within a complex web of categories and relationships” (Forth, 1991 as cited in Joyce & Gillespie, 2000, p. 18). In this sense, the longhouse and the community are embodied, with inter-relations amongst the members and the environment shaping the community.

Changing Conditions and Changing Beliefs

The socio-cultural dimensions of Dayak Banjor have been greatly influenced by past authorities – such as the colonial government, the Malay kingdom and the church. The colonial government generalised the ethnic groups in Kalimantan with the term Dayak and introduced the new belief of Christianity (Catholic and Protestant). The Catholic mission arrived in upper Kapuas in 1822-1823, almost together with the Dutch (Wadley, 2001). During the introduction of Catholic values, the church gave the community space to practice their traditional beliefs, a strategy to persuade the community to recognise this new religion.

Specific to Dayak Banjor, the Catholic missionaries accessed the area of Dayak Banjor and other Dayak sub-ethnic groups that settled in Ketungau by building an aeroplane runway for their regular visits. The missionaries gave spiritual services to the community and tried to increase community living. In the 1980s, the missionaries stopped engaging directly with the community along the Jungkit River (including Dayak Banjor), impacting their bond with the community. Although they were Catholic, they did not have enough understanding of Catholic values. By the late 1980s, most of these people hold on to their traditional beliefs, with only a few continuing to embrace Catholicism.

In the late 1990s, most Dayak communities in Banjor were converted to Protestantism. This conversion resulted in Dayak’s gradual but extensive abandonment of old rituals. It impacted their connections and relationships with their ancestors. Later, the fear of customary law (*adat*), customary prohibitions (*mali*), or sacred places (*tanah keramat*) started to disappear.

Protestants began increasing in number, and the Protestant church imposed faith control by placing a representative (*gembala*) in every Dayak Banjor territory village. The Protestant leaders used a traditional strategy of having good relationships with local leaders and women to collect followers. When the village leader chose Protestantism as a new belief, other villagers followed. As a new role model of Protestantism, the local leaders who had spiritual power or were a shaman would abandon their supposedly magical goods and use the bible as a new power source.

In addition, some local leaders participated in Protestant organisations to affirm their authority in the community by transforming their traditional power and knowledge into Protestant values. However, some leaders who had solid connections with traditional beliefs were mentally and physically affected and became ill. The cause was family and community pressure and the loss of dignity as indigenous leaders.

In daily life, local beliefs among the Banjor community have been deeply influenced by the values of Protestantism. The Dayak ornaments found in Dayak houses have disappeared and been replaced by the crucifix or a picture of Jesus Christ on the wall. Some people put the bible on top of television or radio speakers, while others put it on the living room table. Every morning, spiritual hymns are heard from every house that has turned on its tape or cell phone. Moreover, the Banjor try to be religious by always 'doing what is good and refraining from bad'. Mothers teach their children religious words of wisdom such as "it is what God likes and dislikes" and "do not be naughty, or god will be angry." They also are used to saying "*puji tuhan*" (praise be to God) and other phrases ascribed to the god. In this light, the use of Protestant expressions and values shows the success of the missionaries in nurturing Protestant values in the Banjor community¹⁶.

This kind of religious transformation to Protestant life changed traditional rituals and ceremonies. One ritual that has remained is the feast or *gawai*, and the *gawai* is central to Dayak tradition. *Gawai* is a much-awaited moment amongst Dayak community members, which refers to all kinds of ceremonial festivities such as harvest feasts, marriage, or death. After the Banjor converted to Protestantism, the term *gawai* also referred to Christian celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. However, the term of *gawai* is mostly used to refer to the harvest feast tradition, which is held from June to August during the rice harvest. Over the last ten years, the tradition of celebrating harvest has been discontinued by one of the Banjor village chiefs, and the decision has received the support of the religious head, despite disagreement among community members. However, rather than expressing their disagreement directly, they prefer to resort to gossiping, which can be considered a form of behaviour control and an effort to keep social harmony.

In 2014, one of the village heads in the Banjor community tried to reinvigorate their traditional rituals that Protestant beliefs have restricted by holding *gawai* after harvest. As an influential person in the community with support from his close family and followers, this village head couched the idea to preserve culture

16 Since the Protestants are accepted by most of the community, the church has placed one or two Protestant leaders or *gembala* in every village to deliver Protestant values by visiting houses. These leaders receive a monthly payment from the church, 20% of which they keep for themselves and the remaining 80% must be delivered to the church.

and *gawai* and as momentum to introduce the tradition to the next generations. Half of the community members agreed with this idea and supported him by participating in the preparation of the *gawai*. In order to make the *gawai* celebration unforgettable, the village head invited influential figures of Dayak to come to the village and enjoy the celebration¹⁷. Further, the *gawai* celebration in 2014 became the foundation of celebrating the *gawai adat* in this area again.

Towards the New *Lahan Basah*: Introduction of Palm Oil

In the early 1990s, the central government changed its policies on ‘seeking to encourage private sector initiatives, facilitate Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and accelerate estate crop development’ (McCarthy, 2010, p. 830). Suharto’s interest in the agricultural sector was the improvement of rural well-being and protection against agrarian radicalism (Rock, 2003; McCarthy, 2010). Hence, the transmigration program aimed to attract investors to target regions by supplying labour and establishing new towns with facilities that meet “international standards” (Li, 2016, p. 361).

Implementing FDI during the New Order regime strongly affected Indonesia’s form and flow of investments. The first implementation of FDI with palm oil as a commodity was regulated under the Nucleus Estate Scheme (*Perkebunan Inti Rakyat/PIR*)¹⁸ from the 1970s until the 1980s that targeted Sumatra Island. In Kalimantan, oil palm cultivation started in the mid-80s with the opening of state-owned oil palm companies Perseroan Terbatas Perkebunan Negara (PTPN). Shortly after the introduction of palm oil, the expansion of palm oil cultivation reached the upper areas of Kapuas, such as Sintang, Melawi, and Kapuas Hulu districts under the PIR-Trans (*Perkebunan Inti Rakyat-Trans/Nucleus Estate Scheme-Trans*) scheme and KKPA (*Koperasi Kredit Primer untuk Anggota*) or Primary Credit for Cooperative Members (Julia & White, 2012; McCarthy, 2010; McCarthy, Gillespie, & Zen, 2012).

17 The decision to invite influential figures (district and province) was triggered mainly by the village’s leader’s aims to use the *gawai* as a political-cultural vehicle. The *gawai* can enlarge the networks of local figures and create opportunities for access to resources and district funds. A *gawai* celebration uses to express the rise of the Dayaks’ after the implementation of regional autonomy.

18 *Perkebunan Inti Rakyat* (PIR), the first type of palm oil plantation scheme, was introduced in the 1970s in Indonesia in the transmigration program. The transmigration program was followed by a joint venture scheme between the companies and smallholders called the Nucleus Estate and Smallholders (NES) scheme that was tested in Malaysia in the 1970s (Feintrenie, Chong, & Levang, 2010, p. 385)

PIR-Trans and KKPA schemes were initiated and funded by the Indonesian government. The PIR-Trans scheme was an abbreviated estate development that used a big plantation as a core that helped guide the community's plantation as mutually beneficial cooperation. Under the PIR-Trans scheme, the expansion primarily occurred via joint government-private sector development schemes involving transmigrants (McCarthy & Cramb, 2009). The migrants and local communities were provided with a two-hectare palm oil area, a 0.75-hectare garden area, and a 0.25-hectare housing area. In this program, the government-funded infrastructure facilitated land acquisitions, sponsored smallholders, and provided credits to investors at concessionary rates for estate development, new crop planting and crushing facilities (Potter & Lee, 1998, p. 3).

KKPA was the government's palm oil scheme between 1986 and 2000 and was dedicated to transmigrants and local smallholders. The government subsidised this scheme, increasing about 16% of the total loans secured by the farmers (McCarthy, Gillespie, & Zen, 2012; Zen et al., 2016). The developers were required to establish a palm oil estate based on the PIR model and provide capital. Meanwhile, the local farmers' cooperative was required to provide the land. Unlike the PIR-Trans scheme, KKPA did not allocate food crops and housing areas, which sometimes resulted in misunderstandings between the scheme's participants and the palm oil companies. The implementation of both schemes caused several problems, such as failed food crops and inadequate income generation that forced some participants to abandon the plasma.¹⁹ Palm oil during the implementation of these two schemes was not attractive to the participants. Only after the palm oil trees began to generate income did the situation improve for the participants.

In Sintang, in 1994, the government gave a palm oil company the first permit to operate under the KKPA scheme in the Tempunak sub-district (a transmigrant area). Five more companies followed suit in 1996 in Binjai, Tempunak, Tebelian, Dedai, and Ketungau Hilir sub-districts. Of the total area under the palm oil permit given by the state, only 30% was converted into palm oil plantations. The central government continued to pursue the oil palm development agenda in consideration of protecting the investment. Moreover, the central government assigned retired military or senior bureaucrats as members of the palm oil companies' board of commissioners to control the business during the New Order regime (Sidel, 2005),

19 In the case of West Kalimantan, especially in the Sintang district area, the left plasma was taken over by the local community, especially former owners of the land or village elites. Meanwhile, in their study in Jambi, McCarthy and Zen (2016), found that village elites cheaply bought the plasma, sub-district officials, in-migrant traders, and teachers who were aware of the high productiveness of palm oil (McCarthy & Zen, 2016, p. 121).

thus securing the business sector. In order to attract different types of actors to engage with palm oil later on, the government and palm oil companies offered various schemes, such as the large private plantation (*Perkebunan Besar Swasta/* PBS) and partnership (*kemitraan*) schemes.

The PBS scheme only sometimes associated smallholders as a partner of the companies. The companies could buy the community land from the state and hire workers. Unlike the previous schemes, the first PBS scheme implemented in Sintang (1996) put the company as the leading actor in palm oil development. Many issues arose in the early phase of the scheme, such as land grabs and land conflicts, when the local community's land was taken over without fair compensation.²⁰ Potter (2008) noted a similar situation in Central Kalimantan, where the implementation of PBS triggered adverse reactions against palm oil since there were no arrangements regarding plasma and other things that involved the local community (*ibid*, 2008, p. 78).

Since 1999, under the reformation era, the old schemes offered during the New Order government were superseded under the influence of local legislatures and then, after 2001, under the decentralization arrangements (*otonomi daerah*). This momentum increased the influence of local politicians, and most of the administrative and financial power was handed over to the district government. These changes gave benefits to various actors but also imposed new constraints. Besides affecting the political situation, the 1997 financial crisis prevented the government from sponsoring the previous schemes. Under the partnership (*kemitraan*) model, plantations could negotiate land and benefit-sharing arrangements directly with the participating farmers without any direct involvement of state agencies (Zen et al., 2016, p. 100).

Under partnership schemes, plantation companies could take control of up to 80% of the total development area, while smallholders took the remaining 20%. The minimum 80:20 ratio was not a mandate, meaning it was possible to bargain between the local community and the companies during the negotiation process. Vital communal initiatives and local representatives could provide the community with more opportunities in the allocation scheme. At this point, the partnership scheme provided many opportunities for various actors, including the local community.

The Sintang condition, described above, shows similarities with the work of McCarthy (2010), who explained that the situation of palm oil development in Indo-

20 For instance, in Ketungau Hilir sub-district under PT. SNIP's concession (Dinas Perkebunan Sintang, 2015).

nesia may be differentiated into three phases: (1) the New Order state development (1970 to 1994), which was characterized by direct state intervention, (2) the transitional period towards a private initiative through the KKPA model (1994-1998), and (3) the '*laissez-faire*'; the period since 1998 after the reformation era (McCarthy, 2010). Program initiators during the three phases came from various institutions with different interests. The schemes and initiatives that supported palm oil development were adjusted to the flow of investment and political changes. Consequently, the implementation of decentralisation influenced each policy's shape, significance, and application based on the conditions and policies in each district, which always takes the side of capital owners.

Palm oil, however, as a new commodity and thus opportunity was also seized by independent actors. Besides the palm oil schemes, many farmers began to plant palm oil independently. By making use of the established infrastructures, transportation, and market, independent farmers expanded their interest in palm oil by investing labour and capital. Their investment resulted in good returns to pay for labour and generated cash to gradually intensify production (Cramb & McCarthy, 2016; Zen et al., 2016). Many farmers developed and maintained their palm oil garden plots, except for selling palm oil fresh fruit bunches to the mill. However, it was difficult for independent farmers to access capital, planting materials, fertilizers, and a marketing network (McCarthy, 2010, p. 826). In this sense, the involvement of independent farmers was a new form of engagement in the new agrarian transformation of palm oil plantations as an addition to the plasma scheme.

Nevertheless, it created 'inclusion and exclusion' for independent farmers (Fortin & Fleury, 2005) in the palm oil industry. 'Inclusion and exclusion' means that independent farmers are often excluded in many aspects, such as policy frameworks or other support, i.e. funding, technical assistance, marketing channels, and agricultural knowledge. Paradoxically, it also provided benefits such as emerging new economic power and increased opportunities for independent farmers in a rural setting. In many cases, these would only reach some farmers, i.e. the existing rural elites.

From Forest to Plantation Land

The transformation of communal land into an oil palm plantation is based on the agreement of a local community willing to join the plantation system by selling or handing over their communal and private land to a company. Land preparation, however, is often the most challenging phase in land transformation for palm oil plantations. The idea of land is a somewhat problematic issue, for instance in relation to land tenure and land allocation (see Cramb & McCarthy, 2016, p. 39; Julia

& White, 2012; Li, 2015). As stated in Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution on the regulation of the management of Indonesia's natural resources: "land, water, and all-natural resources that belong to common pools and public goods are under state control and will be utilised for the maximum welfare of the people" (Julia & White, 2012, p. 996). It could be concluded that natural resources, including land, is under state control. In Indonesia, however, there are three general categories of land: private land, state land, and customary land (Cramb, 2007; Cramb & McCarthy, 2016).

In Dayak communities, rights over land or *hak milik* can be understood as subject to exclusive and indefinite ownership, and it can be sold or transferred without any restrictions. In Kalimantan, for instance, land ownership is claimed by individuals by opening the forest (*nebay*) and using it for swidden agriculture (also known as 'slash-and-burn' agriculture) (Dove, 1985; Dove, 1993; Cramb et al., 2009). To avoid the risk of dispossession, the Dayak people have strategies to fortify their claim to the land: by growing agricultural products or planting specific trees, such as rubber, pepper, or fruit. Trees can signify permanent land use and, therefore, ownership and prevent claims from companies or other villagers (Dove, 1993; Potter & Lee, 1998). At the very least, when companies or the government acquires the area, local communities will still get compensated for the land and trees.

Customary land is more debatable than the above-mentioned categories, but Indonesia's legal framework recognises customary rights in principle. Dayaks, for instance, govern customary land through longhouses. Through the longhouse, the community controls common land areas, such as forests, village areas, and sacred grounds (i.e. old village or *tembaway* and burial ground). Community members also have access to their customary land. In many cases, intra-group inequalities resulted in internal conflicts, with more powerful figures manipulating negotiations with outsiders in their favour without regard to social consequences (Li, 2002; Li, 2014; Hall, Hirsch, & Li, 2011; Cramb & McCarthy, 2016). In this sense, the idea and values of communal land have long been neglected.

The interpretation of land ownership in Dayak society is highly complex. Using the land for plantation is also often tricky and needs to be clarified. One of the reasons is the absence of land use control, although the government attempted it by having a planning mechanism. Many of the designated land usages, i.e. agricultural and forest forests that can be converted into other uses, concessions, agricultural, or protected areas such as a national park, have been allocated for palm oil development. Furthermore, the definition of a 'forest' is unclear in Indonesian regulations (Sheil et al., 2009; Li, 2015). For instance, some palm oil companies

have expanded into the forest area, reportedly about 3% of occupied primary forest land (Obidzinski et al., 2012).

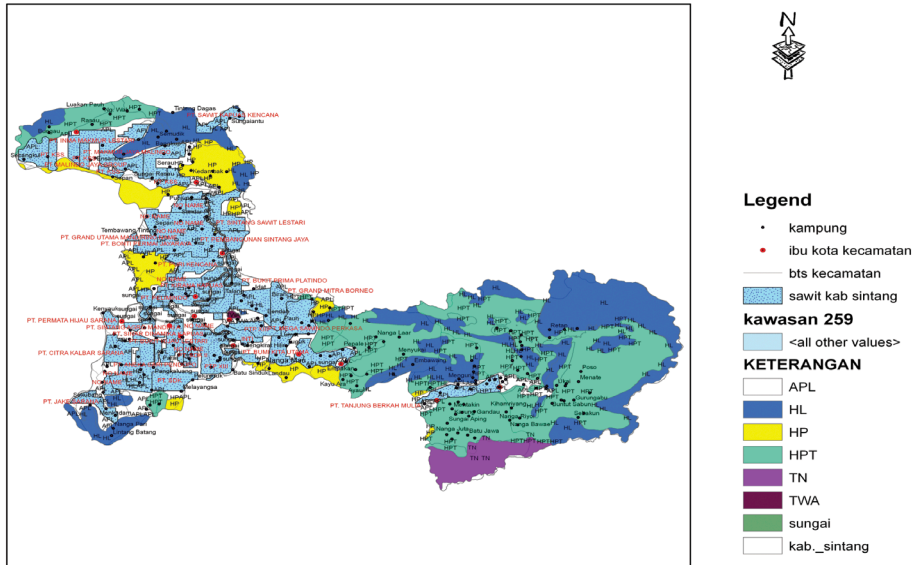
Nevertheless, most palm oil plantations are established on secondary forest land, logged land, grass and scrubland. The problem was that some of this land was used by customary landholders for swidden and extensive agroforestry production. Local communities claimed the land as part of their traditional territory. In this case, state and local communities had a land claim based on different foundations. Unfortunately, many cases have shown that the expansion of plantation companies into these areas has reduced access for local people and thus diminished their opportunities for independent farming and collecting forest products.

Li has argued that 'palm oil expansion is associated with the degradation of customary institutions and the undermining of customary authority (Li, 2015, p. 4). This argument is based on the strategy used by companies, which involves making a deal for land acquisition with customary leaders who may fail to first consult with the landholders. Customary leaders are brought to the company's side. The company also invites them to officially join the land acquisition team and its staff, officials, and security personnel (the army and police). As paid members, they helped persuade landholders to agree to the company's demand. Since only compliant customary leaders were included in these teams, it diminished the capacity of customary leaders and traditional institutions to protect the interests of landholders as a group (Li, 2015). After securing a land acquisition agreement between the local communities and the palm oil company, palm oil development commenced.

Specifically in Sintang, many companies queued to invest after people's trust in palm oil was established, and there was high demand for palm oil in the global market. This investment decision caused the price of palm oil to rise steadily. In addition, the implementation of regional autonomy led the district government to accommodate the palm oil demand by inviting investors to Sintang and offering tax relief. From 1994 through 2015, 45 companies received an operational licence in Sintang over 578,203 ha (see Map 3). Ten companies are categorised as multinational companies, and the rest are domestic companies covering a total area of 67,269.10 ha that has already produced crops and 65,481.55 ha of immature plants. Over the past five years, the total production of palm oil in Sintang increased significantly.

However, after 15 years, in 2015, one aspect of the palm oil industry that has yet to develop soon is how plantations and communities interact. Different schemes, the strong involvement of the regional government, and the increasing demand

from local communities for their rights (after regional autonomy) have yet to solve the friction between the companies and the communities.



Map 3. Land use map of Sintang District 2015

Source: Dinas Perkebunan Kab. Sintang

Unrevealing the Actors in the Field of Palm Oil Business Plantation

The transition of forests into oil palm plantations in Indonesia requires obtaining operational permits for oil palm development and access to strategic and influential actors in the district. As mentioned by Mayer (2006) in Varkkey (2012), “decentralisation had led to widespread confusion on the ground about who had the authority to approve local land use redesignation and plantation development, or how recently devolved authorities are legally exercised” (Mayer, 2006 as cited in Varkkey, 2012, p. 683). However, in the case of palm oil, the central government created the “macro-legal environment” for plantation and focused on the effects of regulation in terms of options, agency, and resources (Gillespie, 2016, p. 304). Meanwhile, the provincial government conducted the less important monthly oversight of the costs of plantations and announce the price of crude palm oil (CPO). Since the implementation of regional autonomy, the core process of operational permits related to the development of palm oil plantations was connected to the district head, locally known as *bupati*. In practice, the district and sub-district levels strongly influenced the

distribution of benefits between the plantations and communities, land allocation for businesses, and the control of plantation companies and their obligations. It could be said that the higher authority was delegated to the local (district) level.

Although the Sintang district government holds the authority to develop the region, the competition to invite investors is relatively high in West Kalimantan. Some district actors (especially in the bureaucratic, legislative, and economic sectors), aware of global price fluctuations and the booming commodity, tried to attract investors directly by offering various incentives. In the context of palm oil, the local government, for instance, ensured that the licensing process would be facilitated. They also offered tax exemptions, such as the class C excavation tax (*pajak penggalian golongan C*) and supported the business sector. Moreover, as an individual, many government officials, compelling actors, tried to build investment trust by offering their capacity to ‘protect’ and ‘secure’ the business, both formally and informally. Despite these offered conveniences, companies went through several steps before receiving the concession permit to establish a palm oil plantation (see figure 1).

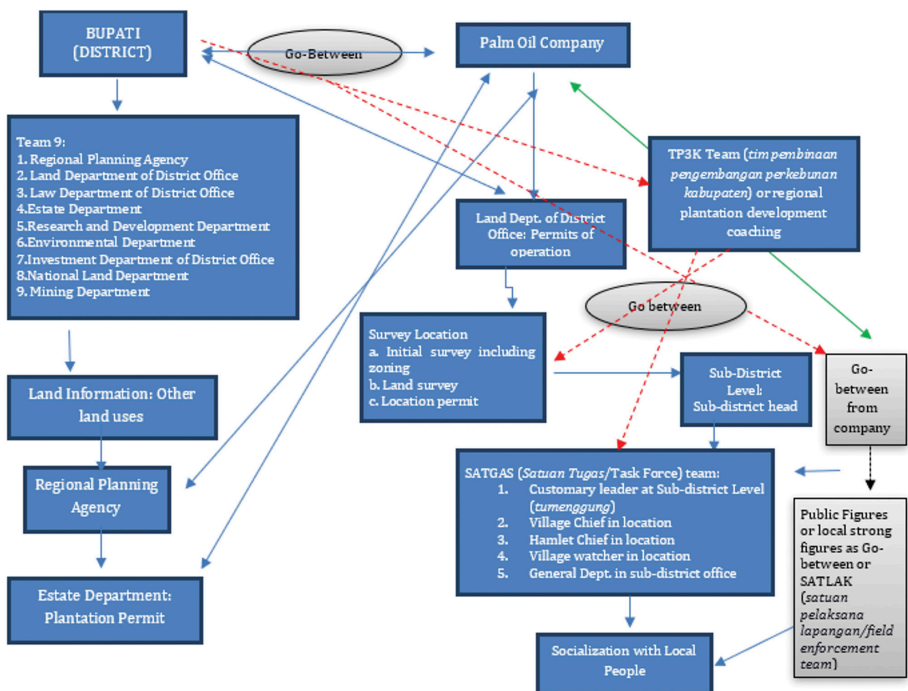


Figure 1. The actors involved in the permit application process for oil palm development in Sintang District

Before investors can establish a palm oil plantation, they must register with the Indonesian Investment Coordinating Board (*Badan Koordinasi Penanaman Modal/ BKPM*), acquire a notarised statement of the establishment of their company and then apply for a tax number. The company then must submit a business plan to the district government, which shows that the area planned for the plantation development is by the provincial and district spatial plan (Sirait, 2009, p. 46).²¹

Meanwhile, the district will provide the company with information on land availability and land status i.e., forest areas, other uses, or companies' concession areas. To convey information about the land and investment procedures, the head of the district establishes a team nine (*tim sembilan*), which comprises several departments involved in the governance of Sintang (see Figure 1). However, the validity of the land status is often debatable. Some companies, for example, obtained a permit to develop a plantation in a peat area, which is illegal (Varkkey, 2012).

After submitting several completed documents,²² the investors can apply for the plantation business license to the district office (*Izin Usaha Perkebunan* or IUP). The head of the district (*bupati*) has the total capacity to follow up on the palm oil company's IUP application. Many cases in Sintang during 2005-2010, the issuance process of palm oil plantation permits was relatively close to the end of the regent tenure (i.e. nine permits in 2005 and five permits in 2010). Although, the pattern changed slightly in the last period (2010-2015), in which three to five permits were issued annually, with 16 permits for palm oil companies. To ensure the process, the head of the district often assigns their trusted assistant (right hand or *tangan kanan*) to follow up on and secure the process.

After the company has issued the plantation permits, the company has three years to do the initial survey, including raising awareness (*sosialisasi*) of the oil palm plantation, land collection, land dealing, land acquisition, and infrastructure system establishment. To follow up on the investment process, the head of the district will distribute power to the sub-district level to monitor the business. Support comes from the establishment of the district plantation mentoring and development teams (see Figure 1). These teams' main tasks are to enforce and support the initial process of a palm oil plantation (Sirait, 2009, p. 28).

21 If the area overlaps with a state forest area, the process will be transferred to the ministry of forestry to get permission for conversion of land status of forest area to a non-forest area; nevertheless, the company need to provide the detailed calculations of overlapping areas (Sirait, 2009, p. 34).

22 The Environmental Impact Assessment (*Analisis Dampak Lingkungan/AMDAL*) document is a declaration letter of the land clearing process proposal of partnerships with farmer cooperatives.

Although the state is directly involved in the development of palm oil plantations, the initial survey process is rarely smooth, with a lot of controversies and friction between the company and the local communities. The government's position to support the investment is against the principles of protection and fulfilment of the local community's rights. Taking advantage of the government's position in achieving the targeted land acquisition in three years, the company may use powerful figures to help smoothen the initial process (*sosialisasi*, land dealing, and land clearing) that can potentially trigger conflicts. These figures are considered to have sociocultural power and a strong voice, and their involvement contributes a lot to the company in persuading the local community and protecting its activities (Li, 2017; Eilenberg, 2012; McCarthy, Gillespie, & Zen, 2012; McCarthy, 2010). These strong local actors also negotiate compensation for the community and themselves.

To establish a business, palm oil companies must have the business use right (*Hak Guna Usaha/HGU*). Under the 2004 Law on Plantations, HGU concessions may be granted for 35 years and extended for 25 years.²³ Once the company obtains the HGU permit, local communities that formerly managed and controlled the land under customary law lose their rights over their territory. When HGU concessions expire, the land reverts to state ownership. Thus, customary rights are permanently abolished when HGU concessions are granted, although local communities are often unaware of this (Julia & White, 2012, p. 999). The legalisation and institutionalisation of this new ownership dispossess local communities or individuals without legal documents, power, and legitimisation and create economic and social exclusion (Peluso & Lund, 2011, p. 674). In this light, the Indonesian system of transforming areas into oil palm is a long process with much bureaucracy and documents. The process is not transparent and chaotic, and replete with go-between involvement. However, this chaotic process is carried out continuously in cycles following the age of the HGU for oil palm plantations (see Figure 2).

23 This law overlapped with Investment Law No. 25/2007, which allows a single concession to be valid for up to 95 years (35 years, another 25 years, and a possibility to extend for another 35 years).

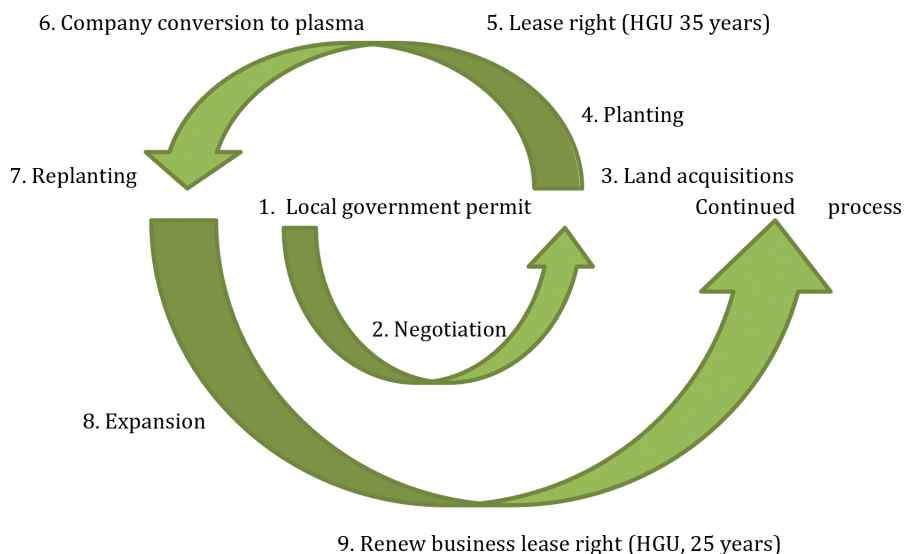


Figure 2. Cycle of oil palm plantation (Sirait, 2009)

The procedure for palm oil development is often undertaken in the grey area, while the government rule is not fully transparent and flexible. The procedure seems easy and obvious, but in practice it is difficult. The uncertainties in the procedure create an opportunity for people to play the role of a go-between actor, who will make obtaining permits faster and easier both in formal and informal situations. On the other hand, Indonesia's unclear and hierarchical structure allows for the emergence of 'patronage policies' at various levels, from the national level to the village. The study by McCarthy and Zen (2010) argues that the reason for this 'flexible' situation was triggered by decentralisation (*otonomi daerah*) with the power to issue licences given to local sectoral agencies (i.e. the department of plantation or the department of industry and trade) whose main interest is in supporting regional development. Meanwhile, Varkkey (2012) noted that plantation companies have been allowed to act with impunity due to the patronage networks they maintained with the local and central governments, which created a gap in the bureaucratic system. Moreover, the domination of big businesses in Indonesia – such as oil palm (see Varkkey, 2015) – and the 'flexible' bureaucracy sometimes potentially lead to unbalanced patronage relations to take advantage.

Palm Oil Plantation Development

There are several phases in the development of palm oil plantations. It often takes a few years until the plantation is established. After the land is acquired and the permit has been obtained, the company will transform the land concession into a palm oil plantation. Several steps must be followed before the plantation is established and palm oil production reaches the harvest period.

The process starts at the nurseries, which produce seedlings. The quality of seedlings determines the success of palm oil production. To ensure the quality of their palm oil production, companies always use certified seedlings from the Indonesian Palm Oil Research Institute (IPORI) or certified imports from Malaysia or other countries (Harsono et al, 2012, p. 216-217).



Picture 2. Oil palm plantation in Sintang

Source: author collection

Many local people (mostly women) are hired as daily labourers to support the oil palm nurseries on palm oil companies. Their task is to choose the best seeds for the plantations under the supervision of estate assistants with a background in plantations. Good-quality seeds are placed inside plastic containers, and the containers will be changed every two weeks due to plant growth. After three months, the seeds will be mature enough and have enough leaves to be transferred to the plantation.

The land is also cleared at this stage. After enough land is acquired within the concession area and the compensation is paid, the company will remove all trees using excavators and bulldozers to establish new plantations and settlements. The plantation contractor prefers to hire males as daily or monthly labourers for

this work. The process of land clearing and land preparation before the planting process will take longer, especially if it is done on peatlands.²⁴ Male workers must increase soil density at least five times to ensure the land is solid enough for palm oil trees. After three months in the nurseries, the trees will be ready to be placed on the plantation with 3m x 3m of space between the trees. The young palm oil trees are transported to the plantation using trucks to cover the distance from nurseries to plantations between five and seven kilometers (Harsono et al., 2012, p. 217). In most cases, young palm oil trees are planted manually.

The company completes the plantation, and they choose a strategic location (close to the mill, company office, main roads, and in the first ring area) for the core estate. This design means that the farmers' plantations will often be located in a less strategic position: in the second or third ring area. Additionally, the plantation structure that differentiates the nucleus and plasma areas often leads to a conflict triggered by the lack of infrastructure and plot positions. For instance, in schemes such as PIR-TRANS or KKPA, the company will maintain the plantations for up to five years or until the sand fruits (*buah pasir*) appear, and then they will hand over the plasma to the farmers through a lottery. While the plasma handover process appears fair in this scheme, the company does not consider the bond between the local communities and their land. Consequently, it often triggers horizontal conflicts related to land claims among local communities or between locals and migrants.

Meanwhile, in a partnership scheme (PBS), a company must maintain both the nucleus and the plasma during the period of the HGU permit (25-35 years). The problem that often emerges under implementing these schemes is the uncertainty of plasma plot locations. Farmers often do not know their plot's location, and the harvest's monthly income tends to be small compared to other schemes such as PIR-Trans or KKPA. Nevertheless, during that time, plasma farmers must pay their instalments.

After the planting process, companies and independent farmers will use fertiliser in their plantations to increase the productivity of palm oil trees. A fertiliser with nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium and magnesium component will be used twice a year to increase tree productivity. After the first five years, the productivity of palm oil trees will increase and continue to increase for up to 20 years. In the

24 Peatlands are suitable for the growth of palm oil when deeply drained, although it is hugely firing prone. Varkkey (2012) looked for the important reasons the company for opening up peatland areas for plantations, such as the valuable timber growing in these areas, and the peatlands are usually free from the customary right claims, less triggered social conflicts regarding the compensation cost (Varkkey, 2012, p. 323).

second stage, between 7 and 19 years, the palm oil plants will continue to mature, and their productivity will increase and reach peak production levels.

Running the Palm Oil Business

Since there are many types of work in a palm oil plantation and various material processes, a palm oil company needs to recruit labourers to run its business. The labour supply from the local area is minimal; most palm oil companies will invite labourers outside the concession area to cover it. However, the involvement of people from outside and within the concession areas is based on several reasons. For instance, local communities are recruited to work on plantations for reducing social conflicts, as part of the agreement during the socialisation process, and as a strategic process to introduce community members to the palm oil system. Meanwhile, labourers outside the concession are essential to ensure the business runs well, especially in difficult and busy times. Although the involvement of labourers is part of the process of establishing the plantation by the company, demand for workers also creates a new opportunity for go-betweens, in providing the industry with labourers from the plantation areas and outside the plantations.

Although a palm oil plantation requires much work, Cramb and McCarthy (2016) have argued that demand for labour on palm oil plantations is lower than for other crops, such as rubber, especially in the first stage of palm oil cultivation. Around 60% of the annual labour requirement is allocated to establishing palm oil and fruit harvests. For plantation maintenance, around 30% of the activities are conducted by men and women (Cramb & McCarthy, 2006; Li, 2015; Cramb & Feraro; 2012). In the maintenance process, daily tasks for women involve cleaning the grass (*nebay*), applying fertilisers (*nyolo*), and picking up fallen fruits (*brondol*). Although it seems that women's tasks are easy, fertilising is poisonous, and it is not guaranteed that they will be hired as permanent workers. Meanwhile, men dominate the more strategic positions and some work as permanent workers, e.g., plantation assistants, foremen (*mandor*), and mill workers. Some other men work as non-permanent employees, like truck drivers or regular daily harvesters. The health insurance, family allowances, or work safety of both permanent and non-permanent labourers on palm oil plantations are not fully supported by the company, which often leads to negative implications (i.e. poverty and social vulnerability in terms of conflict (Rist, Feintrenie, & Levang, 2010; Potter & Lee, 1998; McCarthy, 2010).

In the palm oil system, especially during the maintenance phase, a group of labourers works under the authority of a plantation foreman (*mandor*), who administratively works under a plantation assistant. It means that a hierarchy of jobs

governs the relationships between workers. Other than that, the discipline of palm oil plantation is applied during the period of working time, which starts at 6 a.m. and finishes at noon for the first shift, and then the next shift continues from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. for the daily labourers. Although they are permanent employees, the working time of a plantation assistant and foreman is less strict than that of daily labourers; they are only tasked with monitoring the daily labourers' work. The differences between these positions and the working periods on a palm oil plantation intensifies the isolation of workers from their social sphere and replace relatively egalitarian relationships with a more hierarchical structure. This working system is also applied in independent palm oil plots. The landowner plays the role of a boss and fulfils the role of a foreman when running their palm oil business, and they will recruit their neighbours as daily labourers to maintain the palm oil plots.

In establishing palm oil businesses, the companies that own palm oil mills will try to protect their business by making fruit supplies from their plantations (including the nucleus and plasma) their priority and often refusing fruits from independent smallholders. This strategy protects the quality of their CPO (crude palm oil). In Sintang, for instance, the total production numbers of CPO and Kernel came from various sources, such as the nucleus of a palm oil company, plasma, and independent smallholders.

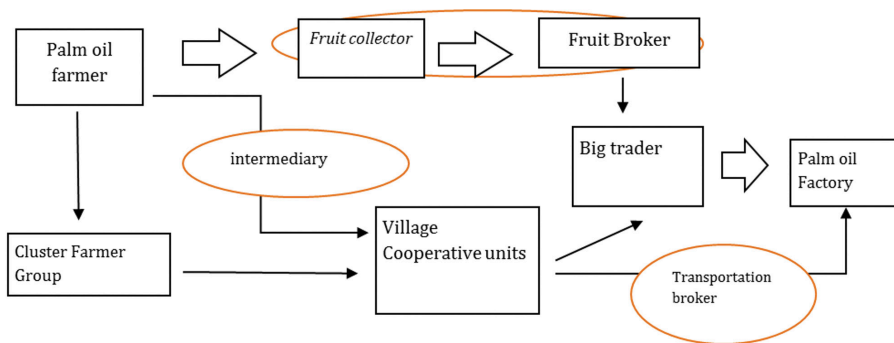


Figure 3. Palm oil trading: from farmers to the palm oil factory

Figure 3 shows the mechanism of palm oil trading from the local level to crude palm oil (CPO) processing in a palm oil factory. From this figure, plasma farmers who partner with palm oil companies follow the 'legal' process to sell TBS (*tandan buah segar* or palm oil fresh fruit bunches) via the village cooperative units (*Koperasi Unit Desa* or KUD). This cooperation between palm oil farmers and palm oil companies is based on a legal contract. The farmers agree to hand over their

land, accept the schemes and monetary compensation, collect the credit payments, and manage and sell the plasma fruit directly to the companies. The KUD also applies a hierarchical system in which the KUD functions as the leader and the supporting team that becomes a connector. Each KUD is responsible for several clusters farmer groups (*kelompok petani hamparan* or KPH). One group will be the leading group, directly controlling the plasma farmers.

On paper, it is expected that the farmers form the KUD to represent them. In practice, most KUDs were created as part of the palm oil company system. In this sense, the company tries to safeguard their business by working with people supporting its activities. To keep control of the KUDs, the farmers and companies have regular meetings almost every month. They discuss oil palm activities, the fluctuation of palm oil prices in the world market, and the difficulties faced by the farmers. Due to the decisive role of the KUD as a formal intermediary that links palm oil farmers with the company, it creates a new form of a social-political organisation besides its main economic functions. As stated by Li (2017, p. 3), the idea of plantations in Indonesia is more than to generate profit since both investors and the government bring a material, socio-cultural, and political transformation to everyday life. The introduction of palm oil plantations gives many new opportunities to actors at the local, district, and provincial levels after implementing regional autonomy.

From Three Different Plantations Towards to *Lahan Basah*

In this study, I focus on two different stages of palm oil plantations (development and maintenance stages) in Sintang, specifically in the Ketungau Hilir sub-district, during my field research. Ketungau Hilir is an interesting location, as most of the land is peat; hilly areas surround only a tiny area. As mentioned previously, and as stated in the Indonesian regulations, it is considered illegal to transform peatlands into palm oil plantations. The land characteristics in Ketungau Hilir bring even more complexity and dynamics to the investment situation. In the past, the economy in the area was supported by the trees of peatland forests and the strategic location of Ketungau Hilir, which is relatively close to the Malaysian border. When peatland forests decreased, the legal concessions of industrial plantation forests or *Hutan Tanaman Industri* (HTI) were transferred to significant palm oil concessions.

In Ketungau Hilir, 11 palm oil companies operate and have different phases of planting age. The first permits were issued in 1996, and the permit issuance

continued until my fieldwork in 2015. The total area of Ketungau Hilir is 160,500 ha or 7.14% of the total area of Sintang, of which almost 33% or 52,910 ha are tropical peatlands (BPS Ketungau Hilir, 2013), with a total population of 21,890 people (BPS Sintang, 2016).

Table 1. Palm oil companies in Ketungau Hilir sub-district

No	Company name	Location	Investment Type	Total area of plantations*	Year of plantation permit
1	PT. Bonti Permai Jaya Raya	Binjai Hulu, Ketungau Hilir	PMDN**	93,930.99 ha	1996, 2013, 2014
2	PT. Satyanusa Indahperkasa (Takeover from Ivo Mas)	Binjai Hulu, Ketungau Hilir	PMDN	25,683.41 ha	1996, 2006, 2014
3	PT. Makmur Agro Lestari	Ketungau Hilir	PMDN	9,550 ha	2009
4	PT. Duta Sejahtera Utama	Ketungau Hilir	PMDN	17,000 ha	2009
5	PT. Buana Hijau Abadi	Ketungau Hilir, Ketungau Tengah, Ketungau Hulu	PMDN	19,837 ha	2010
6	PT. Perdana Sawit Plantation	Ketungau Hilir, Ketungau Tengah	PMDN	17,500 ha	2012
7	PT. Duta Rendra Mulya	Kelam Permai, Binjai Hulu, Ketungau Hilir	PMDN	6,680 ha	2013
8	PT. Perkasamas Langgeng	Sepauk, Ketungau Hilir, Ketungau Tengah	PMDN	19,099 ha	2012
9	PT. Cahaya Unggul Prima	Ketungau Hilir, Ketungau Tengah	PMDN	17,200 ha	2014
10	PT. Sawit Khatulistiwa Lestari	Binjai Hulu, Ketungau Hilir, Ketungau Tengah	PMDN	12,100 ha	2014
11	PT. Palma Adinusa Jaya	Sintang, Kelam Permai, Binjai Hulu, Dedai, Ketungau Hilir	PMDN	10,348 ha	2015

* The total area of the companies covers one or more sub-district as the plantations are located on the border of a sub-district.

** Domestic Capital Investment or *Penanaman Modal Dalam Negeri*

(Source: Sintang Forestry and Plantations Department, *Dinas Kehutanan dan Perkebunan Sintang*, 2015)

This table shows that there are three different stages of palm oil plantation in the Ketungau Hilir sub-district (referring to the planting year: 1-5 years first stage; 6-20 years second stage; and 21-25 years third stage). The information from the Sintang Forestry and Plantations Department (*Dinas Kehutanan dan Pekebunan*) only shows the total area of the large-scale plantation transformation; smallholder oil palm activities have yet to be recorded. However, the popularity of the crop has encouraged local communities to start their independent smallholder plots since 2006.

In the case of Ketungau Hilir, palm oil fruit can be harvested three years after planting, and the plants will become more productive after five to seventeen years. After that, the productivity will begin to decline, which means it is economical to replant after 25-30 years.²⁵ Trees older than 25 years are too old and too tall for manual harvesting. In order to understand the oil palm system and the various gaps in the system that go-betweens fulfilled, the research was conducted on three plantations at different stages and operated by different companies, including: (1) SNIP, which started its operation in 1996 under the KKPA scheme; (2) CUP, which started its operation in 2014 under the partnership scheme; and (3) SKL, which actively operated in 2014 under the partnership scheme.

Satyanusa Indahperkasa Company or SNIP

SNIP is the longest-operating company in the Ketungau Hilir sub-district, starting in 1996 under the PBS scheme that took over from others companies. The plantation only has the nucleus (*inti*) plots, meaning local communities have no right to access the plots. The company's area was previously the concession of another company under the KKPA scheme, i.e. the Nusantara Mukti Sentosa company that transferred to yet another company named Ivo Mas. The initial plantation development process (i.e. socialisation, land dealing and compensation, infrastructure development and tree planting) was carried out by previous companies. Meanwhile, SNIP continued the plantation maintenance under a new scheme that was not introduced to the local communities. This act created a lot of tension and friction in the past. To prevent any instability during the operation, SNIP built an excellent relationship with the local leaders. Local leaders were hired to participate

25 The central government introduced a plantation revitalisation (*revitalisasi perkebunan*) scheme with a subsidised 12% interest between 2006 and 2010. The main goal was a replanting program for old trees. Under this scheme, state-owned and private estates could obtain subsidies for replanting older smallholder plasma areas. However, this scheme did not work well due to low credit, limited benefits, and many land conflicts between the central and local (district) authorities (Zen et al., 2016; McCarthy, 2010; McCarthy, Gillespie, & Zen, 2012).

in the company's projects in order to maintain the relationship, such as developing the area, building labour houses, and finding local labourers.

SNIP is under the management of LYMAN AGRO Group, a group that dominates the oil palm sector in Sintang and has the highest production of palm oil fresh fruit bunches (*tandan buah segar*). As one of the oldest companies operating in Sintang, this company has a massive concession with 25,683.41 ha and a total production of 56,288 tonnes. Much of their area consists of peatland, which was possible since investment regulations were not that strict during the New Order era. To support their palm oil production, LYMAN AGRO built a CPO mill on Sungai Risap, located close to the Kapuas River, to accommodate fresh fruits produced by companies under LYMAN AGRO (including SNIP).

SNIP manages its plantation by dividing its estate into southern and northern parts. One estate manager leads each part of the plantation, and the managers are under the supervision of the general manager of the Plantations. SNIP is registered as a national company, although most of the strategic positions are taken by foreign workers. SNIP started its operation in 1996, and the plantation operation has been challenging. Several conflicts have emerged during its operation that lead to fruit thievery, land compensation cases, and fraudulent schemes with local communities.

The most notorious case happened in 2012 when the Banjor community, which lives in the concession area, decided to impose a social sanction on SNIP. Based on their customary law (*adat*), the local community closed the southern part of the company's plantation area for almost three months by using rituals (such as burying a large jar and sacrificing pigs). This sanction was triggered by the dissatisfaction of the local community with the PBS scheme and the 'dishonesty' of the company's approach. Besides forcefully closing the plantation, the community around the plantation area decided to demonstrate to assert their rights to oil palm plots in exchange for their communal land. The problem was complicated as three companies under unclear schemes took over the concession. The first deal was between the community and Nusantara company and monetary compensation was given in exchange for the acquired area. The village head acted as the go-between in this process.

Less than two years after the handover process, the concession was transferred to Ivo Mas company without the community's knowledge. The same situation happened again with the last takeover process by SNIP after SNIP took over the concession, and the community tried to ask for compensation from the company, but the request was declined. In terms of compensation, it was insisted that the payment for the land had been made based on the outright sale (*jual lepas*)

system. However, the community claimed they never sold their communal land to the companies. SNIP insisted that it was not based on their agreement since it was made between Nusantara company, Ivo Mas company and the community.

Since the company did not respond to the community's demands, one of the village heads initiated contact with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSO) or *organisasi kemasyarakatan (ormas)* in Sintang. It was expected that by involving NGOs and *ormas*, the community would get some support, and they would oversee the negotiation between the Banjor community and SNIP. In this sense, the NGOs and *ormas* were the intermediaries who initiated the mediation between the two conflicting parties. Meanwhile, the company requested the district government as an institution and government members to support them and resolve the local conflicts. The company also had the opportunity to have another intermediary, the government TP3K (*Tim Pembinaan Pengembangan Perkebunan Kabupaten*) or Regional Plantation development coaching team that gave the company room to manoeuvre under laws and regulations regarding oil palm plantation investment and its implementation. However, movements of the local community and the closure of oil palm plantations made the company suffer losses, peaceful efforts were made by paying compensation in the form of money and 500 seeds of premium rubber per households in the Banjor community.

Cahaya Unggul Prima (CUP) Company

CUP is another plantation company located in the Banjor community's territory, which started to operate in the area in 2014. The company obtained a permit from the district government to locate lands. The presence of CUP, under a partnership scheme in Dayak Banjor brought new optimism to the communities around the area. Landowners in the concession area of CUP preferred to hand over their land and join the partnership scheme. Some believed that CUP would deliver a different managerial approach to maintain the plantations according to the partnership scheme and thus provide more financial benefits to the local communities.

The company's approach to gaining community acceptance was relatively smooth. CUP started introducing its presence by placing company assistants in each village within the concession area. Socialisation was part of the company's strategy to locate the community's lands and persuade community members to hand over their land. To strengthen the company's position during the socialisation process, the discussion was designed to emphasise the benefits of oil palm commodities, such as material benefits (i.e. money, oil palm plots), open access, and infrastructures (i.e. roads, bridges, and a new settlement). On the other hand, to guarantee and secure its business in the area, the company started to map elite

figures and leaders (actors with social and cultural power). They built an excellent direct relationship with these actors to gain support for their activities.

The introduction of oil palm systems and schemes has always been crucial. The strategy commonly used by palm oil companies in Sintang to gain land access and introduce palm oil systems and schemes is to consider the community's cultural values. For instance, in the Dayak Banjor community, the idea of insiders and outsiders is fundamental. This value was adopted by CUP in their worker recruitment by considering the ethnic background of the workers. In practice, CUP allocated some positions, such as estate assistant and foreman, to be fulfilled by Dayak community members and always considered employing Dayak ethnic group representatives as the company's staff. The company's actions are part of the strategy to create bonds of dependency with the local people.

Moreover, the company also calculated that having representatives of Dayak ethnic group as employees could allow for quick acceptance as a person and as a company representative. The shared identity (as a Dayak person) and the ability to speak the language minimised social boundaries and created trust. To maintain a good relationship in terms of closeness, for three years, both Dayak employees and migrant employees always attended cultural and social events held by the community. However, in the case of CUP, the company, took advantage of using these events to persuade the local community to hand over their land. When the presence of company assistants is perceived well by the local communities, it can be guaranteed that the introduction and development process will be smooth.

From the explanation above, it may be inferred that the representative of CUP is a go-between who connects local people to the company to introduce the oil palm system. However, the company also took into account the involvement of local figures when they actively persuaded local communities to join their scheme. The company applied several strategies to secure the support of village leaders for palm oil. For instance, the company offered a development project worth around 30-70 million rupiah (around 2,000-4,000 euros). The project involved building employee settlements and bridge maintenance. After the company obtained a permit for 17,200 ha of land from the Sintang government and collected a third of the total land permitted to them, plantation development started in 2014.

To support the development, CUP hired many workers from around and outside the plantation area (such as Java, NTT, or other parts of Kalimantan). Some workers focused on land acquisition, while others focused on the nursery and the initial construction of the plantation. The company also hired fresh university graduates (mainly from the Bogor Institute of Agriculture) and placed them by their speciality to support oil palm sustainability. The involvement of many people outside

the Dayak Banjar community in higher-ranking positions (i.e. manager, estate assistant, and foreman) sometimes caused friction between CUP and the local community. In this sense, the central conflict was triggered by socio-cultural and educational gaps resulting from the company's decision regarding staff recruitment. To reduce tension and solve problems in everyday activities, CUP worked with solid figures in the area to protect the business and resolve the conflicts. Despite the efforts to create a smooth and more negotiable engagement by involving local figures and employing local people, friction or physical conflicts could not be fully prevented. One of the most severe cases nearly started a physical conflict between CUP and the Banjar community. It happened during the burning season for swidden agriculture in 2015. One of the Banjar people (Pak Elang) burnt²⁶ his land for swidden agriculture, which was located next to the CUP concession on peatland with a depth of three metres.²⁷ It caused 15 hectares of CUP concession land to burn. The resolution to the issue involved local leaders negotiating by using *adat* and pay reasonable compensation to CUP.

Sawit Khatulistiwa Lestari (SKL) Company

SKL area is located in two different sub-districts in Sintang: Binjai Hulu and Ketungau Hilir. Some parts of SKL's areas are in the Dayak Banjar territory, and the community has engaged with the company for some time. Some community members still have high expectations that oil palm plantations will improve their lives. However, bad experiences with the company sometimes create problems for the company to acquire land. Since SKL had obtained a permit from the Sintang government over a 12,100-ha concession, the company needed the land to continue the development. The company used local figures to persuade, negotiate, and guarantee that community members would hand over their land and that the company could gather enough land to continue to the next phase.

During the socialisation process, for instance, SKL involved strategic figures from the community, such as heads of villages, heads of hamlets and customary leaders. This strategy was essential to gain support and security from the leaders before SKL established its own office, and they asked to use the house of the village head as their office in order to create closeness to the villagers. The process

26 The local community has specific methods to protect other areas from catching fire, i.e., building small trenches, setting fire against the wind direction, and overseeing the fire until it stops.

27 Ministry of Agriculture Regulation No. 14/2009 states that if there is a concession on peatland with an area of more than 30% of its total concession to have a peat thickness of more than 3 m, then the entire concession should not be opened (Varkkey, 2013).

of collecting the land was relatively slow compared to previous plantations, with many areas already allocated for oil palm plantations and private lands had been transformed into private oil palm plots. Although the local community had limited enthusiasm for the new oil palm company, the new partnership scheme created optimism amongst the local community. However, their optimism was constrained due to their experience. This caused the villagers to hand over their communal land (the land owned by the community) instead of their productive land, although few people still handed over their private land. Most of the communal land is located on peatland, and no one in the community was interested in cultivating the land because the costs were too high. SKL considered peatland to be too costly and too tricky for plantation establishment. However, they still accepted the land.

The first phase of palm oil was focused on the plantation and office development by involving the village elites in the project, which cost around 120-150 million rupiah (approx. 7,000-9,000 euros). The high total cost had limited the access of local elites to joining the project. To solve the high cost, some of the local elites worked together with big traders (*tokey*) in Sintang to reduce the project's cost. The local people nicely captured the opportunity, which resulted in indirect connections with the palm oil company. Although the company also had its goals, this is one way for them to secure their investment.

To anticipate the possibility of an unsuccessful target of development (including land, planted area, and land transformation), SKL hired an employee who worked as a mediator between the company, the local community, and the local government. This type of actor was supposed to have enough knowledge and experience to interact with people from different backgrounds, known as public relations (*humas*). His experience interacting with different types of people gives him more capacity to develop an excellent strategy to address societal issues. One of the most crucial PR people that I knew told me that:

*People in **Kalbar** (West Kalimantan) are more open to business activities, especially palm oil, than people in **Kaltim** (East Kalimantan). Persuading the elites and local communities to join the company's schemes is easy. Most of the influential figures accepted the scheme without a long negotiation process. The company will provide a small project, monthly income, or palm oil plots. If there is a conflict, the strategy that local people and local NGOs use is almost the same in every part of Indonesia: gather a large group and hold a demonstration and ask for money from the company as compensation. (Interview with Danang, 48 years old, SKL company worker)*

In this case, keeping contact with the elites or local figures helps keep the process working.

Besides the negotiation process during the initial phase, the mechanism and procedures of the palm oil plantation establishment were almost identical to those of the other companies. As a new company in Ketungau Hilir, SKL tried to recruit many villagers to work on their plantation. Moreover, the company also hired a labour broker to provide workers from East Nusa Tenggara. Hence, many low-educated and less experienced people worked as daily labourers. A group of women without access to their land also took the opportunity to join the company. Many youth who regarded palm oil as a means to provide fast money competed for work as labourers. In sum, the presence of the palm oil plantation is giving new opportunities and other benefits to the local community. However, the high demand for labour also created a new class of labourers that did not exist in the past.

One of the processes in which SKL is better than CUP has been establishing village cooperative units (KUDs) since the initial process, even though the company interfered in the selection process of the first head of KUD. However, the existence of the cooperatives helps the farmers to always connect with the company and have a reliable source of information in the process. The roles of a KUD in connecting and mediating companies and farmers shape a new opportunity for local people (especially farmers) to participate in the palm oil competition. To protect them from being cheated by the company, SKL farmers rely on the KUD and other people with more knowledge to conduct negotiations with the company.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered a detailed view of Sintang as a rich natural resource area in the eastern part of West Kalimantan and, in some ways, new perspectives on different types of frontierization by analysing existing literature on the area and providing new data from ethnographic field research, involving observations, interviews, the study of documents and archives. This chapter clarified how the old frontier emerged before the colonial era, in which Sintang became an interesting place for making a living for different ethnic groups due to its richness of natural resources or as *lahan basah*. This perspective of *lahan basah* has been followed by the Dutch, seeing Sintang as interesting, strategic, and rich in natural resources, which caused them to choose Sintang as a safe place from which they could protect their colonial area. The process of frontierization has continued through

the implementation of political changes by the colonial government, as well as the Malay kingdom and even the church that impacted local lives. These shifting powers were also followed by the exploitation of natural resources, land claims, controlling the locals, and even forcing new beliefs by the authority. Furthermore, the process of frontierization continued after Indonesia's independence by exploiting the natural resources of the areas in the form of logging, as many forests have been cut to support global log demands. As continuing with other commodities was considered valuable, such as rubber and oil palm, the Sintang area again encountered other frontiers. However, the idea of *lahan basah* in the old frontiers has also proven to be a disregard for the right of local communities, forcing them to change and adapt without interruption.

The Dayak who live upstream have continuously adapted to new commodities and new life forms. It changed their believes, livelihoods and material infrastructure and transformed their social-environmental spheres. The relationships have become more focused on social relations by creating good networks and connections to other people outside their family. The adaptation process to social and material transformations was not always smooth and easy. Many local people, particularly in Ketungau Hilir, needed a mediator and negotiator to enlarge their access to the outer world. It showed that the spaces for go-betweens have been emerging swiftly in regions with a high concentration of valuable commodities, such as rubber and oil palm.

The structural conditions around the old frontiers became the basic foundation for the new lives on new frontiers around Sintang. This new frontier started especially after the distribution of power to the regional government, to which was responded by inviting multinational companies into oil palm development schemes in Sintang, particularly the areas in Ketungau Hilir. The chain of oil palm is long and open for various actors inside and outside the district to be involved, from the dealing and negotiation process, the land transformation, planting, production, and continuing to deliver crude palm oil to the global market. The plantation community and the local people who live in the surrounding areas become the first actors in this oil palm chain, to be followed by other actors who take important roles in this process of the global commodity to ensure the integration in the global market.

In terms of socioeconomic benefits, palm oil plantations undoubtedly have improved the income of certain groups of actors. The plantations also generate employment opportunities and lead to improved public infrastructures. Nevertheless, in many cases, palm oil plantations fail to deliver benefits to a sufficiently large spectrum of actors, thus triggering various conflicts simultaneously. Those

benefiting most are individuals with prior experience, knowledge, or skills associated with palm oil, cash crops, or other plantation estates (Obidzinski et al., 2012). However, the transformation process of palm oil and the long periods of maintenance often create a new *lahan basah* for various actors to compete, including a new gap to be filled by a go-between. In this sense, *lahan basah* is not a place. It is a space marked by many opportunities. The fluidity of *lahan basah* follows paradoxes that can remake values and norms through rapid changes.

In the next chapter, the discussion focuses on the shift in power after the implementation of decentralisation. The implementation of decentralisation has opened up new opportunities for Dayak people to have a better position at local, district, provincial, and national levels in various economic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions. Furthermore, this good position helps them to join forces and create *lahan basah* in the name of development, which turns some of them into new types of go-between.

Chapter 2

Reshuffling Position of Go-Betweens in *Lahan Basah*

In the previous chapter, I discussed the transition process in Sintang into *lahan basah*. The position of the go-between in Sintang can be understood through the history of the Dayak community inside and outside the longhouse. Traditionally, the go-between's role among the Dayak community was limited to specific roles connecting the communities with the small part of the outer world, meaning the power of these types of go-betweens was limited. Locally, these go-betweens dominated in socio-cultural and economic dimensions. The socio-cultural and economic dimensions of the go-betweens were made possible by the social organization of Dayak ethnic groups at the village level and their market penetration into the hinterland.

This chapter will describe the redefinition of actors' position within the ethnic groups in West Kalimantan, specifically in Sintang, which was partly triggered by the implementation of regional autonomy. The power shift from the central government to the regional government helped the rise in power of local Dayak communities. The regional autonomy and the rise to power of the Dayak establishment supported Dayak communities in taking strategic positions in society, governmental institutions, and national-level politics. Some Dayak actors took advantage of this vital position to play the role of go-between and utilised the Dayak Customary Council to suppress state structures (i.e. state regulation and law) and gain power and control. By doing so, the new power and position acquired by members of Dayak ethnic groups in Kalimantan altered the social structure within the community.

In this chapter, I focus on the structural changes in West Kalimantan that were seen as an opportunity by the go-betweens to emerge and consolidate their new role. I also examine the factors that triggered the process of structural change (including the emergence of customary councils or *Dewan Adat Dayak* (DAD) as a new form of political power). Understanding this issue in West Kalimantan and

specifically in Sintang will help us to understand the structural conditions that led to the domination of Dayak go-betweens in the context of new frontiers.

Go-Betweens from a Structural Perspective

Social organisation and status relationships make up the basis of structural perspectives on go-betweens in the literature. This structure exists independently of individuals who fill particular positions such as brokering or mediating. It is common to focus on the social organisation of a specific society that makes the emergence of particular go-betweens possible and shapes the acts, possibilities, and constraints of go-betweens. The social organisation of a given society is generally described as “the collection of values, norms, processes, and behaviour patterns within a community that organises, facilitates, and constrains the interactions among community members” (Mancini, Martin, & Bowen, 2003, p. 319). In this sense, social organisation is a dialectical process among individuals, groups, and society. It also includes the networks of people, reciprocity and exchanges, norms and values, and social control. In Southeast Asia, the study of societal organisation started in the 1950s and has mainly been conducted by anthropologists. Most of these were explicitly interested in the ties of dependency and clientelism that prevailed in the social organisation of Southeast Asian societies.

From a structural perspective, the positions of go-betweens are shaped by patronage. This can be defined as a cross-cultural pattern of vertical relationships at the local level. In these dyadic relationships, the gratitude of the subordinates plays a vital role. Patronage, thus, is defined as “an informal relationship between persons of unequal status and power, which imposes reciprocal obligations of a different kind on each of the parties” (Silverman in Wolters, 1983, p. 10). The patron provides their protection and access to their networks to one side and loyalty to the other. This relationship is based on a personal, face-to-face basis, and is over a long term, sometimes even a lifetime. These relationships cut through socio-cultural, political, and even economic dimensions. Although patronage still appears in many communities, Mitchell (1990) shows how patronage is shaped by capitalism and the emergence of a modern nation state. Patronage is still performed locally and can be felt immediately, but the power relations now appear more fixed and permanent than personal and fluctuating, as the patronage theory explains.

Structural studies have shown that social organisations based on patron-clientship and clientelism enable the emergence of go-betweens, not only because of the lack of rigid structures, but also because their acts are legitimised and

underpinned by the values and norms on which these systems are based. It means that norms and values that apply in society or regulations and laws introduced by the state play an essential role in the presence and existence of those actors. Further, the different forms of social organisation in which patron-clientship or ideas of clientelism prevail lead to different types of go-betweens.

In the Indonesian case, patron-client relationships are embedded in the state system (Nordholt, 2015, p. 179). The Dutch adopted clientelism as a means of entrenching their colonial regime. They used patron-client relations to run local kingdoms, while the king or sultanate also practiced, in turn, patron-client relations to rule their territory. In this situation, the king and sultanate played roles of both patron and client. In the Sukarno era, the existence of the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia* or PKI) impacted patron-client relations, which offered equal positions. The situation changed dramatically, however, after the mass killings of 1965-66, when half a million supporters of the PKI were killed (Nordholt, 2015).

During the New Order, Suharto re-directed large amounts of money from foreign aid and oil revenues, enabling him to control various actors (business, bureaucrats, and military). The 'pyramid of patron-client relationship[s]' (Nordholt, 2015, p. 176) went down to village-level. This also enabled corruption to flourish. The extent of patron-client relationships was hidden behind bureaucratic procedures and a carefully orchestrated public display of order and unity (Koning, Nolten, Rodenburg, & Saptari, 2013; Holt, 2007). After decentralisation, the embeddedness of the state in society was revealed, as well as the extent to which the middle class supported the image of a coherent state while accessing resources through personal connections. Moreover, the absence of a strict rule of law embodied in stable government institutions created a space for successful militias to offer security, confirm ethnic identities, and defend property rights. In this light, the practice of patron-client relationships embedded in the state remains in Indonesian society.

From the studies on different forms of social organisations (e.g. Bierschenk, Chauveau, De Sardan, & Kossi, 2002; Nordholt, 2015; Koning, Nolten, Rodenburg & Saptari, 2013), several similarities can be drawn about these different types of clientelism. First, the go-betweens or mediators operate in empty spaces or at least less ordered and less structured spaces of the state. Secondly, they use multiple ambiguous structural relations to establish their position and increase their power. Thirdly, they use values, norms, trust, and social organisations to create, maintain and secure their position. Notwithstanding the importance of these studies in pointing out the structural aspects that legitimise go-betweens to arise and act, there has been substantial criticism of structural approach studies for neglecting

the individual characteristics and capabilities of go-betweens. This study will add to that criticism by focusing on the emergence of go-betweens in West Kalimantan, Indonesia, which is dominated by the Dayak ethnic group. Thus, it is crucial to look deeply at the form of Dayak social organisation, which is structurally and permanently embedded in community interactions through the idea of kinship.

The Cultural Social Organisation of Kinship

In discussing go-betweens, it is essential to look at the structural aspects embedded in society. To elaborate on the idea from a structural perspective, I continue by addressing Dayaks' main form of social organisation – that is, through kinship. The conditions and situations are always uncertain in new frontiers with low trust. Coalitions of actors are constantly changing depending on interests. To some extent, it provides a room for social ties like kinship to be a room for manoeuvring.

Southeast Asian societies, particularly Indonesian societies, can be understood as longhouse societies (Joyce & Gillespie, 2000; Helliwell, 2006). The longhouse is a symbol of a group or family that also preserves the spirit of the people within it. However, the daily interaction of the longhouse society is based on kinship as a social relation. Kinship is a vital concept that applies to Dayak communities, whose members are bound together through kinship. It also serves as the basis of interactions and to further share social and cultural obligations. Through a longhouse, people are part of social groups or networks and social relations (De Jong, 2008). While the longhouse no longer exists as a material form, the spirit of a longhouse society can still be found in daily practices. During the 1970s, the government of Indonesia ruled that Dayaks had to live in independent houses, which impacted the social organisation of the Malays and Dayaks who lived in Kalimantan.

Typically, for longhouse communities, the interaction is focused on the *bilek* or specific territory for the family, while the relations with the other members of the longhouse community are like siblings or close cousins or are bounded because of kinship relations to one of the core groups of founding families (Freeman, 1961, p. 212). From this understanding, the broader structure of Dayak and Malay ethnic groups in Kalimantan is derived from the idea of longhouse communities as a social unit group. At the same time, daily interactions are based on kinship. The rooms in the centre of a longhouse are those of founding families linked as siblings or cousins, but linkages are much less direct beyond this core group. While living in the same longhouse, different *bilek* families will become part of the same longhouse community.

Kinship was a key theme throughout twentieth century anthropology. For instance, Pollock and Maitland (1952) “make a clear distinction between the clan

in which kinship is traced only through males or only through females, resulting in permanent and mutually exclusive units” (Freeman, 1961, p. 195). In this study, the idea of kinship helps to understand the broader structure of the societies to which people belong.

Within this unit of social organisation, there is a representative of the group who is also a ritual expert who takes auguries and performs rituals for the group. The group lives and travels as a unit, with many interactions among its members. The social structure thus provides a space for the particular interest of individuals. The kinship networks are also crucial for connecting the different longhouse communities. Living in longhouse communities can be situated in social spaces which are bound by social networks, social relations and people’s identities within the longhouses (De Jong, 2008, p. 46).

Due to the policy of the Indonesian government in the 1970s, most people who had lived in longhouses started to live separately. The families became split up. The social relations among communities were no longer based on longhouses, but transformed into that of kinship. The relations among the Dayak communities ranged from weak to strong, from relationship within a longhouse to family. Strong ties can be categorised as valuable relations, based on trust, such as relations between families, adopted families, ancestors, and origin. In contrast, weak ties are limited interactions or links between people who interact infrequently. Nevertheless, strong and weak ties can be used as a bridge to reach other vital networks to support actors’ lives.

In present day Kalimantan, which has transformed into a new frontier where many actors with various interests in natural resources have emerged, a social organisation such as kinship remains important. For instance, under the new frontier situation, a social organization based on kinship, is used to manoeuvre a bridge between relations and open up different networks. In this light, kinship can be understood as a form of social structure within the Dayak ethnicity in Kalimantan, which go-betweens can use as a strategy to build networks and survive on new frontiers.

From Longhouse Go-Between to Village Go-Between

The role of go-betweens is not new but already existed and was practiced by Dayak communities at the time of the longhouse. Dayak societies already had roles for specific persons who took responsibility for the whole longhouse. These people occupied two different spaces, which are cultural and social. The first one is *tuai*

burong or augur, who occupied the cultural sphere and was more respected than the other. They had an essential role in the community connecting people with the spiritual world, particularly with ancestors during their cultural practices. The second one, called *tuai rumah* was the head of a longhouse who occupied the social sphere and had a role in maintaining harmony, particularly within the longhouse.

Among the Dayaks, a person with the title of *tuai burong* is believed to have esoteric knowledge (*ilmu*), which gives them the ability to fly, disappear, and be impervious to weapons. All these abilities made a *tuai burong* a community guardian, especially during the ethnic war and headhunting or *ngayau*. The Dayak community believed that not everyone could become a *tuai burong*, as it is something given and chosen. The knowledge and ability of *tuai burong* then are considered a natural process and part of someone's destiny, making him an unusual, extraordinary, and charismatic figure in their community.

Besides becoming the guardian of the community, with his/her 'gifted' background, a *tuai burong* plays a role in mediating between people in the longhouses and their ancestors through rituals, especially in the organisation of the agricultural cycle (Rousseau, 1980:55). These rituals, thus, are a form of communication between the Dayak with their ancestors to balance the human world and the ancestor world or spiritual world, which stem from their belief that the world is not limited to the human. However, there also exists a world beyond the human world. Thus, a *tuai burong* plays an essential role in protecting Dayak community life.

As a go-between in the cultural sphere, a *tuai burong* has extensive knowledge not only in esoteric knowledge of magical ability but also in *adat*²⁸ (custom), particularly regarding socio-cultural taboos, which are things that are allowed and not allowed in the community and the impact of its violation (Freeman, 1961, p. 164). In this sense, the knowledge of *adat* make the *tuai burong* a powerful actor in the structure of the community and outside the community. The role of a *tuai burong* has long been abandoned due to the Dayak conversion to Christian religions, such as Catholicism or Protestantism. However, while the *tuai burong* are

28 *Adat* is translated as custom or refers to the traditional practices in local communities (for example, Li, 2001; Fujiwara, 2020). On the other hand, *adat* also functions as a 'part of the local and state legal system', especially in the Dayak community (Guerreiro, 1993, p. 135). Meanwhile, the understanding of *adat* can also be seen in the contemporary context, as Hanley and Davidson (2008), consider '*adat* is used to particular time-honoured practices and institutions, inherited by communities rather than imposed by the state, which are seen as having continuing relevance to current political concerns' (2008, p. 817). In addition, the notion of *adat* is also used in contemporary political contexts, which refers to a complex of rights and obligations that ties together history, land, and law. On the other hand, in abstraction, *adat* also represents a vague but powerful set of ideas or assumptions regarding what an ideal society should look like (*ibid*, 2008, p. 818).

consigned to the past, the belief of such abilities persists and is often passed down to their descendants as successors.

Besides the *tuai burong*, another go-between role among the Dayak community is the *tuai rumah*. *Tuai rumah* is a role that is based on a longhouse social organisation. Within the longhouse, a *tuai rumah* plays a central role. They hold the highest authority among longhouse members and act as the head of the house. The role of *tuai rumah* is to maintain harmony among the longhouse members. Other than maintaining harmony within the longhouse, a *tuai rumah* is a go-between in inter-longhouse relations or between members of different longhouses, for example, during a dispute or alliance formation such as marriage. The role of intermediaries thus was inevitable, as they are needed to settle disputes and conflicts that arise within and between longhouses. A *tuai rumah*, the head of the house, holds the intermediary position. In connection to the outer world, *tuai rumah* was the representative of a longhouse who made contact with the outside world and was also the mediator in settling conflicts in the house (Freeman, 1970). They also provide supporting administrative documents when the Dayak community becomes part of the state administrative regime.

To be a *tuai rumah*, a person must be considered powerful in terms of individual capacities by possessing *pama*²⁹ or 'a strong soul', esoteric knowledge (*ilmu*) and have a good understanding and knowledge of customary law or *adat* within the community, and thus be trusted by all community members and chosen by them. Further, to be an outstanding *tuai rumah*, a person needs to have specific characteristics such as having strong verbal skills, being a good negotiator, being physically strong, brave, and, if possible, charismatic. This combination of individual characteristics makes them a perfect representative of people living in the longhouse. Traditionally, the *tuai rumah* was appointed by people living in the longhouse. However, most of the time, the position was passed down from father to son with the approval of the longhouse members.

Another position that has a mediating role in Dayak society is a shaman (*manang*). Unlike a *tuai rumah* whose primary role in the socio-cultural dimension is to connect and maintain interaction inside and between the Dayak community, a *manang's* central role is of a healer and a mediator to connect the human and spirit

29 Oesterheld defined *pama* as a type of divine soul substance which gives blessings to the whole community (Oesterheld, 2012, p. 291). The *pama* attaches to the *sumangat* or *semenget* and should be seen as a representation of the soul substance rather than the soul itself. It is only associated with great people like shamans, successful headhunters, or *adat* (customary) leaders. *Pama* is also believed to be found in certain heirlooms, such as weapons and jars (Sillander & Couderc, 2012, p. 30).

worlds. A *manang* connects people who live with their ancestors (spirits) and their life force (*senenget*)³⁰ (see Sillander & Couderc 2012; King, 1978). As such, Dayaks have long constructed and embraced the idea of interconnectedness between two different worlds which specific actors mediating. This role of mediator, however, is not available to everyone in Dayak society. People who are descendants of intermediaries or who have experience (working as shaman assistants/*pebayu*) and have strong capacities, such as possessing magic (*ilmu*) can take on this role. In other words, people following a specific trajectory can become the next *manang*. In this sense, similar to a *tuai burong*, a *manang* is a role that connects the human world with the spiritual world. Like a *tuai burong*, the power of a *manang* is not something that can be learned, but is considered a gift. The role of *manang* is not limited to men but can also be held by women as long as they can mediate the two worlds and help to cure peoples' illnesses.

The presence of *tuai burong*, *tuai rumah*, and *manang* in the longhouse showed that longhouses were a physical construction and a form of social organisation. Furthermore, in the maintenance of the social organisation, these three go-betweens played essential roles in controlling, mediating, and facilitating the community cohesion and well-being inside longhouses, between the longhouse communities, and between the human and spiritual world.

In the 1970s, the Indonesian government under Suharto issued a rule that prohibited communal houses as they were considered uncivilised, unhealthy conditions and supposedly encouraged sexual promiscuity and thus the transference of sex-related infections (see Tanasaldy, 2014; Duile, 2017). This forced many Dayak communities to leave their communal longhouses. This prohibition was enforced by a sub-district low-ranking apparatus that forced people to move to independent houses. The government then designated the longhouse area as an area for raising livestock. To ensure the implementation of this agenda, the local government involved charismatic leaders inside the community in initiating their idea. At that time, most leaders at the village level were appointed as the village head under the state administration of the village. As the leaders were under state control, it was hard for them not to support the government's policy.

30 *Senenget* or *sumangat* is different from *nyawa* (vital force) or *antu* (spirit), and is considered as part of the soul, which is similar to energy or 'mind' (Oesterheld, 2012, p. 291). For example, if *nyawa* is gone, a person will die, while if the *senenget* is gone, a person's state of mind will change, and they will be in a dreaming or ill state. After death, a person's *senenget* is supposed to continue living and ascend to a heavenly afterworld (*sabayatn*). However, the *senenget* of the special people with *pama* is supposed to go back to the *jubata* 'benevolent' in the upper world (Sillander & Couderc, 2012; Oesterheld, 2012).

This prohibition was part of the transformation into a uniform-style village of Suharto's new order regime, known as a new-style village (*desa gaya baru*), subdivided into hamlets (*dusun*); each had a leader who answered directly to the village leader. It was legalised in the form of UU no. 5 in 1979 on village governance (*pemerintahan desa*). This led the Dayak community to adopt a new living concept based on private houses and a new kind of village. In these new villages, communities and their members inhabited one residential area under a single administrative structure to accelerate rural development (see Bebbington et al., 2004, p. 192). Hüsken (1994, p. 121) writes that "though it was not acknowledged financially, village administration was a crucial agency for all sorts of government. It was the last link in the chain of command from the bureaucratic apex to the general populace, and it was thus the level charged with implementing central policy regarding economic development planning, taxation, and state formation." The implementation of the new settlement created new boundaries that were no longer restricted by a sub-ethnic territory but by an administrative village boundary.

In this new kind of settlement, the government created a structural, administrative position that served as a go-between with the power to manage specific areas based on population and introduce new titles for the position, namely head village (*kepala desa*) and the deputy head of the village (*kembangan*). Both the village head and the deputy head of the village were representatives of the government at the local level. They had socio-political roles in organising the community, including solving community problems and interacting with other communities and the government. These new go-betweens diminished the role of traditional go-betweens who existed in longhouses as the new and traditional go-betweens shared similar spheres in practising their roles of connecting people in and out of the community. In Sintang, particularly in the Ketungau area, some *tuai rumah* were appointed as a head village or vice head to ensure the shifting role was a success. Furthermore, the Banjar community was one of the Dayak sub-groups that tried to adapt to the new regulation despite other sub-groups resistance who preferred staying in the longhouse to keep their role as *tuai rumah*.

This new community structure and administration has changed the idea of communal identity and of being connected with a longhouse. Today, the Banjar community no longer live in a longhouse as they live in independent houses. In theory, an independent house is where a nuclear family lives. We can, however, often find two or three Banjar nuclear families living together in one independent house. In this regard, the families work and live in the same land. Typically the land belongs to their parents, which is viewed as family land. In every house, there will be one person who becomes the leader of the house, called the head of the

family or *kepala keluarga*. In Banjar, it was hard for them to deal with the new regulation of living independently. As a result, the Banjar community continues to interact with people with whom they previously shared longhouses or built houses close to their family or parents' houses and thus continues to make close interactions with family or kin. The representation of each family becomes essential to connect the family to the larger structure of the village and to support the family's existence within the community.

Tokey the Economic Go-Between in Hinterland

There is much literature on the economic role of intermediaries in mediating local communities and other groups in Southeast Asia (see Scott, 1972; King, 2008; Hall, 2010). One example is the trading relations between Dayaks and other ethnic groups such as the Malays and Chinese (see Heidhues, 2003; Cooke, 2006; Wadley, 2006; Gin, 2015). In this kind of literature, both Malays and Chinese are known as strong traders in terms of monopolising trading networks, controlling the economy, and having an extensive trading area in the hinterlands of Kalimantan. To understand the relations between traders and local communities in these hinterlands, many scholars look at structural relations, describing the vertical exchange relationships and face-to-face interaction, even though there is a chance to have a bargaining position for traders and clients (Dove, 1996).

Chinese middlemen use Sintang, a strategic location, to create a strategic market to meet the people's everyday needs in the upstream area; these go-betweens monopolised the flow of goods (see Cooke, 2006; Gin 2016; Heidhues, 2003). In this role, they benefited from the lack of infrastructure, such as roads and suitable distribution mechanisms in the upper Kapuas area. They adopted patron-client values such as trust and debt to create a socio-economic bond and relationship with their clients and utilise them to run their business. The Chinese middlemen then 'remained in the middle of otherwise unconnected actors' (Stovel & Shaw, 2012, p. 146).

Specifically in the area of Dayak Banjar, Sintang district, one such role can be seen in the terms local bosses (*tokey*) and clients (*anak buah*) used to define the relationship between the trader and its client, which is bonded by debt, both economic and social debt. The term *tokey* in the Dayak community has long been the subject of studies. The earliest study focused on the economic success of *tokeys* as entrepreneurs and prominent businessmen (Heidhues, 2003). This term, however, was later considered for small traders, shop owners, farmers, and fishermen. The relation of *tokey* and clients (*anak buah*) is based on a relation of economic power differences (see Semedi, 2014a; Semedi, 2014b; Li & Semedi, 2021; Mulyasari, 2013).

A *tokey* gained power by supplying daily goods to clients, which can affect the relationships among families or kin in everyday life. To have control over a large number of people or a group of people, a *tokey* tries to monopolise the economic activity in that area. In Sintang district, the process of monopolising the economy often starts from the Sintang city and goes to the very local level in the villages in the hinterland. This is evidenced by the fact that there are Chinese and Malay traders at every intersection along the Kapuas river.

The role of *tokey* in Sintang became dominant after they played a significant role in the rubber economy, the crops introduced by the Dutch colonial power in the early 20th century to support industrial activity (Gin, 2015). In this period of high demand for rubber, the Banjar farmers started to plant rubber trees in their fields, even though only a small number of places near the river could accommodate the trees. Consequently, only a few families inside the kampong had the strategic position to plant rubber and thus could monopolise the land. Typically, these families, such as a head village, held a structural position.

This situation changed because of the presence of *tokeys* that monopolised the economic sectors. Typically, these *tokeys* came from Chinese backgrounds and moved to central Kalimantan to work as farmers. However, the rule set out by the Dutch government that prohibited foreigners from owning land forced them to work as farm labourers or traders, which later on made them local bosses (*tokey*) in the economic sector. In addition to the Chinese, there were also Malays who traditionally had a monopoly in the trading sectors as a result of the Sultan's influence. Later on, the position of *tokey* was also occupied by some Dayak who managed to hold a large portion of rubber land due to their structural and cultural advantage, such as head of the village or customary leader, which made them start to engage in the trading business. The presence of *tokey* leads to the formation of new socio-economic structures: traders (*tokeys*), a wealthy group of families with structural and cultural positions, and another group of families with insufficient land who work as rubber tappers (*penoreh*). In this light, *tokeys* were starting to become patrons of the rubber tappers who became their clients.

Traders built relations with the local community by lending them daily goods such as oil, salt, rice, sugar, *benches* (canned sardines) and soap in exchange for their rubber products. Using water transportation, they transported goods from towns to certain villages or areas that took several days to reach. Therefore, a *tokey* played a role as a community patron by offering debt in exchange for goods. He also acted as a go-between by connecting the local community with people outside their territory. The traders used the debt to have social contracts with the people in the villages and 'adopted' them as clients. In many areas in West Kalimantan,

the idea of adopting the debt system was introduced by these goods traders, who were predominantly Malay and Chinese. To have political power in trading, many Chinese and Malay traders married local women, preferably from the upper classes, which allowed them to monopolise trading and invite their wives' families to become clients. From an economic point of view, this act reduced the costs of having and taking care of commodities such as latex and resin. This debt bond shows that the relation between *tokeys* and clients is unequal regarding wealth and power (Scott & Kerkvliet, 1975).

As a patron, a *tokey* supports the daily life of his clients and often acts as a representative of his clients to solve problems with outsiders. In this light, a *tokey* as an economic leader has combined his function with a social mechanism. The Chinese and Malay *tokeys* have characteristics of being very open, empathetic, discerning, friendly, and not being particularly talkative. These characteristics help the *tokeys* win the clients' loyalty, making them sell their rubber only to them, paying their debt with rubber, and not falsifying rubber scales. By allowing the client to meet his daily needs, the relationship between a *tokey* and the client is both traditional and modern. The new traders from Dayak adopted the trading strategy between the Chinese or Malay with local people in the hinterlands.

In the presence of local bosses (*tokey*) and clients (*anak buah*) a new kind of social relation – one which is based on wealth – emerged. Furthermore, it also created new kinds of classes inside society; inclusive of the poorer classes, which the clients occupied. Unlike other Dayak groups with a hierarchical status (e.g. Dayak Uud Danum and Dayak Embaloh), the Iban and the Dayak Banjar are relatively egalitarian. This new wealthy class that outsiders dominated (Chinese and Malays) monopolised the economic sectors within the society and influenced their way of living (Heidhues, 2003).

In the Banjar area, the clients are not only rubber tappers or farmers but also logging workers that emerged in the 1970s during the logging industry boom. The emergence of *tokey* from the Dayak community is their attempt to balance the class hierarchy and safeguard their positions in the community. In short, patron-client relations have existed in Sintang and are influenced by different commodities, ranging from rubber and logging, to later on, oil palm. However, the bond between *tokeys* and their clients changed after the presence of oil palm as the communities had other sources of income. In addition, oil palm opens access to the nearest town through the plantation road. Once the roads opened, the *tokeys* could no longer monopolise the economic sector, as the community was directly linked to the capital of Sintang.

Moreover, the *tokeys* also lost out to credit unions, which mushroomed after the presence of oil palm, which enabled Dayak to borrow money and strengthen their business capital. Another aspect forcing this relation to change is that the cost of being a patron has increased as commodity prices such as rubber have decreased. As such, it is riskier to hold a patron status. This traditional go-between, however, exists until today, especially in the hinterland. Many of them have shifted their businesses to the new oil palm crops to survive the agricultural transformation.

Go-betweens in the Political Atmosphere

The role of the go-between within the Banjar community can also be analysed from the political sphere. Locally, the implementation of state structure in the hinterland has aimed to control the community and create a clear boundary between villages. The government has designed structural positions for the state representative to support these objectives. This top-down design compromises the positions of the already existing community representatives. They are manifested in the transferral of power from the existence of go-betweens in the community to new 'state-form' go-betweens. This process was difficult and involved many conflicts. This new representative's sphere was raised with the new administration to live in the villages with an independent house for every household.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the initial action of the new regulation was to move the Dayaks to independent houses. To enable this, the government often started by personally approaching the *tuai rumah* and *tuai burong*. As compensation, the government offered them powerful positions and to be the new representatives of state administrative roles such as the role of the deputy head and head of the village. If they agreed, they needed to persuade the members of the longhouse to move to the independent house. Many of the *tuai rumah* and *tuai burong* preferred to continue living in longhouses and were not involved in the transformation process. It blocked them from candidacy to become head of the village or deputy head of the village. The government would replace them with other longhouse members who supported the government regulation. The Banjar longhouse group, who lived downstream of the Banjar River, refused this new structure, and only two members agreed to join, obliging them to leave the longhouse and build their own house. This action made them chosen by the district government to be the head of the village and deputy head of the village. As they took the new role, they were excommunicated by other people from the longhouse.

The New Order government was very dominant throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in the hinterland of Kalimantan. They promulgated the idea that longhouses were uncivilised, which fostered an unhealthy lifestyle. Furthermore, this

discourse has triggered some longhouse members to move and start living in independent houses. This unsafe condition made most of the longhouse members and other longhouses live in fear and made them aware of the state's power, which made the members build their own independent houses close to the longhouse. The responses from the longhouse members to live in an independent house made the roles of *tuai rumah* lost and made the local political dimension dominated by the head of the village.

As such, the village administration was the main force of political control in the countryside, which supervised, monitored, intervened or reported daily events at the local level to higher-level authorities (Hüsken, 1994, p. 121-122). In this sense, implementing a 'new style of village' (*desa gaya baru*) by the state created a new political go-between embedded into the state structure and lessened the power of cultural go-between. Salibah, the head of customary leader (*ketua adat*) of Dayak Banjar explained the shifting role of community go-between as follows,

*I no longer have the capacity to organise the community after the government installed **kepala kampung** (head of the village). I have lost my power, and now I only have a substantial role in cultural matters such as weddings, death, and sometimes conflicts between neighbours or families. The village head possesses strong power in the community politically and culturally and is supported by people in sub-districts or **kecamatan** (Salibah, 63 years old, customary leader).*

In the case of Dayak Banjar groups in Sintang, the strong impact of this single administrative village structure was the power shift from cultural figures and institutions to state institutions. Village administration must become the "eyes and ears" as well as the "hands and feet" of the central government (Hüsken, 1994, p. 122). As such, they became the political go-betweens.

The domination of the political realm by state-endorsed and structured actors continues into present day life in Sintang. Since the role of head of villages (*kepala desa*) emerged, the cultural role is no longer powerful enough. By having authority over specific areas and territories according to boundaries recognised by the state, they have the authority to decide the developmental agenda of their territory, although, the position of *tuai burong* (cultural go-between) still exists and is regulated by the state as a representative of indigenous communities or *masyarakat adat*. The term *tuai burong*, however, has changed into *ketua adat* or customary leader, whose role has also been reduced in the community and has little influence on organising community members. In addition, in some areas of Sintang, the role of *ketua adat* has become ceremonial. Only on specific occasions, such as

weddings, engagements, or death ceremonies, does the *ketua adat* play a significant role. Most *ketua adat* are elders within the community with a strong understanding and knowledge of *adat*.

Another political go-between that has a transformational role was *tumenggung adat*. The role of *tumenggung adat* is not very different from that of *ketua adat*. Both play a role in cultural dimensions and represent the community in different ways. At the administration level, both *tumenggung adat* and cultural leader have assignment letters from the government for their position. The term *tumenggung adat* was introduced by the Dutch during the colonial era as a representative of an ethnic group. In performing his role, *tumenggung adat* is assisted by *ketua adat* or representatives from every village. A *tumenggung adat* is becoming a representative of a sub-ethnic group in the area. In these years, the characteristics of *tumenggung adat* have shifted.

To have a position as a political intermediary, a person needs to be vocal in the community, has knowledge of cultural values, and have enough money to join the election process. Some candidates use kinship to support their candidacy, so it cannot be denied that kinship still plays a vital role in the Banjar community. However, in the political sphere, the role of *tumenggung adat* is less intense than that of the state structural position of head of sub-district or *camat* that dominates in the political dimension, even though the positions are equal structurally.

In this sense, the state power during the New Order has fully penetrated the Dayak community in the hinterland by regulating a new structural position recognised legally by the law. The implementation of the new state structure overlapped with pre-existing social cultural power. Further, the state has introduced a kind of go-between that functions as a representative of government and community, directly chosen by the government. During this period, structural positions have undergone many transformations, including in the hinterland for the go-betweens. Moreover, the rise of Dayaks has influenced political structures, forcing the government to legalise the cultural structure. However, this condition in the hinterland was only a piece of the reshuffling of go-between positions in Dayak society. It is necessary to continue our understanding through the broader lens of political transformations in local and super-local situations in Indonesia that are faced by the Dayak ethnicity.

Go-betweens under the New Order Regime

After the student-led *reformasi* movement brought about the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, regional autonomy was introduced in 2001. Some authors who focused on the fall of Suharto stated that the democratisation process in Indonesia started after the end of the New Order regime in May 1998 (Hadiz, 2010; Tanasaldy, 2012). The end of the Suharto era was followed by a deep economic crisis in Indonesia and the beginning of a new chapter of democratisation in the country. To some extent, the governance transformation in Indonesia has been described as a 'big bang' (see Hadiz, 2010, p. 19), which can be understood as a significant transformation process in Indonesia.

During the Suharto regime, Indonesia was ruled in a highly authoritarian and centralised fashion for 32 years (1966-1998). During his reign, state bureaucrats, politicians (under the controlling political party Golkar) and the military (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia/ABRI*) exerted strong control over society through violence and scare tactics. Sidel (2005, p. 8) described the pattern of local power that began to 'crystallise, expand, and entrench' during the New Order regime.

The Indonesian state was tightly centralised and insulated from any centrifugal and societal constraints in the internal circulation and machinations of the officials. Although there were parliamentary bodies at the district, provincial, and national levels that faced a re-election every five years, their adequate power and prerogative were severely limited. Moreover, under the New Order regime, the military's role became very strong, and they were always in direct contact with the state at the centre.³¹

Violent actions and scare tactics were also utilised locally in order to silence the population. Due to the scope of state power, state actors took advantage of their authority to control and dominate access to natural resources, occupy strategic positions, and monopolise development funds. The power and strategic positions held by many military elites during the New Order era enabled them to secure provincial or district-level positions and take advantage of the power these positions offered. For example, they controlled the distribution of government resources such as jobs, subsidies, and public facility funding. In so doing, the middle-level military elites started to act like a mafia who would ensure the smoothness of development programs and collect illegal levies, known locally as *pungli* (*pungutan*

31 In this period, the hierarchy of military commands mirrored the structure of the local government, and active and retired officers were appointed to occupy seats in the regional and national parliament, including strategic positions such as governors and heads of regencies (Sidel, 2005, p. 8).

liar). These actions created a massive gap between the elites at the national and regional level and local communities as the strategic positions and resources were monopolised by a small number of people.

Some studies have found that the idea of patronage became the foundation of political interactions among the Indonesian elites, who were the extra pair of hands (*perpanjangan tangan*) of state authority (see Barker, 1998; Barker & Van Klinken, 2009). In this sense, they represent the desires of political patrons and other elites. Not only that, the dominating and totalising control of the New Order regime also triggered the emergence of 'shadow figures' (Barker & Van Klinken, 2009, p. 6). At the same time, the military eliminated the space for local bosses (Sidel, 2005), which implied that during this period the power shifted from local bosses to the military.

Some of these elites employed the local '*jagos*' (local strongmen; singular: *jago*) who played a role during the colonial era (see Nordholt, 1991; Barker, 2009) to secure their political position. If these strong local *jagos* were able to gain followers and had resources, then through a cultural ritual, they were considered legitimate and authoritative (Nordholt, 1991, p. 75). Local *jagos* were believed to have a magical power that rendered them physically invulnerable (*kebal*) and protect them from unwanted elements (magic). In the New Order regime, local *jagos* were the shadow figures that controlled people and territories at the local level. Although, these acts also resulted in more local *jagos* in every area.

During the New Order era, political elites' power was connected to military power. Many military elites occupied strategic positions in the central government and as heads of districts³² across the country. The placement of military elites depended on individual capacity, political strategy, and proximity to the elites. By having a specific territory and area of power, the military elites used the local *jagos* to protect and secure natural resources and potential areas for the bosses. Alternatively, on the other hand, they became their shadow puppet. The presence and existence of local *jagos* were maintained under a web of elites. Some local *jagos*, however, preferred to work independently, and they were skilful orators and had a reputation for possessing magical power (Barker, 2009, p. 59).

32 The significant role of ABRI (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*) or the military during the New Order era could be seen from the domination of ABRI elites in the government. A lot of military elites occupied strategic positions, such as ministers, directors of state owned enterprises that managed plantations, logging concessions, construction, banks, etc., or as heads of districts and provinces, or the head of the regional legislative council. In relation to the centralization that was established by the New Order regime, the military held an important role to protect and control the country and sometimes their control was translated into scare tactics and violent activities.

In this sense, the shadowy figures became “the extra pair of hands” of the regional and national elites, which created a boundary that separated the state from society. From the previous explanation, it means there were two types of shadowy figures: first, those who offered security and access to natural resources and were supported by the political power as well as strategic structural positions such as the governor or military elites; second, those who served as the puppets of the elites. The first type mostly had more authority than the puppet type and utilised the authority to execute the command of the more authoritative players. However, some puppet figures would take advantage of the power and positions of the more influential figures by backing (*bekking* or *decking*) them, protecting them from the law, and by securing their rights to run their operations. The most common example of puppet figures are known as *preman* which roughly translates as ‘thug’ (see Barker, 1998; Lindsey, 2001; Nordholt, 1991). They emerged in the 1980s and 1990s during economic growth, industrialisation, and social-political mobilisation in Jakarta and other major provincial cities (Sidel 2005). Furthermore, *preman* in Indonesia were known to be associated with the youth organisation *Pemuda Pancasila*, which was very active during the Suharto era.

After the New Order era ended, the reformation led to broader democratisation and power distribution to the local level (from a centralised system to decentralisation) substantiated by Law No. 22/1999³³. The implementation of this law created a power vacuum in the centre, which was quickly filled by the *jagos*, who emerged at the local level to gain control of natural resources. In this regard, the implementation of regional autonomy allowed dual-role actors to maximise their roles. A new regulation on regional autonomy, however, was issued in 2001.

During the New Order regime, plantations were important – as well as oil and agriculture – as a means to improve state finances. Established primarily in Sumatra, these plantations were later expanded to Kalimantan. In Kalimantan, the land transformation happened faster than in other regions, leading to the island’s establishment as an active frontier (De Jong, Knippenberg, & Bakker, 2017). Kalimantan was selected for mega projects in mining, forestry, and agriculture³⁴ (De Koninck, Bernard, & Bissonnette, 2011). In agriculture, to control and protect plantation investments, the central government employed military elites in top

33 According to Law No. 22/1999, decentralisation in Indonesia is focused on power distribution to regional governments, and local governments have the right to manage and maintain their territory.

34 In the late 1960s, the logging boom began and provided hardwood for global exports. In the 1970s, a lot of areas were claimed as state land and then transformed into state plantations for different commodities, for example rubber, coconut, and oil palm across the islands of Indonesia.

positions and low-level staff on the field to protect their assets (Lewis, 2007). The military presence in the plantations brought fear and created a distance between the local people and investing actors³⁵. The state protection of the plantation business was driven by the attempt to create a boundary between business, government, and community in practical life. Moreover, the involvement of military elites who were also business owners encouraged them to monopolise and dominate specific sectors, so they often emerged as a 'type of mafias' (Sidel, 1999, p. 8).

Based on the development course during Suharto's presidential period, the government had to work with the local *jagos* to ensure that the economic development agenda ran smoothly. This cooperation also ensured the control of regional taxes that contributed to state revenue. The characteristics and personalities of the Suharto regime shaped the country's economic and political development objectives.³⁶ Many of the go-betweens that emerged during the introduction of oil palm plantations had similar roles to the local *jagos*. Companies would select local *jagos* based on the local government's recommendation and their characteristics, such as their knowledge and experience in the plantation sector, capacities for violence, communication skills, and whether they were feared. Having local *jagos* guaranteed the protection of the companies' investment by immobilizing those with power in the local community. In this context, the local *jagos* would work with the various oil palm companies. The companies would also take advantage of people within the governmental structure and choose people with strong legal power in the community, such as the head of the district or village or the customary head.

To support the development agenda during the New Order regime, the government facilitated private investment in the plantation sector, specifically oil palm (see Chapter 1). Along with implementing the 'new' village system, the New Order regime also started a new era of foreign investment. President Suharto had a strong interest in agriculture (see McCarthy & Zen, 2016). He initiated Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which shifted the investment policy from state to business. The Indonesian government invited many foreign companies to invest in the country, which triggered many new frontier openings (see De Jong, Knippenberg, & Bakker, 2017; Obidzinski et al., 2012). To support the agenda, the Indonesian government provided investors with the privilege of controlling natural resources and tax

35 In many plantations, it was common place to find military personnel who were tasked with protecting plantations and business from the local people or activists who did not support plantation activities. To minimise the presence of military and police in oil palm plantation areas, oil palm companies tried to hire lower-rank military and police members as their employees.

36 Suharto's strong individual characteristics and personality resulted in a stable economy for more than three decades in comparison to Nigerian leaders (Lewis, 2007).

reduction. For instance, during the 1960s to 1980s the state applied a centralised system, which included a logging concession known as HPH (*Hak Pengusahaan Hutan*). Many forested areas in Papua, Sulawesi, Sumatra, and Kalimantan were allocated for timber extraction.

Besides the logging commodity boom, the establishment of FDI also played a role in the oil palm sector. Consequently, the state began granting extensive new concessions to large private companies (McCarthy & Cramb, 2009) under the Primary Cooperative Credit for Members (KKPA) scheme. During this period, lands in Kalimantan were considered underdeveloped as most of them were covered by grass as a result of logging activities. The frequent land burning in swidden agriculture practices was also considered an environmental hazard. Under these circumstances, the government was keen to issue land titles or the right to cultivate without any substantial payment from the developer to secure oil palm as the better option (Zen, Barlow, & Gondowarsito, 2005, p. 4). In this sense, the regional government did not have any role in natural resource management. Despite the central government's control, brokers or intermediaries were still able to take advantage of this type of situation.

The different schemes, such as Perkebunan Inti Rakyat-Transmigrasi or PIR-Trans (Nucleus Estate Scheme) and Kredit Koperasi Primer Anggota or KKPA (Primary Cooperative Credit for Members), which the government introduced, extended the plantation sector to large areas.³⁷ Although land transformation benefits the development agenda, transnational farm investments are risky for the investment sector, the government, and people in the areas (Li, 2015). This argument is also relevant to the oil palm investment that has shaped Indonesia over the decades. It can be seen as creating an unstable situation that will affect the political situation, global prices and demand, and the high risk of creating go-betweens.

37 Unfortunately, corruption, which was part of the plantation system, brought failure to state plantations. During the New Order regime, specifically between the 1980s and the 1990s, state corruption in Indonesia was not well-organised compared with other countries in South-east Asia. For instance, state-owned companies in Kalimantan had to endure the financial problems of maintaining the state rubber plantations of PTPN XII in Sintang or the state oil palm plantations of PTPN XIII in Sanggau.

Emerging Opportunities for the Go-Betweens in New *Lahan Basah* in Regional Autonomy

Some political elites (including those of Dayak background) used the transition process of regional autonomy in West Kalimantan to suppress current political elites by mobilising the intellectual masses. Meanwhile, Malay elites had different strategies to empower their positions under the New Order regime. The Malay preferred to establish a close relationship with the central government in Jakarta (Tanasaldy, 2012). Direct contact with Jakarta would create an opportunity for gaining power in Kalimantan. Malay people, with support from the central government became prominent in the administration and military sectors.

On the other hand, the limited power of Dayak groups in West Kalimantan prevented them from establishing a network in Jakarta.³⁸ This situation then pushed Dayak elites to take a different direction by gathering people and support from the local elites in West Kalimantan (Tanasaldy, 2007). Their weak political position also drove them to bring up issues related to power centralisation and the domination of some ethnic groups in Kalimantan, such as Javanese and Malay. They targeted young people and students from the hinterland of West Kalimantan who were searching for freedom and democracy to become their new followers. The transition of power enabled go-betweens to gain strategic positions in legislative bodies and the government to emerge and then secure strategic bureaucratic positions or to be included in the national political process.

After the demise of the Suharto-led government, democracy and critical thinkers were able to occupy new spaces in Indonesia, which made international forums able to be involved in Indonesia's democracy, primarily related to the issues of natural resources and land, which led to the emergence of indigenous people (*masyarakat adat*) that must be protected from natural resource corporations (see Tsing, 2020; Li, 2000; Li, 2007). The involvement of international forums increased the awareness of the local people regarding their rights as individuals and as a community. International forums earned a place in the community by serving as a mediator for voicing the local community's wishes. In light of this situation, the opportunity used by Dayak ethnic groups to create a significant movement cannot be separated from the influence of international organisations in Kalimantan in providing knowledge, information, and new networks to the local community. The

38 It was different with Central Kalimantan, while one of Dayak, Tjilik Riwt, had succeeded in having a good network in Jakarta. Another main factors of his success was his military background (Tanasaldy, 2012).

knowledge transfer process was conducted top-down, and it was necessary to establish a dependency on international organisations within the local communities. However, the idea of indigenous people and the influence of international forums led local communities to protect their land and 'make and claim identities' (*ibid*, 2007:38).

The intellectual discussions that emerged in the newly established democracy and the involvement of Dayak ethnic groups in the democracy highlighted the imbalance in Kalimantan, especially for Dayak ethnic groups. The earlier conflicts in 1996-1997 between Dayaks and Madurese can be seen as a starting point in the rise of awareness and were the basis for the Dayak ethnic groups to continue their efforts to achieve strategic political positions at local and national level (Tanasaldy, 2012). The violent actions in 1996-1997 triggered Dayak ethnic groups to reconstruct the social structure in Kalimantan. However, the power shift in Kalimantan was seen by some Dayak elites as their turn to sit in powerful and strategic positions. In order to achieve this objective, these local Dayak elites mobilised their supporters to embark on strategic actions, which could either smoothen or suppress the political transition process in West Kalimantan. For example, in Sintang, the people were mobilised to support the Dayak candidate to become the head of district. They managed to gain national support and lobbied for a specific candidate to win the Sintang electoral election. The political elites in Sintang also supported him. Despite these efforts, the Dayak candidate did not win the election since the candidate failed to accommodate the needs of other ethnic groups, such as Javanese and Malay.

To manoeuvre in this new socio-political space, local elites in West Kalimantan had taken advantage of the political transition in their area to obtain strategic positions by involving and supporting the Dayak Council movement. In addition, these local elites have not only taken advantage of the ongoing political transition but also used the momentum of Dayak movement to prioritise their interests. Pak Sopidan explained the political manoeuvre in Sintang to me as follows:

Before the implementation of regional autonomy, most district heads and legislative members in West Kalimantan were from the military and Javanese or Malay ethnic groups. Only a few Dayak people could obtain good government positions even though before 1998, many Dayak people had sent their children to school or university to have a better life and access to jobs. During this period (around 1990-1999), many Dayak students learned about politics. They were involved in various discussions regarding the position of Dayak people in Indo-

nesia who were initiated by several influential people, such as Mr Kornelius (now the governor of West Kalimantan) or Mr Abang in Sintang (former legislative member and head of DAD) and Mils (former district head of Sintang). People who supported these students joined in some violent activities. One of them was the arson incident in Mempawah, which was led by Mr Kornelius (Pak Sopidan (35), lecturer at the University of Kapuas Sintang (UNKA) and local activist in Sintang, December 2015).

This testimony shows how the Dayak elites tried to take advantage of the intellectuals to change the situation and start a political transition. The elites used the limited information and the hunger for knowledge felt by the young people to gain support for achieving their ambition to have a good position in the government. Since the Dayak communities had observed the political, economic and even sociocultural discrimination over the years, they were encouraged to be involved in the local movements of the Dayak people without considering that their efforts could efficiently be utilised as a political tool by the Dayak elites who were trying to be in power.

Dayaks were absent from state activities in Kalimantan throughout the New Order. The Dayak community was marginalised compared to other ethnic groups, such as the Malays, in the governance of sub-districts and districts. The Malays occupied at least 50 per cent of the governing positions in every district. In this regard, the role of the Dayak people in the bureaucracy was insignificant. The domination of Malays is similar to the period of Sultanate rule, where the Dayak people were generally excluded. That recruitment was determined by social class, family ties, and religion (Tanasaldy, 2012, p. 160). During the Sukarno era, however, the Dayak community had a strong position and representatives in several strategic posts under the Dayak Party (*Partai Dayak/PD*). Meanwhile, during the New Order era, this party was broken into two different factions: one supported the Golkar party, and the other supported the Catholic party. After the separation, the Dayak community's difficult times continued until after Suharto's fall in 1998.

Political awareness in the Dayak community in West Kalimantan had risen a few years before the end of the Suharto regime. However, in some cases (i.e. Sintang and Kapuas Hulu), democratisation and the rise of Dayaks could not immediately be realised. Sintang, nonetheless, became a political transition baseline against the domination of the Indonesian army and Malay ethnic group to the Dayak people. The process of placing a Dayak figure at the head of the district in Sintang started in 1994. The political awareness of the Dayak ethnic group in West

Kalimantan triggered this. However, they did not achieve the desired result since most of the legislative council members, who were dominated by the military and Malay ethnic groups, supported non-Dayak candidates.

The tension after the election in 1994 was the result of violent activities, demonstrations and pressure on the governor in Pontianak and the legislative members in the Sintang district. Unfortunately, the possibility of having a member of the Dayak community as district head could not be realised. This failure in Sintang reinforced the desire of the Dayak ethnic groups to win regional elections in other regions. For instance, in the Kapuas Hulu regional election, Dayak communities and elites proposed eliminating other non-Dayak candidates and only supported one strong candidate. Their failure in Sintang forced them to make such a decision. This move was closely observed by other ethnic groups and elites who wanted a candidate who would also understand the interests of other ethnic groups.

Other violent actions happened in 1999 during the regional election in Mempawah District when Kornelius (the present governor of West Kalimantan) was excluded from the candidacy. The exclusion angered the Dayak community from the area of Landak (Kornelius' home community) and escalated into violent actions. Two weeks after Kornelius's failure, a mob burned the regional legislative (DPRD) office building in Mempawah (see Tanasaldy, 2012, p. 266) – which Kornelius was charged with. To some extent, this incident put the Dayak community at an advantage. They gained lobbying power with the elites and the ability to put Dayak people in strategic positions. The incident in Mempawah pressured the governor, and later the criminal charges against Kornelius were dropped. Kornelius was promoted to the head of the district of Landak for two periods (2001-2006 and 2006-2008).

Moreover, Kornelius used his power to reach a more powerful position in West Kalimantan by running for the governor's office in 2008. In summary, the violent acts in Mempawah encouraged Kornelius to control the people to respect government decisions. Moreover, he showed how to maintain the peace and unity of his people and utilised it to reach a strategic position.

From the cases in West Kalimantan, it can be concluded that the new political freedom in Indonesia had the potential for different activities, which could be seen as part of a collective movement. It was also stated by Goldstone (2004) that "emerging democracy thus is arriving already equipped with habits and experience of mobilisation of collective action" (Goldstone, 2004, p. 337). The movements that were thought to improve the conditions of the local people also provided some elites with room for negotiation and socio-political manoeuvring.

Moreover, some Dayak elites and young people believed that without the aggressive and radical pressure on other ethnic groups, they would not achieve their goals of having control over land and natural resources. In this light, having an ethnic-based organisation helped the Dayak communities to achieve their political goals. It became an instrument for some people or elites to gain access to strategic positions.

A New *Lahan Basah* for Go-Between After the Regional Autonomy

Potter notes that implementing regional autonomy “produced new subdivisions, new roles for local leaders, and more immediate forms of agricultural regulations” (Potter, 2009, p. 109). Specific to Sintang, after the implementation of regional autonomy, the local government obtained the control to decide the development process of the areas they had maintained which led to a new *lahan basah*. Further, as Hadiz (2010) explained that “at the same time, such interests seek to negotiate the terms of local engagement with the forces of economic globalisation, as the expansion of markets potentially produces new rent-seeking opportunities” (*ibid*, 2010, p. 18). In this sense, the increase of rent-seeking activities and the emergence of go-betweens with Dayak ethnicity background after the implementation of regional autonomy were combined with the expansion of natural resources exploitation from 2001 onwards. It is shown by the total land expansion and investments, specifically oil palm plantations in the Sintang district. As stated by McCarthy (2004), the involvement of Dayaks in important sectors, “naturalised natural resources exploitation by actors with a regional identity, shaping emerging patterns of access by allowing for particular ‘Dayak’ patterns of resource use and undermining the legitimacy of others” (*ibid*, 2004, p. 1206). Although oil palm expansion sparked resistance from some groups rejecting the program, it also provided openness through investment for the local community, which at some point could be seen as a compromise. According to Li (1999), compromise is defined as a distribution of political power and agency, if unevenly, between the actors (*ibid*, 1999). The compromise process uses the role of go-betweens for the mediation between the state, the community, investors, and other parties. However, in Sintang, the involvement of government officials (with Dayak ethnic background) was also followed by their strong position regarding access to natural resources. Someone who can reach a strategic position, play a role as a rent seeker or mediator, and controls access to natural resources is known as a partaker or *pemain*.

The negotiation for the investments of natural resources in Sintang involved many go-betweens in strategic government positions or politics. To gain more power and a stronger bargaining position, some go-betweens from government positions would provide information and knowledge about how to ensure safe investments in Sintang. For example, the go-betweens suggested that the investors, mainly in the oil palm sector, could contribute and support the local elites to secure a powerful and strategic position in the district, thus guaranteeing a safe business. The contribution and support of former and candidate investors could be given during the election period.

Interestingly, various go-betweens would apply the standard practice as a strategy to access networks and funds. For instance, during election time, go-betweens usually emerge and offer different strategies and networks. During the election period, a go-between would provide access to their network of local elites in villages who could influence the community's votes. Some go-betweens would even go further by collecting information from supporters for other candidates to know the election strategies of the opponent teams. Meanwhile, other go-betweens would offer their service in the economic sector by persuading their clients to support a candidate. Most go-between's clients came from the hinterland and possessed strategic positions in the economic sector in their area. On the other hand, other go-betweens would offer security to candidates during the campaign period. They would exert control through fear, launch smear campaigns against opponents, and offer secret information. These contributions from the various go-betweens to the political elites during the election period in Sintang and the candidate chosen to receive this support would impact the go-between's role for the following five years. With this in mind, many go-betweens provided support to all candidates.

When considering their positions in the future, the go-betweens would try to attain strategic positions to enable them to have easier access to the development and maintenance of natural resources. Furthermore, some go-betweens who were actively involved in election events already had a good position in civil organisations such as Dewan Adat Dayak (DAD), Muslim Students Association (*Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam/HMI*), or other social organisations that are based on religion or ethnicity. These strategic positions occupied by go-betweens also increased candidates' opportunities to gain votes and support. In the previous election in Sintang, the candidates took advantage of the go-betweens and elites' network to contact the national, ethnic organisations (i.e. *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara/AMAN* or the Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago) to gain support and negotiate at the national level.

In 2015, the dynamic situation in Sintang was influenced not only by electoral issues but also by the proposed regional division of the new province of Kapuas Raya, which was unsuccessful during the previous regime. The regional expansion plan has opened up new spaces for the rulers to access national funds. In realising this agenda, go-betweens in Sintang had to build good connections and relationships to negotiate and lobby the central government to fulfil the requirements for forming a new province. On the other hand, the go-betweens also seek other support from DAD organisations at the provincial and district level.

In this sense, the new provincial agenda in West Kalimantan was part of a political aim to gain the support of the local elites. Despite the fulfilment of several requirements for the establishment of the province, the local elites' political power would still determine the results of the process. Territorial expansion is easier once local elites share the same views and political positions as national elites. This legal administrative expansion takes six years to finally materialise and continue the process of legal administration for becoming a new independent province. The development process of a new province has created a new interstitial space since new institutions could be established in the process. Powerful actors could use this new space to play their dual roles as go-betweens to gain control over natural resources.

The implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia, particularly in West Kalimantan, triggered the emergence of many Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and NGOs, further introducing even more go-betweens. They came with their agenda and ideas supporting the rights and freedom of the local communities about their land and resource investments. These organisations adopted ideas on rights and values from international forums, and consequently, the government did not provide them with much room to manoeuvre. Many international organisations, both NGOs and CSOs, focus on conservation areas and forest protection. Their missions are the opposite of the local government's program that tries to bring investors to the region.

Local NGOs and CSOs follow the ideas proposed by international NGOs and CSOs to raise awareness and support the conservation agenda and protect the forest in Sintang. This agenda was triggered by a joint project between local and international NGOs and CSOs, such as WWF and local CSOs, Keling Kumang and Good Returns, an Australian NGO. The knowledge and information about sustainable commodities given by local and international NGOs and CSOs to the communities in some areas of the Sintang district have protected the community from unprofitable investments offered by the government. Furthermore, some international NGOs connected the community with small investors willing to support the

community. For example, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) invited investors to build a small palm oil factory and establish a method to certify the sustainability of palm oil products, especially those of smallholders, to ensure that these products would be acceptable in the global market. Another example is Keling Kumang, which is a credit union that was established to support the economy of the local community. However, since the government has different goals from the NGOs, the approaches taken to improve the community's life are often top-down.

Dewan Adat Dayak (DAD) Making Room for Dayak Go-Betweens

Adil Ka' Talino, Bacuramin Ka' Saruga, Basengat Ka' Jubata
Be fair to others, live the way of truth, obey the almighty
(Kornelius, West Kalimantan Governor, in his opening speech during
the Dayak meeting)

Under regional autonomy, the local government designed the development programs with their authority to manage and control local natural resources directly. However, the development programs were often designed homogeneously for the local people (top-down programs), which made the programs ineffective. The government's top-down programs have led to many land and social conflicts between different ethnic groups and investors. This situation encouraged some elites in Kalimantan, especially the Dayak elites, to represent their people and involve themselves in the area of development planning.

The spirit of freedom and democratisation after the fall of Suharto made it possible for an ethnic group to establish and manage an organisation based on ethnicity (see Suryadinata, 2001; Henley & Davidson, 2008; Aspinall, 2013). One example is the emergence of the Dayak Customary Council (*Dewan Adat Dayak/ DAD*), an organisation that has become the representative of Dayak ethnic groups. However, the establishment of a Dayak organisation was not the first attempt. In 1919 *Serikat Dayak* was established, and in 1957 Dayak *Ngaju* was formed (Gin, 2015:97). Both had a strong voice in their area and even at the national level to represent the Dayak people. Different perspectives and interests amongst the Dayak elites disrupted the cohesion of these organisations.

Before the end of the New Order era, a new Dayak-based grassroots movement emerged in the name of the National Dayak Customary Council or *Majelis Adat Dayak Nasional* (MADN), which presented the Dayak groups in Kalimantan. The emergence of MADN departs from the spirit of Dayak culture to face the new era to ensure the Dayak people's welfare, dignity, and well-being. Meanwhile, the Dayak in West Kalimantan responded to the emergence of this Dayak organisation with the creation of an organisation under the name of DAD (Dayak Council). The DAD organisation aims to protect Dayak's socio-cultural values, to increase the local economy, and provide micro funds to the community under the Pancur Kasih Organisation (Tanasaldy, 2012, p. 282). These situations encouraged the elites to legalise DAD as an organisation of this Dayak ethnic groups under legal law³⁹.

In the last few years, DAD has been essential in coordinating Dayak lobbies at district, provincial, and national levels for new natural resource investments or flowing the national budget to West Kalimantan, particularly Sintang District (see *ibid* 2012: 263). DAD at the local level transformed into a new socio-cultural power that, in the beginning, represented specific Dayak groups (for instance, DAD in Pontianak represent Dayak Kanayant, DAD in Sambas for Dayak Sambas). Nonetheless, in Sintang, DAD is the umbrella for the unity of all Dayak groups. DAD Sintang can make decisions and respond on behalf of Dayak groups in Sintang. In this sense, DAD Sintang becomes a new space of socio-cultural power. The significant roles of DAD Sintang make many people keep on competing to have a good position in this strategic organisation. The decisive role of DAD Sintang in the community has created a new 'structure' of elites for the Dayak community members. Furthermore, the presence of DAD has significantly changed the rather egalitarian Dayak society in Sintang into a more stratified one with the emergence of this new Dayak elite group (see Figure 4).

39 The first DAD was established in the Pontianak district, and the next was in Sambas, which represents the specific Dayak group (Tanasaldy, 2007, p. 251).

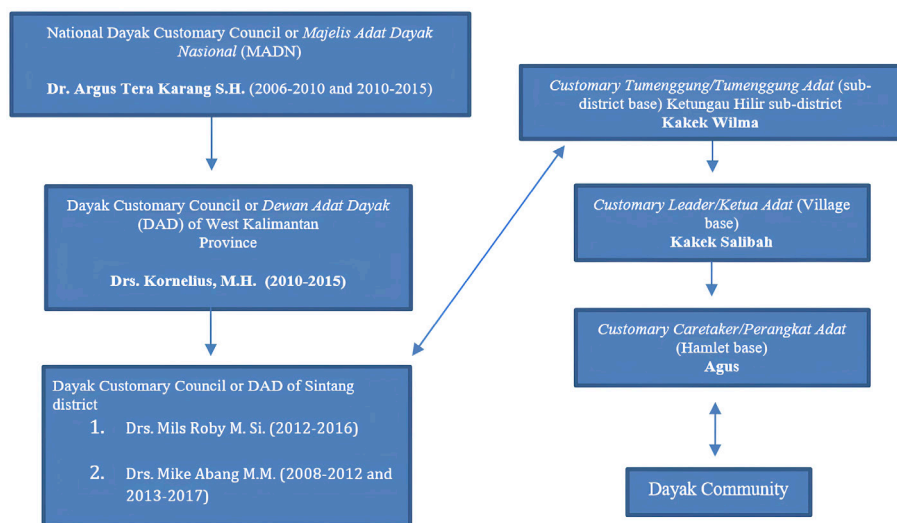


Figure 4. Dewan adat Dayak structure in Sintang in 2015

Source: Interview with Mike Abang and Mils Robi (2015)

Figure 4 shows the hierarchical formation of the DAD in Sintang. It starts from MADN at the national level and continues to DAD at the provincial and district level. This new structure, puts the new elites at the top of the DAD structural organisation. This new elite in Dayak society plays a role in various socio-cultural and political dimensions. They seek more opportunities and access to natural resources or strategic positions. Under DAD, these new elites can undermine the local power of Dayak groups in Sintang and turn it over as DAD power. On the other hand, DAD's deceptive power has limited the cultural go-betweens' capacity and roles in the administrative territory.

In the political dimension, many Dayak people, especially the DAD elite, use the DAD as a platform to access the legislative council in Sintang. Between 2015 until 2019, this strategy was successful and showed that almost 70 per cent of legislative members were Dayaks. Having strong power to present the Dayak people, DAD opened access to other interstitial spaces in Sintang, where the elites and Dayak society could have more roles, such as being a go-between. In the context of accessing natural resources, the presence of DADs is real. At the same time, as the organisation and its elites, DAD offers cultural support and information translation and mediates the development agenda in Dayak living areas. DAD involves many development agendas (offering natural resources, access to control natural resources) and even distribution of fresh development funds. For example, all of the development of new oil palm plantations in Ketungau Hilir used the role of DAD to

explain the objectives of the development of oil palm plantations and the opportunity of it, as well as prevent land conflicts. In return, the elites of DAD gain material benefits, as explained by Abang (former chairman of DAD and former chairman of DPRD Sintang): “I received huge money from oil palm company for DAD roles, and even all of the DAD board members get more than 30 million rupiahs for each oil palm development agenda in Sintang.” Not only is DAD the biggest supporter of the development agenda in Sintang, but DAD also makes room for the elites to use the organisation to collect material things or valuable information about natural resources in Sintang.

In this light, DAD is creating strategic spaces in which it supports the Dayak people and elites of DAD to access natural resources. It also helps the new elites to connect with other elites in the province or even out of the provinces. Considering DAD was seen as a profitable and honourable organisation, several actors started gathering supporters for DAD to reinforce their political, economic, and social-cultural position. DAD is a significant organisation in the Dayaks community structure since it has become the official forum for the customary heads over all Dayaks ethnic groups in Kalimantan. In this sense, the highest cultural power among the Dayak ethnicity was located in the figure of the DAD head that presented a leader of Dayak sub-ethnic groups. The district and sub-district DAD legally officiated every customary head and is considered the customary law enforcer in the area. DAD has strong power at both the upper and local levels. Moreover, the Sintang government issued a law on recognising and protecting indigenous institutions and local people via the regional regulation (*Peraturan Daerah/Perda*) No. 12/2015.

DAD Conflicting for Gathering Followers and Power in *Lahan Basah*
Some figures in Sintang use the strong position of DAD to enable a smooth process for them to obtain a strategic position as a new elite in the community and collect followers and power. An interesting case happened in the Sintang district, which caused the disunity of the DAD organisation in Sintang as they use DAD for their objectives (See Figure 4). The conflict was between two prominent figures in Sintang: Mils Robi, the district head, and Mike Abang, the chairperson of Sintang Regional Legislative Council or *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah* (DPRD). Both Mils Robi and Mike Abang formed two DAD boards. It led to the emergence of two DADs in Sintang simultaneously. Even more, each party claims that its DAD is legitimate and has received a decree from the representative of DAD in the sub-district, DAD province and MADN.

This conflicting situation started when Mike Abang led DAD for two periods (2008-2012 and 2013-2017) and established the organisation’s legality through a

letter from the MADN. The appointment of Abang as the chairman was incomplete since it was not followed by the drafting of the organisation's by-laws (ADRT), and they did not invite the legal customary heads of the sub-districts in Sintang. In opposition to Abang's DAD, Mils Robi established and managed the other DAD by utilising his power as the district head of Sintang and as the advisory chairman of DAD Sintang. Robi understood the legal defect of Abang's DAD. He used the complaints (i.e. less transparent and failed to improve the living quality of Dayak society) coming from the 12 representatives of DAD in the Sintang sub-district. Although Mils Robi did not have a legal letter from the chairman of MADN, he held a preparatory meeting to draft the DAD's by-laws and negotiated to be the new head of DAD Sintang. Further, both DADs claimed their organisation was legitimate and had their supporters.

During the friction between the two DADs, Mike Abang was removed from his strong position as the chairperson of the regional legislative, the head of DAD, and his active involvement in cultural and political activities when he was arrested for corruption. Most people in Sintang saw that this case was related to the political situation in Sintang, which revolved around the tension between Robi and Abang. Since he became a suspect and was imprisoned for almost two years, Abang lost a lot of supporters and strategic positions. Only a few loyal clients supported him until he was released in 2016. Even though he had lost his political power as a legislative council member, he still had his cultural power as the DAD leader to regain his supporters.

Furthermore, having many businesses in Sintang enabled him to rebuild his power through his economic network. He also used the election momentum to regain his political position by offering his experience, information, and knowledge on the political map of Sintang. To restore his political power, he also took advantage of his cultural power in DAD to be present in government meetings and to support the investment of oil palm plantations while ignoring other people's judgements.

On the other hand, Mils Robi appointed himself as the head of DAD Sintang with his followers' support. The friction between Robi and the former governor of West Kalimantan, Kornelius, also prompted his self-appointment. To maintain his power, Robi considered gaining more followers in the east part of Kalimantan by using the cultural dimension of his position by establishing his version of DAD and being more involved in cultural and traditional events in Sintang. This strategy has been designed for his benefit and to create more opportunities for DAD members at the local level.

As the head of the district and head of DAD, Robi gained more followers. To establish a younger generation of supporters, Robi preferred to hold many regional development discussions in universities in Sintang. He also offered information, access to various networks, and material support, such as money or scholarships for the young generation. Many bright students in Sintang received a district scholarship and continued working as civil servants in Sintang. The young people who understood the political situation in Sintang, however, preferred to reject Robi's scholarship offer. The decision to reject Robi's offer was triggered by fear of being controlled and having a social debt to be loyal to Robi.

The condition in Sintang shows how vital DAD is for Dayak society, especially for the new elites. As a cultural organisation, DAD has a significant role in gathering followers and power for a sustainable position as an elite. In Sintang, however, the involvement of DAD elites in the district development agenda was an important strategy to gain access to the local and upper levels of society. The DAD could be used as a political vehicle to collect followers and masses to support their role as a public figure and go-between regarding the development and maintenance process of natural resources in Sintang. The number of people, followers, and support from the Dayak elites could determine one's power in a political struggle.

Adat Book for Increasing the Room for Manoeuvre

The discussion about customary law is related to the existence of DAD as an ethnic group organisation. However, it should be noted that customary law (*adat*) and DAD are different institutions with different roles. The DAD was created as a space to improve the position of the Dayak community at the national level by accommodating their ideas, opinions, and objectives. On the other hand, an *adat* is a form of social control at the local level that guides yet limits people's actions.

However, in the Sintang district, two cultural institutions (Dayak and Malay) have united to record their customary law in a book. Together with every Dayak community and Malay community, the Sintang government initiated the drafting of a customary law book in the Sintang district by collecting all information related to customary law. The idea of recording the customary law in a book was brought up when Mils Robi was the district head (2005-2010)⁴⁰ to collect all local norms and laws. Considering the firm boundary between "we" and "others", Mils tried to blur the ethnicity issue and power domination of specific groups by uniting Dayak *adat* and Malay *adat*. Consequently, many articles of customary law have been mixed

⁴⁰ To collect the *adat* law of Dayaks in Sintang, the local government provided a yearly fund for this agenda.

and need to be clarified, and only people with good local knowledge can separate these articles according to the respective *adat*.

The *adat* book was also distributed to investors in Sintang to become the reference to societal law in the local community. Access to this information helps the companies understand the essential norms and values for the locals and how to manoeuvre from certain disadvantageous situations. For instance, in most daily conflict cases, the company prefers to solve the problem to legal laws compared to *adat*. *Adat* is considered full of ambiguity, opening a negotiation room only for those who understand how to use *adat*. It gives the company less power. Meanwhile, the local community prefers to use *adat*, which gives more flexibility and room for maneuver.

After the *adat* law was recorded in a book, some local leaders in Ketungau Hilir viewed it as an alternative for sharing information and knowledge about customary law. The book of *adat* is considered efficient and functional when customary leaders cannot attend to traditional rituals or help solve societal problems. People can decide how to manage specific issues by referring to the book. On the other hand, the government and the DAD system mix all *adat* laws from every ethnic group in Sintang. As a local leader of Dayak Banjor, Kakek Salibah was worried that no one in the Banjor community would understand the law of Dayak Banjor. He thought that if they only used the government's *adat* book, their *adat* and knowledge might be mixed with the law of other ethnic groups. As an oral society, Dayak Banjor spreads information and knowledge through stories. Although these stories are essential for them, modernity has affected the effectiveness of these stories and undermined their Dayak culture.

The presence of *adat* in the form of a book highlighted the position and power of the local community and DAD as the cultural organisation. *Adat* is considered a process to validate legal rules, as *adat* is a reference to the form of values and norms in society. *Adat* has added value and should be referenced for legal purposes (see Orebech et al., 2005; Ubink, 2008). In this sense, it puts *adat* in a strong position, in accordance with development ideas. *Adat* can be a tool for the local community to be equal in facing the 'outsiders', balancing harmony, and collecting power. On the other hand, the 'outsiders' see *adat* as an open space for negotiation in the local context.

Although, in the Sintang context, after the *adat* was recorded in a book, it became a tool for controlling social dynamics that can be used by various interested parties in the region. To influence and control these processes, these parties often involve 'people who understand the law', who are seen as having the power to reconstruct the ideas of *adat* in a book. The *adat* book then serves as a written basis

for these interested actors to navigate and manoeuvre in different situations. On the other hand, recorded *adat* provides local communities with the formal authority to stay involved in land territory and land development issues, including land development for new commodities. From this understanding, the go-betweens, through their role in the development and maintenance of Kalimantan's new frontiers, view the DAD as a new form of political power representing local interests and see recorded *adat* as an essential structure to be utilised. The imagined land territory of the local community highlighted the structure established by the DAD to be used by the go-betweens. In this sense, *adat* can be considered as a political and cultural weapon, that from time to time becomes hazardous and even violent.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the roles of go-betweens in the social structure of Dayak society before it transformed into the structure that was shaped by the development of oil palm plantations. The Dayak groups have been familiar with the existence of go-betweens in their lives, as they also have a specific term to identify go-betweens and their roles. In the past, go-betweens appeared as a consequence of the existing social structure. Furthermore, the role of go-betweens continued to grow after the penetration of capitalism into the hinterland, informing the rubber economy. The growth of the economic dimension had formed a new go-between dominating that dimension. This economic penetration was followed by the state intervention that forced changes in the Dayak community structure with the new economic structural formulation from the government, which started to shift the roles of former cultural go-betweens.

Historically, since living in the longhouses, the go-betweens had essential roles in everyday Dayak society. The go-betweens were manifesting themselves as *tuai burong*, *tuai rumah*, and *manang*, which dominated the socio-cultural sphere. The presence of *tuai burong*, *tuai rumah*, and *manang* in the longhouse were present as part of the social organisation. Furthermore, in the maintenance of the social organisation, those three go-betweens played essential roles in controlling, mediating, and facilitating the cohesion in the community and the well-being inside the longhouse, among the longhouse community, and between the human and spiritual world to reach a state of harmony.

However, owing to the changing conditions in Kalimantan, mainly triggered by capitalist penetration, a space has been formed for new go-betweens in this setting under the name of *tokey*. The presence of *tokey* leads to the formation of

new socio-economic structures that includes traders (*tokeys*), a wealthy group of families with different structural and cultural positions, and another group of families with insufficient land who worked as rubber tappers (*penoreh*). Under this new structure, *tokeys* were starting to become important go-betweens in the economic dimension.

Furthermore, in the New Order, the social-political conditions also manifested themselves in transferring power from the existence of go-betweens in the community to new 'state-formed' go-betweens. The dominating power of the military eliminated the space for local bosses (Sidel, 2005), which were often supported by the local '*jagos*' to ensure the economic transformation outside Java. The presence of this kind of go-betweens was related to the agenda of the Indonesian government to provide investors with the privilege of controlling natural resources and tax reductions.

After the fall of Suharto, the dynamic situation in Indonesia emphasised decentralisation, freedom, and democratisation and paved the way for establishing ethnic group organisations. Supported by the implementation of regional autonomy, ethnic group organisations grew and developed along with democratisation in Indonesia. It has also led to the strengthening of ethnic identities in national forums.

In the context of Kalimantan, some actors have also used the momentum of decentralisation to show that customary law (*adat*) is very important for ethnic groups in their daily lives. In the political dimension, the recognition of *adat* has also been transformed into an essential foundation for forming ethnic group-based organisations (such as Dayak with DAD). In addition, *adat* is also considered a legitimate law to be used as a reference in resolving various societal problems. These two roles of *adat* in the post-decentralisation era have become new strengths for local communities, especially Dayak communities, in accessing new *lahan basah*. In addition, *adat*, both as an organisation and as a legitimate local law, helps many actors, including those from Dayak backgrounds, to gather new power to be involved in accessing, controlling and creating space to manoeuvre in this new *lahan basah*. On the other hand, *adat* as a new force has increased competition among many actors, even in national forums, to make it a space to compete in the *lahan basah*.

Further to the Sintang context, the extreme power of DAD, the ethnic Dayak organisation in Kalimantan, in particular, has transformed an egalitarian society into a stratified one through the presence of new Dayak elites. DAD is also used as a go-between by some elites to increase their power and control over the situation at the new frontier, especially in the political and bureaucratic dimensions.

Active involvement in DAD, these new go-betweens are providing more access to powerful Dayak elite networks and garnering followers for these new Dayak go-betweens. The power of DAD in Sintang was further strengthened by incorporating different forms of *adat* into an *adat* book under the name of Dayak *adat* book. This legalisation of *adat* rules strengthened the position of the Dayak people in Sintang, as well as in Kalimantan at large, as the dominant ethnic group. The reshuffling of social structures and the emergence of DAD restricts and excludes the involvement of other ethnic groups in the new frontier conditions.

In this light, the rise of the Dayak community in political and bureaucratic dimensions has, in part, been triggered by the emergence of the DAD, which took advantage of the momentum when Suharto's regime ended and the memory of the conflict between the Madurese and Dayak communities in 1996-1997 was still fresh. The rise of the Dayak community also improved the capacity of the Dayak people to access resources. It triggered fierce competition and contestation amongst actors in Sintang, especially the go-betweens. As a result, the characteristics of go-betweens now differ from those of the past. It is necessary to thoroughly discuss the characteristics of go-betweens by locating those involved in developing and managing oil palm plantations in Sintang in the following chapter. By focusing on the characteristics that help people become successful go-betweens on the new frontier, the question to be addressed is what kind of individual characteristics go-betweens have?

Chapter 3

Locating the Characteristics of Go-Betweens

One evening, I received an SMS from Hendrik, a member of FAMKI, a civil society organisation in the Sintang district that struggles against oil palm plantation development. In his message, he wrote: “there is someone who wants to meet you. This guy lives in the area around the oil palm plantations in Ketungau Hilir.” I replied and agreed to meet with the person that night. Hendri had long intended to connect me with his friend from Ketungau Hilir. That night I waited at Hendrik’s house for almost an hour before he finally arrived. He apologised for being late. He wore semi-formal clothes and carried a small shoulder bag. His hair was cut short, and he spoke politely in formal Indonesian. However, then his question shocked me. He said, “what will you give me and our village if I help you and provide you with the information that you need?” From his unsmiling face, I knew he was serious. I was taken aback by his straightforward reciprocity-demanding question in our very first meeting.

The story above shows the existence of specific actors in a new-frontier situation competing for access to money or other resources. In the new-frontier situation, information and local knowledge are considered valuable. Sintang is a typical example of a new frontier area due to its rich natural resources, including forests, gold mining, timber, and oil palm, that attract various actors who try to gain access to the resources for their benefit. I have divided this chapter into three sections in order to grasp the complex phenomenon of go-betweens in the context of oil palm at Sintang District.

The first part of this chapter looks at go-betweens through an actor-oriented approach. The discussion begins by exploring studies of go-betweens which focus on their individual characteristics. Some studies (see Scott, 1972; Sidel, 1999; Jackson, 2003; Calvo & Murillo, 2004; Hilgers, 2012; Szwarcberg, 2012, Stokes, Dunning & Nazareno, 2013; Larreguy, Marshall & Querubin, 2016) have investigated the past presence of go-betweens in various settings, where their individual characteristics became vital elements fuelling their presence. This theorisation

helps to identify the role of go-betweens in Sintang and their individual characteristics.

In the second section, I engage different types of go-betweens on multiple levels, from the village to the district, and map their engagement in oil palm activities. The long and intense process of oil palm development creates space for the go-betweens to be involved. By focusing on the type of go-between, the second section attempts to provide insights into the roles of go-betweens with the aim of contributing to the general understanding of go-betweens with new perspectives drawn from the empirical research. Some roles are considered as new forms triggered by oil palm plantation development, while others exist as roles of go-between that shift from the previous structural conditions.

The third section focuses on understanding the different qualities of go-betweens in new frontier-driven oil palm chains. Different types of go-betweens in the oil palm chain possess specific individual characteristics such as charisma, smooth talker, risk taker or other culturally specific characteristics. These characteristics are formed by their cultural background and life experience. Looking at some cases of go-betweens in Sintang will help us to understand the significance of these individual characteristics in their go-between practices in a new frontier context. Thus, go-betweens in the new frontier context constitute an obvious and important case to study.

The Go-Between from the Actor-Oriented Approach

The perspective developed in the actor-oriented studies of the Manchester School of Anthropology has paved the way for new perspectives on go-betweens. These studies argue that go-betweens are actors at the interface of different world views and knowledge systems, and their importance lies in their negotiating roles, relationships, and representations (Mosse & Lewis, 2006). These actors manage strong and weak ties using various practices such as negotiations (Granovetter, 1973). The concept of “interface” involves the exchange or strategic adaptations between actors to compromise or reproduce social and institutional boundaries. This is also similar to negotiation concepts, such as the relations between sellers and farmers, donors and recipients, or policymakers and project planners (Mosse & Lewis, 2006).

The actor-oriented approach is a useful starting point for coming to terms with brokerage issues (see Scott, 1972; Sidel, 1999; Jackson, 2003; Calvo & Murillo, 2004; Hilgers, 2012; Szwarcberg, 2012; Stokes, Dunning & Nazareno, 2013;

Larreguy, Marshall & Querubin, 2016). Contrary to the structural-functionalist perspectives, the study of actor-oriented approaches shows that the practices of actors are influenced by the agent's capabilities to be embedded in social, political, or economic dimensions rather than simply following the structure that exists in society (Bierschenk et al., 2002). Jackson (2003) points out that the term broker is used differently in different arenas. In a political context, he noted the usage of terms such as diplomat, mediator, go-between, and negotiator, while in the business scene, it is more common to use the terms agent, promotor, trader, or someone who buys and sells. He concluded that, regardless of the terminology and arena, brokers connect people, networks, or organisations and resources. In some conditions, brokers possibly create something new or add value to something that already exists. As such, brokers and brokerage have been analysed in different ways, for example Larreguy, et al (2016) and Stokes, et al (2013) for brokers in the fields of party politics and elections. Meanwhile, Calvo & Murillo (2004), Hilgers (2012), Sidel (1999), Scott (1972) and Szwarcberg (2012) were studying clientelism, machine politics, and patronage. On the other hand, Scott (1972), Stokes (1995) and Szwarcberg (2012) use the terms brokers, patrons, and intermediaries interchangeably. In the following section, I explore the position of go-betweens based on the insights that have been developed by studies on go-betweens under the terminology of brokers, middlemen, and local strongmen. Those terms have been developed by different disciplines, using different perspectives to understand the intermediary actors. I begin with the concept of broker.

Brokers

Settings of rapid transition, “where state planning attempts to direct the course of change but does so in a way that foregrounds the influences of the market, have laid the grounds for a re-emergence of brokerage” (James, 2011, p. 318). However, the ways in which access to natural resources and control over natural resources is transported and translated across the boundaries of different worlds have not been explored much. We need to understand how natural resources are made in specific places and how transactions occur between places. Sverrisson (2001) argues that natural resource brokers can be understood as persons or organizations that facilitate the creation, sharing, and use of resources. The resource broker can link know-how, know-why, and know-who; the resource broker thus works in the public domain as much as in the private domain (Meyer, 2011). In this respect, resource brokering tends to happen in particular locations: in spaces that privilege the brokering of access and control over natural resources or across boundaries. It also requires brokers to be able to link practices by facilitating transactions

between them and their clients. Resource brokers are said to act in three different manners: as managers, linkage agents (between producers and users of resources), and capacity builders. In doing so, they are involved in a broad range of activities, such as articulation, communication, identification, mediation, and education.

According to Johri (2008) and Wenger (1998), brokers try to overcome the overlapping spaces between different worlds. The activities of resource brokers are often not recognized and take place beyond visible interactions and practices. Nevertheless, brokers often try to create their work and roles as visible and valuable as possible to others in society. As a broker, it is necessary to produce and facilitate movements and participate in a movement. Therefore, brokers move back and forward between different spaces. Nevertheless, the transfer of resources does not only take place in one direction, but that brokers engage in continuous exchange cycles. It is common to argue that brokers are standing or practising in-between worlds.

Brokers, according to Stovel and Shaw (2002, p. 141), are actors who “trade on gaps in social structure.” Brokerage, in general, is defined as “the process of connecting actors in systems of social, economic, or political relations in order to facilitate access to valued resources, with specific characteristics (a) the brokers bridge a gap in social structures and (b) they help goods, information, opportunities, or knowledge to flow across that gap.” In this sense, the actions produced by these brokers are based on their role in connecting parties or actors through personalized or group interactions to achieve particular benefits, such as access to and control over resources. The most important attribute brokers must have include a willingness to manipulate relations, a central strategic location, and ample time to service relations and power (Boissevain, 1974, p. 158). Thus, brokers need to know the social, economic and political structures in which they operate, understand the pattern of their network, and know how to use their network to offer services to their clients. Being a broker also forces them to know the local and global situation that affects negotiation and mediation processes. As such, to use Eric Wolf’s phrase they are ‘connecting the local system to the larger whole’ (1956, p. 1075).

For a further conceptualisation of go-betweens in new frontier situations, I want to draw attention to studies that focus on two types of brokers: *development brokers* and *cultural brokers*. These two types of brokers have strong roles in rapidly transforming areas, such as Kalimantan, which have frontier-like qualities. In the socio-environmental transformation, for instance, the process of translation involves not only the presence of development brokers, but also cultural brokers who are important in bridging different interests.

A study on development brokers by Bierschenk et al. (2002) has been influential in understanding the intermediate actors. Bierschenk et al. (2002) draw attention to the actors' concepts, practices, and strategies and the constraints of national and international political-economic contexts. They perceive development as a process involving interactions between actors with different statuses, with varying resources and goals, "for whom development constitutes a resource, a profession, a market, a stake or a strategy" (Mosse & Lewis, 2006, p. 1). Yet, it is people in the position of brokers who assume importance and capture significant resources in the mediation of development activities (*ibid*, 2002). Bierschenk et al. (2002) examine the role of development brokers by underlining the social spaces between aid funders and recipients. They argue that "development brokers have been far from being passive operators of logics of dependence, development brokers are the key actors in the irresistible hunt for projects carried out in and around African villages" (Bierschenk et al., 2002, p. 12). In this light, these authors try to go beyond the normative presentations of such people, which is common in development discourses (Mosse & Lewis, 2006).

Development brokers can act as individuals or in groups. Individual development brokers mainly possess individual capital, such as experiences, knowledge, or a strategic position that supports their role. On the other hand, development brokers in a group mainly depart from the same interests, but most of the initiatives come from a particular person within the group. In the form of a group, the broker appears through village associations, cooperatives, religious groups, or migrant organisations. Meanwhile, in individual form, the broker is necessarily an actor with strong characteristics who can be a mediator or negotiator, such as a local public service holder, a regional intellectual, a regional politician, a customary leader, or a village leader. Further, this approach places attention to 'translational processes that shape the political economy of development and the strategic position it affords to development brokers' (Hönke & Müller, 2018, p. 335).

The studies of development brokers are part of a French theoretical tradition and are influenced by the Manchester school, even though they are linked to Marxist structuralism and popularism (see Olivier de Sardan [2004] cited in Mosse & Lewis, 2006, p. 10). These studies' collaborative and comparative work suggest an 'interface' (*ibid.*) between a more macro-level analysis and local knowledge systems, as the modern state influences local power.

Clifford Geertz (1960) introduced the concept of 'cultural broker' by stressing the symbolic dimension of brokerage. Cultural brokers "may span a gap between highly cohesive groups, whereas market makers connect actors who are insulated from their structural equivalents" (Stovel & Shaw, 2012, p. 144). In these studies,

the positions of cultural brokers are considered because of their capacity to manage the meaning of global culture and modify it to the local context. Feldman-Bianco (2000) showed that female cultural brokers translate cultural codes using transnational domestic structures and kinship networks. From this point of view, cultural brokers can be considered as individual actors with a good network and knowledge about the situation. Meanwhile, Geertz uses the *Kiai* (Muslim leader) as an example of a cultural broker. *Kiai* have charisma and the ability to control the religion's members or *umat*. When perceived as a cultural broker, *Kiai* can be considered a connector between local and national levels of social-cultural action and fulfils an important role in the nation-building process in Indonesia.

Another study that focuses on cultural brokers is by Probojo (2010), who looks at the function and contributions of cultural brokers in the development process during the New Order era in Tidore, Maluku, Indonesia. He argues that two main actors act as cultural brokers using the local context and ideas about regional autonomy: traditional elites and civil servants. Traditional elites integrated the concept of modernisation from the New Order era into local traditions by using local rituals to channel information about the state's development programs to the local community. The traditional elites became the negotiators and modifiers of two interests (local and state) in implementing development programs (Probojo, 2010, p. 107). On the other hand, civil servants have the same capability as traditional elites by reconstructing modernisation concepts regarding local culture and identity.

From the discussion above, it may be inferred that the role of brokers is important because they have the power to enforce the meaning and interpretation of commodities in a specific context. In a situation where the state is weak or absent, brokers play dual roles as regulators and rent-seekers. Under some conditions, they might even be able to monopolise, reconstruct or control a situation.

Middlemen

Studies on middlemen show different insights than the studies on brokers. Middlemen can be found in political, economic, social, and development transactions. They emerge in imperfect markets, which led to the presence of economic gangsters with close connections to political elites (Sud, 2014). A middleman bridges the communication gap between larger and smaller structures. In practice, middlemen generally start as messengers and end up, in some instances, as leaders who direct or control the process of integrating different structures. In this light, a middleman has the potential to demonstrate that the process is a non-zero-sum game or, in other words, is beneficial to both structures (Sud, 2014).

Meanwhile, Bailey (1969) used the term middlemen to refer to the mediator who communicates with different actors to resolve a problem.

Several studies on middlemen have focused on the impact of their existence inside the society from a socio-economic perspective (Rodman, 1977; Russell, 1987; Rust & Hall, 2003; Sidel, 2012). In some of these studies, middlemen are imagined as having a positive impact on smallholder farming communities by providing them better access to goods, investments, or natural resources. Middlemen are present and able to operate when there is a lack of access to information, an abundance of natural resources, or when there are fragmented businesses inside society, for example, in the migration sector (see Godfrey 1992, Spaan 1994, Atsushi 2010, Sheth 2014), or in the production of cash crops such as rubber, rattan, and palm oil (see Dove 1994, Blecher et al., 2004, Fingleton 2004, Gonner 2002, Keys & Chowdhury, 2006).

Bonacich (1973) argues that there are two types of middlemen: those who are in groups and those who are minorities. Dove (1996) also found the same pattern but used different terms: big players and small players. These two types of middlemen are distinguished on the basis of the arena or the game that they play. Chinese and Indians in Southeast Asia or Jews in America primarily dominate as small players or middlemen minorities. They play a significant role in trade and economic sectors, such as family businesses or stores (see Bonacich, 1973; Obidzinski, 2003). Those two sectors are important to middlemen minorities within these areas as they occupy a position as an outsider and need to create their own spaces for trade and employment.

In contrast, middlemen groups use their networks to fill the gaps between the elites and commons. To create and preserve their position, they act in a “clannish, alien, and unassimilable” manner (Bonacich, 1973, p. 521). Bonacich (*ibid.*) shows that middlemen profit from smallholders and benefit from the relationship by creating dependency amongst other actors, such as government officials and business people, and using their network to monopolize information or materials of interest.

A recent study by Potter (2011) shows, in the case of agrarian transformation in Kalimantan, that smallholders tried to reduce the power of middlemen by establishing direct relations with natural resources, while Fingleton argued that the monopoly established by middlemen could not only be understood by direct relations (Fingleton, 1997) because the process of emergence of middlemen has rarely been observed in this society. The case of middlemen in Indonesia shows that their acts link people in the economic arena and also relate to the political arena (see Rodman, 1977; Kahin, 1982; Spaan, 1994; Leggett, 2013).

Local Strongmen

The discussion of local strongmen in Africa, Asia, and Latin America over the past decades has narrowed down to that by Joel Migdal (1988), who argues that it is the weakness of the state or ‘weblike’ structure of the state that creates the conditions for an individual to emerge, survive, and succeed as a local strongman. In contrast to Migdal, Sidel (1999) suggests looking more clearly at the opportunities and constraints for the accumulation and monopolization of local economic and political power facilitated by the macro and micro structures of the state. Using this perspective helps to explain when and where local strongmen emerge and establish, but also the various forms that local strongmen’s rule assumes in different institutional contexts. To better understand local strongmen, it is necessary to look at the state in which they are embedded and the constraints to their rule. In this light, Sidel suggests understanding the ‘local strongmen’ as extensions of states rather than representatives of societies and also considers the forms of resistance to the strongmen who rule from within the societies in which they are found.

The emergence of ‘local strongmen’ in Indonesia is driven by the organisation of state power at the local level and monopolisation of power. Similar societal structures are also evident in the Philippines and Thailand (Sidel, 1999, p. 15). In contrast to other go-between actors as outlined above, local strongmen are characterized by their (potential) usage of violence to control a situation. Bakker’s study in East Kalimantan suggests that local strongmen are non-government actors known as “thugs” or “gangsters” (Bakker, 2015, p. 3). The boundary between paramilitaries and local strongmen is somewhat ambiguous, and local strongmen often resort to violence and illegal and criminal activities against local society. The power possessed by local strongmen leads to terror and fear because they have the potential to use violence against other parties or patrons. In this light, violent activities are also used to gain benefits from a situation or, on a larger scale, to control society.

Although local strongmen are active in the relationship, they need to build a connection with a patron to strengthen their position in society, with their interaction often based on loyalty. In many cases, local strongmen work with local leaders to support and be involved in development programs using violence. As argued by Bakker, the violent performance by local strongmen to civil society has three practical effects: “(i) This appropriation has had the strategic effect of checking power exercised in the name of the state; (ii) the rise of local regional strongmen and civil society makes visible the increased importance of local affairs that decentralization has fostered, and illustrates ongoing regional distrust in the central government; (iii) the use of violence remains a practical and highly effective tool

for furthering private interests” (Bakker, 2015, p. 13). The practical effects are still functioning and established nowadays, for example, in several places in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand (see Honna, 2006; Hadiz, 2010; Nordholt, 2015; McCoy, 2017; and Bland, 2019).

In general, the function of local strongmen is related to the prevailing political and economic conditions. Shatkin (2004) notes that changing conditions, especially economic globalization, have given new challenges to local leaders or local strongmen. Local leaders and strongmen have challenged the effects of economic globalization. The model of this local leadership has particularly been much studied in Thailand and the Philippines. These two countries have encountered democracy and rapid integration into a global economy (see Ockey, 1992; Sidel, 1999).

Different Roles of Go-Betweens in Oil Palm Development and Maintenance in Sintang

Some studies that are focused on access to natural resources and their relation to human resources highlight the role of go-betweens under different concepts, such as middlemen, brokers, or intermediaries in the interstitial space (see Scott, 1972; Bonacich, 1973; Spaan, 1994; Dove, 1994; Sud, 2014) on new resource frontiers. Jackson (2003) argued that the terms for go-betweens (such as middlemen, brokers, and intermediaries) have been used differently in different arenas. The term ‘go-between’ instead of intermediary, broker, local strongman, local boss, or gatekeeper then is fit to explain these different actors to cover different situations in different time periods.

The long and intense process of palm oil activities blurred the line between formal and informal processes, which created more complexity to the situation on new resource frontiers. During the development stage, for example, uncertain and unclear regulations and processes were often found and occurred. In this situation, trust between actors was low. This enabled specific actors, such as ‘go-betweens’, to significantly influence the translation process. This process often used different attributes, such as economic, political, and even sociocultural, to smoothen the negotiation process, giving more manoeuvring room for go-betweens. In this new situation at new frontiers, go-betweens use multiple and often ambiguous relations to establish their position and increase their power; hence, they have often become the people who establish the rules (Sud, 2014, p. 609).

The involvement of different actors and institutions and the application of different norms and values in the oil palm development and maintenance process

create room for go-betweens to play and manoeuvre. Since the beginning of a land transformation into oil palm plantations, the go-between's roles in the process of oil palm development are fulfilled by different types of go-betweens with specific roles and practices at each stage that are interconnected with the interests and actions of various other actors.

In the previous chapters, I have described the situation in Sintang after the implementation of regional autonomy and the major land transformation into oil palm that has provided people with new opportunities to play their roles. As a result, from the ethnographic research I did in Sintang, I identified several roles of go-betweens in developing and maintaining oil palm plantations in the Sintang district. To understand the different actions and practices of go-betweens, I will describe these roles in the following sub-sections.

Information Provider

A go-between is an information provider. An information provider becomes the source of information and also plays a role in transferring valuable information to the party or people who need the information (Obenaus, 1995, p. 250). Mosse and Lewis (2006) showed that the process of translation in dealing with people and its relation to the information is crucial to smoothen the development process. In this sense, information can be viewed as a valuable instrument or capital that can be used in a deal or negotiation with people or different actors interested in natural resources management.

In the case of Sintang, information providers take advantage of the lack of formal procedures and understanding of contextual (local) situations. Botong, for example, told me the following:

The information providers have a role in offering valuable information to their clients related to procedural rules, potential resources and areas and providing a strategy to manoeuvre against laws and regulations. The information, to some degree, is common and available. However, to some extent, the access and mechanism to execute the information is confidential and is only possessed by the regional government. (Botong, 45 years old, former Sintang legislator)

From the explanation of Botong, it takes skills and expertise to retrieve and manage such information. For example, many information providers provide their clients with good investment maps, information to change land status or scientific results to support their clients' development ideas in the form of an environmental impact

assessment or *analisis dampak lingkungan* (AMDAL) document. These valuable maps are often used as a tool to invite investors to the area directly.

To protect their role in the palm oil plantation business, information providers often monopolise and control the spread of information. All the information on new frontiers is valuable and profitable for the information providers and various actors. It makes the information providers move carefully and calculatingly while transferring information to their clients. Often, only specific information related to the client's needs will be shared while other information will be kept perfectly safe by them.

In exchange for information, these actors will earn benefits. Aris explains this in the following manner, "these can be material benefits such as money, a car, a house, a tourism package, a profitable oil palm plot or *kapling* to reach a better economic position" (Aris, 42 years old, head of smallholder plantation section at plantation service). Apart from these material benefits, they can also exchange information for non-material benefits such as strategic networking to gain more substantial political power.

Information providers typically work independently which enables them to decide who are the best and most profitable clients. However, to provide a complete service (not only sharing information but also following the entire development process into oil palm plantations), they work systematically with people in the same sphere with the same objectives. Through this kind of system, they have more room to manoeuvre, are directly interconnected with other actors and easily access new clients and projects or complete their tasks. Apart from relying on their reputation, information providers use their attributes and positions, such as head of the village or civil servant or head of a government office, to guarantee their services.

Information that is classified to some extent puts information providers at high risk. Any leak of confidential information could impact their status in social life. In other words, they stand between informal and formal, or "legal" and "illegal".

Permit Suppliers

Permit suppliers take advantage of rigid, unclear, complex, and intense bureaucratic procedures to offer services. Most of their clients come from the business sector, which applies a different system than state bureaucracies. These system differences provide room for permit suppliers to handle permit issues. As explained by Edo,

Not only in Sintang but throughout West Kalimantan, everything has to be paid for. New investors, for example, they have to come and approach a go-between to make a deal to get a legal permit for investment. At the end of each the new investor has to give an envelope containing a lot of money. If this is done, the permit process can be smooth and fast. (Edo, 30 years old, staff at Plantation services).

In the case of oil palm, the role of permit suppliers is to provide legal permits for oil palm development in a short time. Besides companies, the permit suppliers also have individual clients who monopolise many resources (oil palm plots, rubber plots, lands, or property), but who have limited knowledge and information about legal permits. This type of client asks for permit suppliers' assistance to legalise their assets with official documents such as land titles.

In practice, the permit suppliers follow government procedures, but they conduct their work informally or 'under the table' to make the process faster and more profitable. To deal with the rigid legal procedures, permit suppliers must be good at lobbying, flexible, have extensive knowledge of (state and regional) laws and regulations, and have access to the right networks. Moreover, to support their role, they need to deal with powerful actors in oil palm development (such as district heads or other actors involved in permit procedures) to streamline the legal process. This express and safe procedure of gaining a permit costs the clients expensive fees as a payment to permit suppliers and the circle of networks. In this sense, the permit procedure flow often limits access to the system for ordinary people or other parties. Only people in the state system or the inner circle of important figures have the potential to become permit suppliers and guarantee the success of their job.

Land Suppliers

Many studies that discuss large-scale land acquisition have pointed to land grabbing in Southeast Asia (see De Koninck et al., 2011; Hall, 2003; 2004, 2011; Hall et al., 2011), while a few publications focus on land brokers (see Sud, 2014; Savitri, 2015). Land deals involve a long, complex, and tricky process, which can take months or even years to complete. Sud (2014), in her study in India, nicely captured several categories of land middlemen who have specific roles in land deal processes, including providing the land for the clients. In Sintang, people associate land suppliers with *mafia lahan* and *calo lahan*. These two terms have a more limited definition than Sud's broad categorisation. They only reflect the geographical and economic scale of offering their role.

In this discussion, I use the term 'land supplier' to indicate the presence and similarity of the roles of the two actors in the context of the new frontier in Sintang. Land suppliers have a specific role in collecting the number of land plots from the local community (private and communal land) that are potentially attractive for investment, such as mining, timber, or oil palm. Specifically, in the oil palm context, the role of land suppliers is to make it more convenient for their clients by providing the desired amount of land in a short period to support their palm oil business.

Land suppliers operate in diverse ways. Powerful land suppliers (locally known as *mafia lahan*) often directly acquire land at a low price and then sell it to interested parties at a higher price. This strategy is made possible partly due to the lack of the district government's power to control land prices. Consequently, land suppliers can set the margin price and increase the market price. Land suppliers in a specific area work on demand; they only acquire land in the targeted areas without purchasing it. Land compensation is paid by a third party. With this *modus operandi*, land suppliers must have detailed information about the land, the location, its boundaries and sometimes the history (ownership and land processing) to add more value to the land. This second method is often applied in a small-scale operation that community members conduct. Armed with information and such characteristics, this land supplier can work efficiently and effectively when they reach out to landowners and gain their trust. In return, they will receive monetary and non-monetary payments from the third party, such as an oil palm plot, money, or small projects.

Fruit Collector: Formal and Informal

The palm oil system has a standard operating procedure to collect the fruit from plantation plots and deliver them to a palm oil mill. For instance, the nucleus plots (*kebun inti*) are the company's responsibility, which include every aspect of the maintenance process (i.e. harvest, fertilisation, and fruit transport). The same system is also applicable for both nucleus and plasma plots (farmer plots) under the partnership or *kemitraan* scheme in which all developmental and maintenance processes are considered part of the plantation work. In all schemes, however, it is necessary to establish a village unit cooperative or *koperasi unit desa* (KUD) as the legal intermediary between plasma farmers and palm oil companies (related to credit and payment). Nevertheless, under the PIR-Trans, KKPA, or PBS scheme, plasma farmers are still responsible for taking care of their plasma and joining the KUD to send their harvested fruits to palm oil mills.

In this sense, the KUD can be considered the formal fruit collector with a legal contract with the palm oil mill to supply and sell plasma fruits directly to the company. Based on the legal contract, all plasma farmers are members of the KUD and are responsible for selling their plasma fruits to the company mill. The KUD is legalised in government regulations as the company partner in the palm oil system (Gillespie, 2016, p. 317), and accordingly has a role in organizing the plasma system, for example, farmer data collection, credit payment, infrastructure maintenance organisation, subsidised fertiliser supply to improve productivity, fruit payment, and information sharing medium (i.e. prices of CPO or new regulations). The establishment of KUD in the palm oil sector aims to create independent plasma farmers and reduce the economic monopoly of individual actors. Although formal fruit collectors work as a group, some members have a more dominant role in directing the visions of the KUD.

Additionally, some individual actors work independently as fruit collectors. In Sintang, they are known as *tengkulak buah* or *tokey buah*. Independent fruit collectors have several roles, for instance, to supply oil palm fruit to company mills, facilitate independent farmers in fruit sales, and accommodate rejected (i.e. two-day old harvest, small-sized fruit) fresh fruit from plasma plots. It is a common practice for independent traders to proactively ask independent farmers to sell their oil palm fruit through them, locally known as *jemput bola* (chasing and controlling the ball). Another common practice is to have an informal contract with the KUD or truck drivers to sell rejected fruit to them at a lower price than the market price due to the involved risks. Their activities of buying plasma fruit or smallholder fruit, are often considered illegal. Thus, independent traders must have a legal contract, which is considered a legal procedure, to supply fruits to palm oil mills.

The presence of independent traders in Kalimantan is not new. In previous economic systems (rubber and log), they were the middlemen who sold goods and bought rubber, logs, or other forest commodities. These actors used debt and personal relationships (in terms of rights and obligations) to monopolise the trade (Penot, 2004; Heidhues, 2003). When palm oil entered Sintang (especially In Ketungau Hilir), the plantation system required the management of palm oil production. It enabled, the emergence of go-betweens. In this new system, local actors only have limited room to participate in the palm oil system and were forced to end their businesses. The surviving actors tried to merge their business with the palm oil economy by playing a role, for example, as illegal fruit collectors. This was conducted by combining the norms and values of patron-client relations (trust, debt, and personal relationships) with palm oil mechanisms (i.e. by having a legal contract with the company to sell and supply oil palm fruits to palm oil mills).



Picture 3. Collecting Oil Palm Fruits

Individual collectors directly collect oil palm fruit (*jempur bola*) from farmers around Ketungau Hilir. Although the fruit is bought at a lower price than the KUD, many oil palm farmers benefit from being able to earn the money directly.

Source: author collection

In sum, the legal and illegal fruit collectors have a role in supporting the operation of the palm oil system by supplying oil palm fruits to the industry. Since fruit collectors have a strong position, their roles often change, enabling them to participate in other dimensions, such as politics.

Service Providers: Transportation, Labour, and Construction (Material)

Previous studies (Li, 2015, 2017; Lindquist, 2017; Sud, 2014; Mosse & Lewis, 2006; Bierschenk et al., 2002) have discussed service providers in separate terms and roles. For instance, labour brokers, who showed demand for labour, had been noted to exist since the colonial era to support the plantation system. The main argument explaining the emergence of labour brokers is based on the lack of human labour, economic background (triggered by a crisis or economic problem, or global economic changes), the possibility of migration, and the easiness of attracting labourers with a background in plantations from outside the plantation (see Li, 2015, 2017; Lindquist, 2017). However, it is difficult to find a study that looks into the development go-between or transportation go-between, and only a few discussions focused on these actors (see Sud, 2014; Mosse & Lewis, 2006; Bierschenk et al., 2002). In sum, the main argument of why the actors emerged in this specific domain was the lack of infrastructure in oil palm plantation areas, and this gap

had to be filled. Based on this argument and the similarity of the offers, services, and reasons to fill the actors' gap (i.e. to gain profit), I categorise them into one general term, i.e. service provider.

Service providers in the palm oil sector have a limited domain. For example, demand for labour and transportation only increases during the initial phase (development) or after the oil palm becomes productive (maintenance). Meanwhile, material providers only actively participate in the development process rather than in other phases. Unlike other go-betweens, service providers work in a specific operating system, i.e. with a proprietor who does the important work (lobbying, providing labour and material, providing monetary capital and network) and obtains a legal contract to provide the service. A successful service provider will have many contracts that will protect their existence. On the other hand, a small service provider only works for specific jobs and is less competitive. In this sense, by providing service to support a new palm oil economy, the service provider will continue to exist for a long time.

Beking

Everyday life in Sintang is complex and involves many ambiguities. There are many ongoing powerplays and actors who operates outside of the law. Some people seek safety through the use of a 'protector'. This protective role is manifested in the term of *beking*. This term was mainly used during the Suharto regime to refer to the security provided by a higher patron, either the army or police (see Bakker, 2017; Aspinall & Van Klinken, 2011). Since implementing FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), *beking* expanded to the plantation business in Indonesia. Looking at the characteristics of a *beking*, it is very closely related to the concept of Javanese leadership shown by a father (*bapak*) as the home protector from the world outside and a reliable patron who should be honoured and followed, whose whim and wish is a command, and who cares for his subjects (see Mulder, 1994, p. 60-62). Unfortunately, the *beking* system is embedded in the state structure. It creates a predatory network, where people use the exact mechanism of *beking* to survive by shifting the power and applying fluid coalitions (see Hadiz, 2004, 2007).

The strong influence of Javanese leadership in the state structure allowed and influenced the regional government to adopt the idea of *beking*. In the new frontier context, actors ensure their opportunity to establish their position and investments by having a *beking*. In this situation, the go-betweens fulfilled and extended their role as a *beking* in different dimensions, such as politics, cultural affairs, force power (military), and economics.

Moreover, the go-betweens were involved both formally and informally. In the case of palm oil, *beking* actors perform more than just for the formal processes to protect their clients and to enable formal procedures or, in some cases, to guard the investments. Other clients would be convinced by their ability to complete the formal processes. In this case, the idea of *beking* that appeared in palm oil activities could be understood as a part of patronage even in the early stages (Varkkey, 2013) that tied the actors to trust, debt, and imbalanced power.

The basic services offered through *beking* in the new frontier context are: 1) securing and protecting investments, 2) influencing the directions and aims of development, and 3) controlling natural resources. In the process of getting access to land and natural resources, powerful figures would be involved. In some conditions, they also played a role as gatekeepers to keep the investment atmosphere ambiguous.

Different dimensions that overlap during the various stages of oil palm have formed different categories of *beking*. In Sintang, several categories of *beking* are based on the instrument used by the *beking*: (1) political *beking* (use of political power), (2) bureaucrat *beking* (having a good position in relation to structural governance), (3) military *beking* (having military background and power), and (4) cultural *beking* (supported by cultural authorities). Each has its dimension as their main field to offer to their clients. In most cases, playing a role as a *beking* gives sufficient compensation directly or indirectly and legally or illegally for long-term benefits and social profits.

Go-betweens of Oppositions

Some of the go-betweens in Sintang take on a role in opposition to oil palm development. One factor that has triggered the emergence of the opposition was the cultural-environmental hazards caused by oil palm development. Many local NGOs or civil society organisations (CSOs) were interested in working as a facilitator to protect local communities and their environment by providing valid information on oil palm systems and schemes or providing alternative projects. The NGOs and CSOs focused on the sustainability of palm oil, environmental and societal issues, and as a source of funding. On the other hand, the emergence of international NGOs with a significant concern over sustainability through forest, environment, and social protection also gives a new platform to the opposition of go-betweens.

For example, international NGOs, local NGOs, CSOs, the Norwegian government and the district government initiated the 'Heart Borneo' project⁴¹ to prevent the expansion of oil palm and protect the national park area in Sintang. As an alternative to oil palm expansion, local communities were introduced to REDD+ and REDD++ programmes aimed at reducing carbon use by protecting tropical forests in return for compensation. Unfortunately, these programmes have not been successful. Meanwhile, WWF, as an international NGO, uses different strategies to bring about sustainable oil palm development by collecting independent smallholders and establishing a responsible group that supervises the oil palm process and activities such as preventing land clearance by fire, using certificate seeds, and finding investors who are willing to establish a small factory that can accommodate harvest yields from independent farmers.

However, not all local NGOs and CSOs oppose oil palm development for sustainability per se as some do so to gain personal benefits. To achieve this, they create conflicts (especially land conflicts and land compensation) and support local communities through legal assistance or negotiations with the company. In these negotiations and services, the actor often asks for monetary compensation. In this sense, it is not only NGO and CSO actors that see oil palm development as a new opportunity, but there are also some individual actors who work independently and use violence and friction to collect money from the companies or the district government.

Right-hand Man or *Tangan Kanan*

Unlike the other types of go-betweens in frontier territories, a *tangan kanan* or right-hand man is an actor with specific roles in helping other go-betweens during negotiations or lobbying. Having roles similar to that of the shadow figures, in most conditions, the *tangan kanan* always keeps the balance of trust, honour, and power of their go-betweens. This process is important to create a strong image of their boss and possibly to enable their go-betweens to play a role for extended periods. The characteristics of *tangan kanan* are similar to the idea of a fictitious kin, i.e. re-creating familiar aspects such as a socio-emotional attachment, ongoing belongingness (i.e. sharing resources to provide material support and protection), and entitlement, which involves trust, strength, closeness, and must also persist over time (Nelson, 2013, p. 262).

41 This programme was initiated by the central government and national and international NGOs, while it was funded by the Norwegian government.

In Sintang, every strong go-between (in terms of power) has a *tangan kanan*, who covers them and conducts all activities under the table. Services offered in the grey area between formal and informal practices are closer to illegal activities, such as corruption and law violations. The right-hand men play a crucial role in representing go-betweens to ensure a smooth deal between go-betweens and clients. Right-hand men have a strong tie with go-betweens. For instance, some are related or have a cultural bond as the ‘adopted brothers’ or ‘adopted children’ (*saudara angkat, anak angkat*). The existence of right-hand men is relatively unique because their roles differ from that of other go-betweens who are directly involved in oil palm development and maintenance.

Table 2. Different roles of Go-betweens in oil palm development and maintenance processes

Go-betweens in terms of practices	Who are they	Services	Actions
Information provider	Sub-head of Department and Local Elites Academics	Procedural rules Potential resources Strategy to use and research results	Provides information on free areas using government maps. Creates windows of opportunity, such as for investments Provides academic results as a basis for the development agenda e.g. AMDAL result
Permit supplier	High state officers Family members of the district head The head district supporters	Providing legal permits to access natural resources	Makes the permit negotiation process smooth, quick, and easier
Land supplier	Companies staff Local people/local elites	Collecting land	Provides the required number of land and people who are interested in converting their land into a new type of investments

Go-betweens in terms of practices	Who are they	Services	Actions
Fruit collectors a. Legal fruit collector: KUD b. Illegal fruit collector: tengkulak, trader or tokey	Legal: KUD Illegal: <i>Tokey</i> , trader, or CV	Collecting fruits	Buys and distributes oil palm fruits from local smallholders to larger fruit brokers or directly to fruit factories
Service provider a. Transportation b. Construction c. Labour or Calo tenaga kerja	Local people or transmigrants Local elites and businessmen from outside the area Foremen in oil palm plantations	Providing different types of services to support oil palm activities	Provides transport for oil palm plants, distributes the fruits Transforms land into oil palm plots and constructs roads, plantations, and new settlements. Transfers the ideas of development to the local community through empirical evidence Provides labour to work in oil palm plantations from the local communities or outside the plantation areas
Beking a. Political beking b. Bureaucrat beking c. Military and police beking d. Cultural beking	Members of DPRD Head of District Head of Police and Military Village Head Customary Head Local Strongmen	Security	Protects the investments Builds trust between parties to smooth the process of land clearing

Go-betweens in terms of practices	Who are they	Services	Actions
Opposition go-betweens	Local NGOs International NGOs LBH (<i>Lembaga Bantuan Hukum</i>) CSOs	Creating conflicts and frictions Providing alternatives for developing the areas and people	Helps the mediation process of conflicting parties Protects local communities and the environment via international donors' programmes or state programmes
Right Hand Men or Tangan kanan	Relatives or family members of the go-betweens	Protecting the role of go-betweens and the extension of the go-betweens	Conducts negotiations with the clients of go-betweens and protects the honour and power of the go-betweens

The table above shows that not all go-betweens emerged to support the oil palm system; some became part of the opposition. However, all of them had the opportunity to gain benefits. Different go-betweens came forth during the two phases of oil palm development, although some types had a role in both phases. For example, in the development phase, most go-betweens emerged due to the ambiguous situation, which was caused by overlapping laws and regulations. These go-betweens include the information provider, permit supplier, and land supplier. In addition, they also provide services in both formal and informal activities, which makes the involvement of state officials as the 'legal' go-betweens relatively higher. This is supported by the capacity of state officials to decide the flow and participants of oil palm development in Sintang. To ensure their success when conducting their service, some go-betweens often used their attributes (political, bureaucratic, or cultural) during the translation process.

Meanwhile, different types of go-betweens emerged during the maintenance process, i.e. fruit collectors and *beking*. They successfully integrated into the plantation system by working as the company's partner. During the translation process, however, these go-betweens still applied the economic and sociocultural norms and values accepted in the community such as debt, *bapak* or father, or trust to support their roles. Some go-betweens worked in both phases, such as the opposition go-betweens, service providers, and right-hand men. For example, the opposition go-betweens and right-hand men emerged from the unstable conditions caused by the oil palm system. This instability sometimes leads to conflict,

violence, or social, political and environmental inequality and these actors take advantage of such situations to become the intermediary or sometimes only to earn material benefits. On the other hand, service providers are considered important in running the oil palm business during the development and maintenance phases.

In this light, a go-between must have the ability to live in different places since their work is highly risky and often considered illegal. Go-betweens will establish negotiations to make the transformation process run smoothly and establish the oil palm business; in other words, they will make a good deal for their clients. One of the common practices of go-betweens to achieve this goal is by demanding monetary payment (locally known as *uang pelicin* or bribe). Village community members prefer to call this payment *uang rokok* (literally meaning ‘cigarette money’) or *komisi* (commission). The term *komisi* is also used by the go-betweens for their rewards, not only in the form of money or material things but also in terms of life guarantee (life necessities provided). This term was used in the New Order era and is related to corruption practises (see Antlöv, 1994, p. 90). If the work poses a higher risk or is of a larger scale, they would use different terms, for example, “*apel* Washington (Washington apple)” or “*apel* Malang (Malang apple)” (based on the currency used in the transaction)⁴², and “fee”.

Sometimes, the activity involving go-betweens in some situations is considered ordinary in terms of ‘*hal yang biasa atau lumrah*’ (common thing or familiar). Their activity, however, is always part of common activities related to the formal structure in the context of oil palm life. In this sense, the go-betweens’ activity is placed between the formal and informal structure, which enables the actors to operate under the radar of regulations, laws, and social norms. Different situations and demands during the two stages of oil palm development can produce different types of go-betweens in terms of tasks, clients, and actions. These roles of go-betweens will enable us to understand the go-betweens better through what the practices are on the new frontiers and how they are embedded in a specific structure that leads them to be successful go-betweens. In addition, having a strategic position adds more value to the go-betweens as they gain trust and power and also have more room for manoeuvring. However, the complexity of go-betweens as agents is not yet understood properly, which is why this study critically examines the individual characteristics of go-betweens.

42 In the E-KTP (Electronic Residence Identity) corruption case, which was widely reported in Indonesian media, this term was used.

Intersectionality to Understand Multiple Identities of Go-between

Go-betweens use multiple identities as one of their strategies to be accepted in many relationships and networks. These multiple identities must be considered with the concept of intersectionality, that emerged during the 1980s as an approach rooted in feminist theories of power and the dynamics of difference (Cho et al., 2013, p. 787). The concept of intersectionality was introduced by K.W. Crenshaw (1991), “who rejected the ideas that class, race, and ethnicity are separate essential categories” (in Bastia, 2014, p. 238). This is insightful for an analysis of the multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination of go-betweens. In the practices of go-betweens, there is a process of enacting some exclusion. Moreover, these practices create a specific space and network for go-betweens. There will be a process of initiation to enter the space, which is supported by their individual capabilities and structural position within the community.

According to Davis (2008, p. 68), “intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power”. Intersectionality is mostly used to understand individual experiences, to theorise identity, or as a property of social structure and cultural discourses. Hence the concept of intersectionality shows the interconnections and exposes the complexity of individual categories. Broadly, the idea of intersectionality showed the positioning of individuals in terms of race and gender, which is embedded in social interaction among communities (Block & Corona, 2014, p. 28). The study of Block and Corona in European societies shows that intersectionality stands as a challenge to the multicultural identities in societies that criticise the ideas of diversity and often mindfully reinforce stereotypes within it (Block & Corona, 2014, p. 39).

In this study, I use intersectionality to look at the ideas of multiple and shifting identities used by go-betweens to play their roles. Intersectionality can add a new dimension, triggering the ideas of the actor-oriented approach and stressing agency characteristics. It means that: “intersectionality primarily concerns the way things work rather than who people are” (Chun et al., 2013 in Cho et al., 2013, p. 797). The idea of intersectionality can be used to see how much room for manoeuvre is open for the go-betweens due to the social structure in which a go-between is embedded. Specifically for go-betweens in Indonesia, it is common to have multiple identities to support their role. For instance, the go-betweens will use their identities as a

villager or *orang kampung*, Dayak, a native of Kalimantan, as an insider, as well as their sub-ethnic identity, and as a relative or friend.

Moreover, they can also use the social-political structure embedded in societies to merge within the presence of various actors involved in developing and maintaining the new natural resources of oil palm. Moreover, the shifting identities and the strong structural and cultural discourses of the Dayak nowadays have made it strategic to play a role as a go-between to access natural resources. In this light, the concept of intersectionality is not a new idea in development and gender studies. However, it provides a new concept for understanding the role of actors in complex situations such as new frontiers.

Picturing the Go-betweens

As analysis of different types of go-betweens and their practices on the new frontiers provide a basic understanding of their role in the translation process during the two stages of oil palm development in Sintang. The structure as well as the agency aspect of the go-betweens should be addressed. There is very limited discussion about the individual characteristics of go-betweens, while ideas derived from an actor-oriented approach may become the foundation for understanding the go-betweens more completely. Studies focusing on an actor-oriented approach see the go-betweens (e.g. broker, middleman, intermediary, or gatekeeper) as actors at the interface of different world views and knowledge systems, and their importance lies in their negotiating roles, relationships, and representations (Mosse & Lewis, 2006). These studies also show that the agent's embeddedness influences the practices of actors in different dimensions of their role rather than following the structure that exists in society (Bierschenk et al., 2002).

The dynamics and complex situation on the new frontier in Indonesia has triggered the shift of individual characteristics of go-betweens by having different capabilities or competencies compared to the previous types of go-betweens. In the past, go-betweens only dominated one field (e.g. economic, political, or cultural) with a specific role such as representative, mediator, or resolver. Meanwhile, they operate in two or more dimensions in the new frontier context. Today the boundaries between different domains are fuzzy, and the rules are unclear, which force go-betweens to have dynamic personalities and flexible identities to survive. Working independently, like in the past, cannot be applied in the new frontier context. In more recent times, the actors do not always work individually but also as a group. To support their individual capabilities, the go-betweens are

able to converse in multiple discourses, understand the different terms or physical gestures that different actors use (e.g. business languages, government rules, local community gestures), and also the way they offer their translation services. On the other hand, adopting the characteristics of go-betweens in the past, such as 1) charisma (see Hughes-Freeland, 2007; Anderson, 2006) to help them to gain followers and establish a network; 2) risk-taking (Vogel & Kaghan, 2001) to have access to natural resources; 3) and violence (see Migdal, 1988; Slamet-velsink, 1994) to control and compromise the situation and monopolise the network are characteristics that are still important. However, some of these characteristics are not suitable for the situation on the new frontiers.

In understanding the important current characteristics that support the survival of go-betweens on the new frontiers, I look into the characteristics of go-betweens, the differences between past and current go-betweens, and the type(s) of go-betweens that can adapt and have strategies to tackle different situations in oil palm related activities.

Gender, Age, and Professionalism

The implementation of regional autonomy in Sintang has led to a strong bureaucratic (village to district level), political, and socio-cultural position of the Dayak ethnic group and has given them more room to participate in the competition for natural resources actively. Additionally, most people in Sintang have the ambition to actively engage in oil palm development, such as by establishing an enterprise or playing a go-between role. However, some people, who belong to different ethnic groups have failed to become a go-between as most of the access to oil palm competition is limited to the Dayak people and specifically to males.

The formalized procedures in oil palm development and the formal relationships between the actors have created a more patriarchal interaction in everyday life, which also creates more patriarchal pressure (see Julia & White, 2012; Li, 2015). Also, women's rights as landowners were reduced compared to the previous periods (swidden and rubber cultivation). In that period, women-owned land under their own names; however, now landowners are only limited to the male members of the community⁴³ (Li, 2015, p. 6). Formal land ownership registration is based on the head of the family (*kepala keluarga*). Throughout most of Indonesian society, the husband is considered the head of the family. It can be said that the expan-

43 The Dayak women have access to land rights. For instance, in Dayak Banjar, women inherit land rights from their parents and according to the customary leaders, gender differentiation does not exist in land heritance. This norm is also applied in other Dayak groups, such as Dayak Hibun (see Julia & White, 2012), Dayak Iban and Dayak Embaloh (see King, 1976).

sion of oil palm also affected gender issues in terms of social roles, relationships, and opportunities, and this was aimed at creating a change in the tenure regimes, especially in order to enable land transfers to more local investors (Behrman et al., 2012, p. 51).

Male domination can also be found in different phases of oil palm development, such as the initial process and maintenance process, when the number of men is higher than women (Julia & White, 2012; Li, 2015). It can be said that oil palm is a masculine system, which is characterized by masculine control in oil palm plantations and social norms that create dominant male roles. For go-betweens specifically, it is easy to find men playing a go-between role from the village to the district level. The patriarchal structure applied in the oil palm setting gives more room for male go-betweens to operate. Additionally, the past cultural experience of the Dayak group also gave men more roles than women as go-betweens, such as *tuai rumah*, *temenggung adat*, or *demang*.⁴⁴ This limited women's space, as only men could access the outside world/villages. In this sense, the patriarchal structure of oil palm plantations and cultural conditions have given male go-betweens more value and resources.

The oil palm system generally enables men from various age groups to adopt roles as a go-between. For instance, men born in the 1960s (who are now around 50-60 years old) have more stable careers and occupy strategic positions (in bureaucratic, legislative or independent offices). These strategic positions lead them to play safer roles such as serving as a *beking* or an information provider. However, education level and experiences (in career and life) must also be considered. Meanwhile, people born between the 1970s and 1980s play the roles of middle-range go-betweens, who face higher risks and are required to interact with more diverse actors. They play the role of permit suppliers, land suppliers, fruit collectors, right hand men, or opponents. To start their roles as go-betweens, the men establish their careers in formal institutions. Having diverse experiences, good networks, and positions can further the career of the middle-tier go-betweens.

Female community members only have little space to play a go-between role in this rather patriarchal system of oil palm development. Besides the limited access, the age range for women is also narrowed, which results in more limited access to the go-between competition. Only young female go-betweens (in their 20s to early 40s or women who were born in the 1970s - 1990s) have more space to explore and

44 Women only have a small role as a cultural intermediary, shaman, *dukun bayi* (midwife) or healing shaman. However, women play an important role in almost all rituals (both minor and major) (see Helliwell, 1995, p. 364).

collect valuable information. In this sense, this persona of young go-betweens is an inevitable element to be accepted well in a masculine world. Moreover, starting to engage in oil palm rent-seeking at a young age enables female go-betweens to be economically and socially independent. In this situation, only a few numbers of women can survive and end up as powerful go-betweens in the oil palm chain. The limited involvement of women also occurred in other settings, such as politics (see Aspinall, 2014; Aspinall & As'ad, 2015; Darwin, 2017). Female go-betweens are considered trustworthy and reliable compared to male go-betweens.

Unlike the political situation, female go-betweens in the oil palm setting have to present themselves as the main actors to compete with male go-betweens. This has encouraged them to play a role in the front line to seize individual opportunities. They generally improve their capacity through better education and specific experiences to open more roles in the oil palm setting. In this sense, female go-betweens' capacity in translating and negotiating is apparent. Several individual characteristics are more suitable for female go-betweens to help them to survive in men's world, as explained by a key informant:

*Oil palm is a men's world, different from rubber or swidden agriculture. However, it is necessary for women to play a role in the palm oil production process. I am a fruit broker (**tengkulak**), and I have a contract with three oil palm companies to supply fruits; one in Sintang, and two in Melawi. The most important personality traits that I should have are loyalty, flexibility, and sweet-talking. Flexibility here means to be able to act flexibly during negotiations or interactions with men. For example, I went bankrupt once, but I was able to get a loan from a **tokey** (businessman) in Sintang to start my business again. Also, I have a good relationship with a company manager who helped me cut some slack, and I did not have to pay the money.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in their everyday routine, female go-betweens should have the same sense of humour as their male counterparts, for instance, when it comes to sex jokes.⁴⁶ Also, do not talk too much (avoid gossip), give direct responses, and use the same logic as men. Moreover, even though I am a woman, I'll take the same risks as any man would" (Yuli, a 35-year-old female go-between).*

45 To become a fruit broker or company supplier, it is necessary to have a deposit of around IDR 60,000,000 – 150,000,000 per contract.

46 In a masculine world, sexist attitudes or sexual humor are simply accepted as the norm. This situation was also found in Bell's study (1999) when she worked as a researcher during a negotiation in an organizational ethnography setting.

In this sense, although female go-betweens have a small role in the oil palm system, their specific characteristics, such as loyalty, flexibility, and adaptability (applying male logic and the same level of risk-taking) provide them with room to manoeuvre to obtain better access. To summarise, gender, age, and professionalism form the grounds on which interpersonal negotiations are based.

Presentation and Appearance

The outward appearances of go-betweens also needs to be considered. In some ways, appearance is classified more than just clothing because it considers body features, movements, and positions, as well as visible body modifications and supplements of clothing (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992, p. 14-15). However, the concept of appearance is also lacking in the literature and doesn't take into account people's touch and taste in fashion. To better understand go-betweens' characteristics, I will start with the describable properties of clothing, such as colour, shape, texture, or design. The explanation will be continued by showing the appearance of go-betweens. The presentation and appearance helped me understand that clothes, modifications to the body, and supplements are considered a form of human communication (Doob, 1961).

In their presentation, go-betweens have identical items that can be used to identify them easily. These identical items have specific purposes, such as communication and expectation that can easily impress others in specific social roles. On the new frontiers, clothing is also an important symbol that go-betweens often use to show their presence.

In Sintang, the go-betweens generally have specific types of clothes, which are considered semi-formal clothes: a polo shirt with jeans or cotton trousers. This clothing style is flexible and applicable in different situations and occasions, including meeting with clients from higher or lower class backgrounds. However, go-betweens generally have different symbolic colours that represent their position. As I observed during the oil palm forum in Sintang where almost all go-betweens in the district were present, independent go-betweens prefer to wear a bright-coloured or stripy polo shirt (green, sky-blue, cream, white, red, and yellow) to attract clients and be easily recognised. By contrast, go-betweens who work with the company or the opposition prefer to wear a dark-coloured polo shirt (black, brown, or dark blue), as dark colours, to some extent, do not immediately attract people who want to interact with them.

This choice of outfit colour made by go-betweens in the oil palm plantation forum represents their role in the palm oil chain. For instance, dark colours can be interpreted as more forceful, self-reliant, dynamic, aggressive, and decisive

(Ruetzler et al., 2012). As go-betweens who work with the company or opposition, go-betweens must show their force to control the situation. For instance, a go-between from the company needs to force the local people to hand over their lands during land seeking. Meanwhile, an opposition go-between must show their force when a conflict arises. Therefore, the colours chosen by go-betweens have particular meanings.

Although oil palm is a masculine world, female go-betweens mostly choose feminine clothing rather than trying to adopt men's clothes. The female go-betweens often wear blouses and jeans or cotton blazers, which, to some extent, show their body shape. In informal meetings, jeans and high heels are preferable, while in formal meetings, they choose cotton skirts or trousers and a bag to carry their documents and mobile phones. From the experience in the field, showing their femininity is essential in the masculine world, where women are perceived as weak, needing protection, having little understanding of the business, or being mere nuisances. Meanwhile, these masculine perspectives make male go-betweens unable to see the true capability of female go-betweens and even provide female go-betweens with more room to participate in this kind of work. However, male and female go-betweens in strategic positions will wear particular kinds of clothes to show their power, capacity, and professionalism. In some conditions, gender-affirming clothes are used to show physical distinctions and encourage social positions and capacity. In this case, female and male go-betweens' clothing is not only an individual choice and expression of one's gender, but it is also shaped by the social norms of their social group.

Hairstyle also symbolises different things. For instance, various types of male go-betweens have a specific haircut: straight and short. This haircut model shows strength and masculinity, describing the settings of oil palm development. Meanwhile, female go-betweens have a feminine appearance with long hair. A hairstyle can be seen as a representation of their personal characteristics, including the important distinctions of gender and role in the Dayak society. As Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1992) have mentioned, the shape and volume of hair immediately communicates to the observers the gender of the individual under scrutiny (1992, p. 16).

To complete their appearance and style, male go-betweens often carry a black or brown polo shoulder bag. The bag is small, large enough for one notebook, mobile phone, and wallet. Male go-betweens prefer to bring their documents separately or handheld along with their phone and car or motorcycle keys. This look gives them an air of professionalism and style. On the other hand, female go-betweens wear makeup, some accessories (i.e. necklace, earrings, or watch), and apply perfume to

look fresh and attractive to be accepted in the 'men's world. To make their clients comfortable, some apply perfume before they meet the clients. In this light, the details of appearances and presentation of go-betweens according to their gender may become increasingly complex based on the various backgrounds or life stages and which social system they are participating in. However, as the supporting attribute of their professionalism as go-betweens, clothing helps them to manipulate power and position for their success.

Another crucial item for go-betweens is a mobile phone. Reviews from South Asia (De Silva, 2008) and sub-Saharan Africa (Donner, 2009; Munyua & Mureithi, 2008) identified mobile phones as the key innovative technology in support of livelihoods, with evidence of growing integration into agricultural extension, information provision, and marketing system. In addition, mobile phones are used extensively for advocacy and campaigns on development issues, including oil palm (Hellström, 2010; Kinkade & Verclas, 2008). It should be taken into account that in the case of go-betweens, mobile phones enhance the urban-rural link, which includes labour migration, information flow, and communication services.

In Sintang, active go-betweens use one or two mobile phones.⁴⁷ They use their phones to reduce communication costs efficiently, directly connect with clients or other go-betweens outside their working space, have safe, confidential conversations, and solve poor signal problems.⁴⁸ Moreover, some go-betweens (especially those who work in a group or network) also need to adapt to new ways of communication through mobile applications (i.e. WhatsApp, WhatsApp group, Blackberry Messenger, or Facebook group) to keep them updated about the latest information related to plantation activities. Being connected helps them control the oil palm system by having a reference from different groups.

In this sense, mobile phones are a tool for go-betweens to be engaged in the oil palm world. Moreover, it is necessary to organise personal and industry-based social networks and relationships (Varkkey, 2012, p. 318). Mobile phones often improve the professional and personal relationships of go-betweens and their clients or their allies. The personal relationship is beneficial to go beyond formal arrangements and bring it into more personal and intimate connections. In this sense, the improved relationship gives more space for the actors to openly

47 Several cheap phone providers offer a device that can have two SIM cards in one phone, giving the go-betweens more efficiency and benefits.

48 Mobile reception is poor in remote areas, such as Ketungau Hilir. To resolve this problem, the go-betweens often devise creative solutions, such as using the radio signal to upgrade their mobile phone signal by hooking up a cable and a wooden stick. This strategy helps them keep in touch through daily communication with their allies or clients in other places.

communicate, negotiate, bargain, and keep in touch for future work. Personal relationships, between go-betweens and their clients, however, often lead to patron-and-client relationships (Scott, 1972, p. 92).

The appearance and style of go-betweens symbolises their social status (e.g. state official, head of the village, or NGO worker), as well as their temporary go-between role (e.g. playing the part of a *beking* or land supplier in oil palm development). Moreover, the go-betweens' tools, such as mobile phones, have not only a symbolic status and role, but they also function as connecting devices for reaching allies and clients.

Charisma

The appearance and style of go-betweens is not limited to their choice in clothes. In this section, I will discuss charisma, one of the characteristics of go-betweens both in the past and present on the new frontier. Earlier discussions on charisma focused on charismatic leaders as the main personality, especially those amongst religious leaders with strong attractiveness to gain followers (Hughes-Freeland, 2007).

Charisma, for Werbner and Basu (1998), can be defined as:

*[something] usually taken for granted as a magical attribute, the contributors to this book interrogate the fabrications of charisma as they extend to concepts of the body, emotion, morality, and sacred topography. In different ethnographic contexts, in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, charisma (Baraka, **karamat**) is revealed as an embodied quality of exemplary persons who create spaces of potential freedom (Werbner & Basu, 1998, p. 21).*

Another scholar described charisma as “the term used by Weber to refer to ‘the extraordinary and personal gift of grace associated with ‘charismatic authority’” (Hughes-Freeland, 2007, p. 178). From previous studies, it can be concluded that not everyone has charisma, and only the ‘chosen’ and ‘gifted’ will possess it. Charisma gives more freedom to the person who possesses it; however, this characteristic has its moral and social obligations. Although the idea of charisma comes from western scholars, it has been adopted by Indonesian religious leaders, politicians, and celebrities to gain their followers’ attention and appeal to the mass.

Among Dayak ethnic groups, the idea of charisma is similar to the concept of *pama*, a kind of ‘divine soul substance’ which gives blessings upon the whole community, believed to be attached to the *semenget* or life force (Osterheld, 2012). As stated by Osterheld (2012), some people stand out from ordinary people by

possessing *pama*. This characteristic is only possessed by powerful figures, such as shamans, great head hunters [give local term], *adat* leaders and *tuai rumah*. However, in Dayak Kanayan't, for instance, *pama* is also attached to things considered sacred (*keramat*), such as weapons and jars (see Sillander & Couderc, 2012; Oosterheld, 2012). In this sense, *pama* is considered a unique ability only possessed by some people.

Both charisma and *pama* are necessary for specific figures (or special things in the case of *pama*), especially people with a high social position and who are regarded to have moral authority. In this sense, ordinary people do have this characteristic. However, in the case of go-betweens, this characteristic is often used as an instrument to help them build trust and emotion (between go-betweens, clients, and their network) and to build power during negotiations or to control a situation. Hence, from this research, it is clear that charisma is something that is necessary to be studied by observing actions, copying and experiencing them. To show that they have this characteristic, go-betweens will talk slowly, act calmly and nicely, use fewer hand gestures and only gesticulate during important parts of the conversation.

Professional go-betweens can show their charisma when they need it. Charisma helps them to shape situations to their needs so that their clients will fall for their charm. However, in the case of oil palm go-betweens, only professional go-betweens (or those who have been involved in rent-seeking activities for an extended period) understand how to use it.

Personal Positioning

Personal positioning is very important to support the work of go-betweens in Sintang. Go-betweens already have an idea of the right positioning to support their negotiations. For instance, when they meet their clients, they prefer to sit in a corner of a room rather than in a central position. To some extent, it is done on purpose so that their clients will give them more attention without showing that they are trying to control the situation. However, the idea of personal positioning in this discussion is not only related to gesture or movement but it is also related to their response and capacity to calculate all of their moves that can create trust and strong bonding with their clients in order for them to achieve a better positioning (Bell, 1999, p. 32).

For instance, if their client expressed objections during negotiations, go-betweens become more passive. They talk less and listen and analyse their clients' objectives. They show agreement and understanding with a nod or a simple 'yes' answer. They also use the moment to calculate and design the best

steps to impress their clients. In responding to their clients, they speak politely, summarise the client's objections, and offer their way of dealing with the problem. In a different situation, when trying to offer their service, for instance, they present themselves neatly, are active and give a good impression by promoting their experience and professionalism. This strategy is mostly used during the first meeting. It is not always easy, as it needs a good understanding of the perfect timing to speak.

Besides understanding the importance of positioning, a good go-between also needs to create an enjoyable atmosphere during negotiations to have a successful and good personal relationship. To achieve this, go-betweens joke to lighten the mood. Any tension during negotiations could be present, considering go-betweens' services are illegal and unsafe. In some cases, many higher-level go-betweens hide their identities and assign their right-hand people to deal with negotiations. Consequently, they cannot work openly, and many would choose an informal setting to work in. Previous studies noted that informal negotiations involved humour, jokes, and laughter, which would be exchanged to establish a social connection in the pre-phase (greetings) and post-phase (leave-takings) (Adelswärd & Öberg, 1998, p. 419). Jokes can be exchanged to make the interaction more colourful and to ease the tension.

Go-betweens also pay attention to the place where negotiations are happening. They often choose two different places: their or the client's private space (e.g. office, house, car, or hotel room) or a public place during peak hours (e.g. hotel lobby, restaurant, café, coffee stall, or airport). Private space presents a limitation for the go-betweens since other people would easily recognise them due to the frequency of the visit. To conceal their existence and offer their services, many on the new frontiers meet their clients in public spaces.

Behaviour and Actions

To also the individual characteristics of go-betweens in a new frontier context, it is also necessary to look at the go-between's behaviours and actions critically. The behaviours and actions of go-betweens change regularly as they respond to the conditions faced. Being a go-between, an individual expresses a specific manner in which she or he functions and acts in certain conditions. The behaviour of a go-between is also a form of individual performance respective to communal expectations of what people want and expect from a go-between. Meanwhile, actions can be described as a method or way in which the person acts or reacts toward a particular situation. In other words, it is the act of will from the go-between to fulfil their agenda or objective. Go-betweens require knowledge of

how to behave and engage with others as a means to negotiate power relations in new frontier territories.

Language Skills

Being multilingual is not new or rare in Sintang. Previous studies discussed brokerage in other countries, for example, in migrant families who benefit from their children who act as language brokers (see Buriel et al., 1998; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002; Morales et al., 2012) to solve any language barriers, or in the context of global trading which is related to the translation of one country's national policy and legal administrative regulations (Obenaus, 1995). Although new frontiers have different situations and characteristics, the ability to be multilingual is still important for the success of go-betweens. The main function of this ability is to translate and interpret and solve the language and interest barriers, e.g. ideas or rules in local languages (Dayak or Malay) into Bahasa Indonesia or English, specific terms or documents (business, regulation, and laws) into everyday language. This ability allows go-betweens to interact in various settings (formal or informal) with different types of people (Morales & Hanson, 2005, p. 491), giving them more room to facilitate negotiation processes.

I noticed that go-betweens were multilingual after joining the various meetings for new plantation development. I saw how they used their communication skills during negotiations. Jaya, for example, used these multilingual skills to translate and convey the goals of local governments and oil palm companies to local communities to give up their lands and join plantation schemes. Jay used appropriate and acceptable everyday language/*bahasa sehari-hari*, added more concrete examples, and emphasized the important value of Dayak ethnicity during his negotiation:

*After **orang perusahaan** or a company representative of PT. CUP explained the plan for opening a new oil palm plantation in the Ketungau area, Jay stood in front of the audience who attended the meeting. He looked around, greeted the audience one by one, and then continued speaking in the Dayak language. He started by explaining the government's and the company's goals for establishing new plantations in the area. The explanation started with the economic gap between the Dayak people in Ketungau Hilir and transmigrants in Binjai who already engaged with oil palm. He nicely described the financial ability of transmigrants in Binjai to buy motorcycles, and cars, fix houses, and send their children to Java for study. The comparison Jay made between transmigrant and Dayak people was understandable by the Dayak Banjar people. He continued with the lack of infrastructure that makes it for people in Ketungau Hilir hard to*

access the capital of Sintang. Many roads were still footpaths and could not be passed by motorcycle or car. After translating the condition of the Dayak people in Ketungau, he once more emphasized that the purpose of the new oil palm development was to change the living conditions of the local community and provide more wealth. He pointed out what they could earn after following the scheme, as the community would have their plots, earn a monthly income from the harvest, and their descendants have the opportunity to work as staff on the plantation. The monthly money from plots can provide a good education for their children and grandchildren and improve their lives so that they and their descendants can live better by joining oil palm. Jay stopped his explanation, apologized for explaining, and asked the audience to think about what he had said earlier. It left silence in the audience. (Jaya, 49 years old, former Sitang legislator)

The language and knowledge barrier between actors is solved by Jaya, who translates the objectives of his clients by paying attention to cultural values and appropriate language. He emphasized to me that, “the importance of family for Dayaks is living in a group.” This insight is key to transferring the aims and objectives during socialization.

In this sense, a go-between is forced to be able to mediate linguistically and culturally with different actors. However, some go-betweens in Sintang often cannot successfully translate and interpret because they sometimes translate statements too literally, leading to misinterpretation and thus unsatisfactory and awkward results. For example, a PT SNIP representative stated during the socialization process “the presence of oil palm plantations can create job opportunities for the community.” This statement was then reinterpreted in the Dayak language by Kakek Salibah, acting as a go-between, who said “everyone in Ketungau Hilir village will work for the company”. The phrase ‘create job opportunities for the community’ was interpreted as ‘everyone will work for the company’, which is not entirely accurate. This misinterpretation has had lasting implications, resulting in ongoing mistrust and dissatisfaction toward Kakek Salibah. In this sense, I share the opinion of Malakoff and Hakuta (1991), who noted that interpretation and translation are invariably complex and force the actors to have an awareness of translations and translation strategies.

Multiple identities

Skillful go-betweens adapt their identities in different contexts to accommodate different norms and values and the client’s demands. According to identity theory, the self is composed of multiple identities tied to individuals’ social roles (Kang,

Sklar & Johnson, 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000). In other words, identities have social and personal components. Go-betweens have a social identity to fulfil their social positions (i.e. *beking*, trader, or parent). In a different setting, go-betweens can be anyone. Therefore, go-betweens use multiple identities to articulate sociocultural gaps. They position themselves as a professional in the oil palm sector (outsiders) as well as a part of the community (insiders). This strategy enables go-betweens to adopt a broad, flexible position and appeal to a wide range of clients.

The multiple identities of go-betweens are used as a way for them to be accepted amongst their targeted clientele. If they can maintain their adaptive ability with their multiple identities, they can acquire a strategic position on the new frontiers where rules are often unclear. When they are socializing with other go-betweens, they will talk like the others, asking about the others' work and results in the previous months and comparing the positions of each other. They use a different persona or identity when talking to villagers. They will act like them and even more than the local people. Their language and words or how they sit are a copy of what locals are used to do (e.g. sitting with one of their legs on the chair). When they work with the company's people, their language will be different and mostly related to business. The go-between's actions are an attempt to accommodate the norms and values of their clients, such as to protect the honour of the local community or to show some professionalism.

Small Talk (*Basa-basi*) versus Straight Talking (*Kerampak*)

The global incursion of palm oil has shifted the cultural values of the local community. However, the work of go-betweens with the local community shapes the cultural adaptability of go-betweens. Small talk (*basa-basi*) as well as straight talking (*kerampak*) are other characteristics that protect their relationships (with clients, other go-betweens, and people around them). These characteristics have a strong connection with the norms and values of Dayak ethnic groups. They are intended to protect their honour (*harga diri*), and the concept of shame (*malu*) is also applied. Like the Iban and Bidayus, the Dayak Banjar (and Dayaks in general) historically did not have a hierarchy, leadership categories, and formal mechanisms, ruling political decisions, obligations, and sanctions; a tendency that Chua (2015, p. 345) and Leach (1950, p. 71) and others categorized as "egalitarian". However, individuals pay much attention to what others might think when they have to make moral decisions. This awareness is connected to the concept of *malu*, literally translated as 'shame'. In everyday life, *malu* is described as unpleasant feelings when people are watching and speaking unfavourably or when one 'loses face'. Considering these norms and values, the people engaged in this relationship

will be automatically enmeshed in a web of responsibilities and obligations that apply equally to everyone (Chua, 2015, p. 346).

In the context of go-betweens, honour and shame (*malu*) apply to their daily interactions, including negotiations. To some extent, it leads go-betweens to always use small talk or *basa-basi*. For example, when starting a conversation, the go-betweens will ask how their clients are doing. When talking to their close clients or network, the questions tend to investigate their activities, such as “*ope can?*” (are you currently working on a project?). This small talk will create a good impression and often brings valuable information or new opportunities for go-betweens. Although *basa-basi* effectively supports the work of go-betweens and creates a good atmosphere, it could also irritate others and limit their access to information and resources. An example of this is what happened to Mulyadi. When he asked Kak Mara, “*ope can?* (are you currently working on a project)”. After that, he followed up with another small talk and said, “*ajak-ajaklah kalau ada project masa semua dimakan sendiri* (if you have a project, share it. Do not eat it all yourself)”. This small talk did not lead Mulyadi to any favourable opportunity but instead made Kak Mara uncomfortable and irritated by his statement.

Although go-betweens use *basa-basi* to protect their relationships, create a good atmosphere, and acknowledge the essential values held by Dayak communities, in certain conditions (especially during the negotiation process), it is necessary for go-betweens to be straightforward to show their position. This act is locally known as *kerampak*. The literal description of *kerampak* combines harshness, persistence and egoism. This characteristic is similar to *jago* behaviour (in Javanese leadership), which also sometimes shows brave yet rough (*kasar*) characteristics; one who dares to speak up and taunt the established authorities (Slamet-velsink, 1994, p. 35). *Kerampak* is helpful for go-betweens to avoid being controlled by others or their clients as independent actors.

In practice, *kerampak* behaviour helps go-betweens to make manoeuvres in negotiations. However, this behaviour should be used at good timing so as not to irritate their clients or friends. Go-betweens must be experienced to be able to maintain the use of this characteristic. This signature characteristic of the Dayak people protects go-betweens and gives them more power to stand up for themselves when required. Unfortunately, this characteristic is also well understood and used by different actors, such as companies, NGOs, and state officials, to force their agenda. The example below of *kerampak* behaviour used differently by an oil palm farmer and a go-between will explain it:

*The sun was piercingly hot when I visited Pak **Kadus**' house in Pedadang Hilir village. His face turned red when he talked to me. I asked him what had happened. He said that his position as village head was questioned by Pak Koru in the land acquisition process for the CUP company, where Pak Koru was the land provider. Pak Koru, as a company representative and community member, felt that there was no need to ask permission from community leaders for the land acquisition process. For Pak Koru, it was too complicated and would take too much time, not to mention that community leader played no role in this process.*

*Pak Kadus heard this, and he felt he had lost face with Pak Koru's statement. He planned to meet and talk directly with Pak Koru. It was an unexpected reaction from Pak **Kadus**, who is well-known as a patient and fair person.*

From the story above, it is not necessary for a go-between to show his or her *kerampak* personality at the first meeting. However, when go-betweens feel the need to show their power, with a sense of honour and shame, they will become as *kerampak* as Pak Kadus.

Knowing when to use small talk or to be straight and direct is a acquired skill amongst Dayaks. Most importantly, go-betweens need small talk and to be *kerampak* as part of their individual characteristics to ensure that their position within the network of go-betweens is considered. *Kerampak*, which is considered close to violent, produces power to control other people.

Sweet talking

Sweet talking is an ability that is also possessed by go-betweens to be connected to politeness. Generally, this means connections based on polite words and the language used by the interlocutor. The individual characteristic of sweet talking provides more opportunities for go-betweens to manipulate, for instance, in the initial process of oil palm development, specifically during socialization processes, when a company officially introduces their plan to transform the land into oil palm plantations. To start the conversation, it is necessary for go-betweens to say '*maap omong*' (excuse me for saying this). This example of '*maap omong*' is said to prevent them from hurting anyone's feelings or making people feel embarrassed (*malu*). On the other hand, this also enables go-betweens to talk freely.

Meanwhile, during the socialization program (at the initial stage), go-betweens need to talk about the positive impact of oil palm to enable the process of negotiations. They give nice promises to improve the community's life and offer food and alcohol. Both food and alcohol are used to create a sense of relatedness between

them (Carsten, 2000, p. 18). This leads to an opportunity to facilitate the negotiation process. In a different setting, when they are trying to acquire land, the go-betweens talk sweetly to persuade the local community to hand over their land. They explain the advantages and compare scheme systems that would be applied by the companies with other companies with a bad reputation. The ability of go-betweens to compare and show the advantages of oil palm (in economic terms) is a common strategy used by go-betweens.

Unlike the first socialization, when go-betweens take advantage of traditional celebration events, the second and third processes involved a different strategy. Sweet-talking is the characteristic response of Dayak people, who like to receive compliments. To use it effectively, go-betweens must use the appropriate language. In this sense, go-betweens apply sweet talk to each of their clients differently.

Risk Taking

In a new frontier situation, go-between activities are primarily between formal and informal structures. Go-between activities are detected in several dimensions, such as economic, political, social, and cultural. As such, go-between activities are neither regulated by the state nor covered in the official data of registered companies. Based on these complex conditions, a go-between must provide risk-taking behaviour to secure and sustain their roles in this ecosystem. This behaviour helps a go-between respond to opportunities quickly, take on risky work, and open access to more valuable resources. As a go-between, they believe the high risks they face will yield high returns.

Risk-taking is not a new type of individual characteristic for actors who mediate two or more parties in the Dayak context. Before the era of oil palm plantations, previous go-betweens (such as *tuai rumah*, *tuai burung*, or *tokey*) had risk-taking behaviour in the face of the uncertain conditions and nature of their living environment. Although risky behaviour is not a new form of individual characters from the go-between, Dayak people rarely own this characteristic and always try to live in peace and harmony. Only those who managed to be a mediator, facilitator, or negotiator in the community possess this characteristic. To some extent, the unfavourable living environment (such as during the headhunting period or outbreaks) forced previous go-betweens to learn to be risk-takers to save their communities.

The condition faced by go-betweens today is more complicated. The rapid changes taking place within Dayak societies, means that go-betweens need to behave in a risky manner. As in the past, many individuals sought to avoid risk. It makes the role of go-betweens only capable of being performed by certain people with these characteristics. Hence, in taking go-between roles such as negotiating

with the local community to provide oil palm companies with enormous plantations, go-betweens need to risk their image or personal position in society. The other example is the go-between, who provides a smooth and fast administration process for investment and will risk their strategic position in the social structure. As taking a risk is not easy, this risk-taker's behaviour needs to stand with others. A go-between needs to combine his/herself capability to calculate the good moves to respond or react to certain conditions without placing he/she in an unbeneficial position. With calculation capability, a go-between can have sustainable roles in new frontiers. In this sense, in the context of the developmental frontier, risk-taking behaviour is more concrete to be owned by the go-betweens as he/she is facing more rough and complex conditions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the roles of go-betweens in the context of a new frontier. The new frontier's constantly changing structure and dynamics have created a range of different roles for go-betweens concerning their practices. However, seeing the go-between through more than only a structural perspective is needed to understand the new go-betweens in *lahan basah*. As such, I looked at the go-betweens by critically describing their individual characteristics. By applying an actor-oriented perspectives on their individual characteristics, I found eight important roles for go-betweens that relate to developing and maintaining oil palm plantations. These roles are information provider, permit supplier, land supplier, fruit collector, service provider, *beking*, opposition go-between, and *tangan kanan*.

The information providers have roles in providing information on the areas and creating windows of opportunity. In this sense, only some can play these important roles, which makes only a few actors with specific backgrounds of having a good status able to survive, such as local elites or academics. Another story has brought me to highlight the more practical roles played by go-betweens in Sintang, such as permit supplier, land supplier, fruit collector, and service provider. These roles shape an individual to have capabilities in providing services to their clients to smoothen the process and mechanism in oil palm. For these roles, some more diverse individuals can play a role. Finally, the last three roles, i.e. *beking*, the opposition of go-betweens, and *tangan kanan* have roles for securing, protecting, and controlling the oil palm ecosystem to operate. In sum, these eight roles of go-betweens are important within the new oil palm ecosystem.

It is clear that all the models and programs designed according to the government plan must be transformed into practice. Go-betweens must translate all designs and models into a different logic of the actors' and institutions' intentions, goals, and ambitions (Mosse, 2005, p. 232). A go-between is "required by the co-existence of different rationalities, interests, and meanings, to produce order, legitimacy and success" (Bierschenk et al, 2002 in Mosse & Lewis, 2006, 16) and to maintain natural resources.

Go-betweens must not only have a role on the new frontier to survive, but they must also add specific individual characteristics. Different and more competitive conditions require go-betweens to equip themselves with strong individual characteristics. Some of the individual characteristics already present among old go-betweens, such as charisma and multilingualism are still required. Nowadays, however, go-betweens require more than just these traits. Go-betweens need other individual characteristics, such as good personal positioning, multiple identities, *basa-basi* and *kerampak*, sweet talking and risk taking. Go-betweens must consider their individual capacities and experience, presentation and appearances, and actions and behaviours.

Some of these characteristics are basic characteristics, supporting characteristics, and important characteristics formed by Dayaks' cultural values. Risk-taking, multilingualism, multiple identities, flexibility, and sweet talking are the basic characteristics that help individuals to play practical roles in oil palm development and maintenance. On the other hand, charisma, *basa-basi*, and personal positioning are supporting characteristics that help individuals to have more roles in the oil palm system at Sintang. However, in the context of Sintang, I also found specific cultural characteristics of *kerampak*: *being* brave, vocal, harsh, and uncontrollable. Go-betweens who do not have these individual characteristics will fail to survive the competition. Only go-betweens with the adaptive capacity to adapt to the new frontier situation can survive.

The success of go-betweens is having at least a combination of those individual characteristics, which enables them to follow sociocultural, political, and economic trajectories. In conclusion, good go-betweens can successfully combine their roles in the community as powerful figures and acquire a good position by using their individual abilities. In this sense, go-betweens are always trying to manoeuvre the unoccupied and empty spaces between different worlds (local system versus global arena) on oil palm new frontiers. However, not all go-betweens emerged to support the oil palm system; some became part of the opposition. Still, all of them aimed at gaining benefits.

In the following chapter, I discuss the social relations and networks in which go-betweens are embedded. It shows how go-betweens are using their social relations and social networks strategically to support their roles in the context of oil palm plantations. The application of social relations and networks of go-betweens builds on the idea of the dialectical relationship of Dayak ethnicity. As we shall see, the entire relations and networks are based on individual positions and relationships.

Chapter 4

Following the Things and People

After some communication via SMS, I finally met Ancik at his home. Ancik is the head of the national alliance of *adat* communities (*Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nasional* or AMAN) in Sintang and was often involved in resolving oil palm conflicts in the region. He was recommended to me by the head of the Sintang Parish, Prist Siau, one of my informants and a friend of Ancik.

Ancik has a beautiful and large house in Tempunak, the western part of Sintang district. Ancik invited me to sit down and offered me a cup of coffee. He then asked me, 'How did you know Prist Siau?' At that time, I thought the question was just small talk and politeness to start a conversation with unfamiliar people. Only much later did I discover that such a question is crucial for people in Sintang as it enables them to map the relationships of newcomers and thus the newcomers' reliability and the people's stance towards the newcomers as outsiders.

After I told him the general idea of my fieldwork, how I met Prist Siau, and Prist Siau's enthusiasm when talking about him as he is often involved in the palm oil chain as an activist, conflict resolver, and mediator, he gradually became more relaxed and started to become more enthusiastic about our meeting.

Our conversation started with him introducing himself: 'My main job is an activist'. He started, 'As you know, I work for AMAN Sintang to protect the indigenous people in this region. My job requires me to take a position against the government. Being an opponent is always tricky, not only for myself, but also for my family. No one out there likes my job. People often classify me as a local strongman who asks for money from companies and the government because I help local people to achieve their rights through negotiations and conflict resolutions.'

In 2014 he mediated a conflict between an oil palm company and the local people of Sei Tebelian in the western part of Sintang after the company introduced a new oil palm scheme. The people felt tricked by the company because it only reserved a small percentage of oil palm plots (which are mainly located on unproductive land) from the total area of land they formerly owned and handed over to the company. Representatives of the local community tried to settle the problem

but to no avail. The locals tried their last chance to create space for negotiations by contacting Ancik to take their side.

Considering their lack of power and weak position, Ancik realised it would be difficult. To reopen the negotiations, he approached the elite in various places and positions: head of AMAN in Pontianak, NGOs in Sintang, Dewan Adat Dayak's (DAD) top members and lobbied for their backup to support the local population in the negotiation process. He also involved Prist Siau to back up their movement, mobilising the elite at the district level, unifying the local people's voices by contacting the heads of the villages and customary heads who lived around the plantations area. The support of this enormous coalition at the local and district level helped Ancik and his people in the negotiations and finally resulted in a win-win solution.

Ancik's capacity to perform his role as mediator to solve problems and conflicts over oil palm plantations rests not entirely on his position as head of AMAN nor on the way he manages to make use of specific structural aspects, such as norms and values, that prevail in Sintang society as I discussed in the previous chapter. It was the result of the quality of his connections and personal modes of interactions with 'others' to engage those persons in an encounter that involves both the 'formal' and 'informal' organisation of society. In other words, the reality and experiences of specific individuals, such as Ancik, to counterbalance legal laws and regulations do not only lie in their capacity to deal with this legality in a formal setting, but also in their social relations and networks that include informal scenes. The connections between Ancik, the elites, local people, and the company staff were framed by social network principles, which allowed Ancik to perform the role of go-between.

The case of Ancik shows important elements of social relationships and everyday interactions, which often remain out of view. Several authors in more recent studies have noted the importance of social relations and networks for brokers and intermediaries, although only concerning particular issues, such as migration (Lindquist, 2017), labour (Li, 2016), and land (James, 2011; Sud, 2014; Vel, 2014; and Savitri, 2016). These studies suggest that brokerage issues can be understood further by looking at actors' connections with 'state, market, and people relations' (Savitri, 2016, p. 1) to understand the flows of global capitalism. Furthermore, this social relationship and network perspective provides a more comprehensive picture of go-betweens. At the same time, the individual characteristics in the previous chapter are less indicative of the translation process.

In this chapter, I explore the role of go-between in terms of constraints and opportunities of the social relations and networks in which go-betweens are embedded, but which they might also strategically apply in the context of oil palm

plantation cultivation. Before arriving at a specific analysis of go-between relationships and networks, I unpack the principles of social relationships and connections that underpin Dayak's social and cultural organisations. In addition, I will outline specific dyadic relations to better grasp the potentialities of social relations and connections. Further, I will review how other researchers have incorporated social relationships in Dayak society into the study of brokerage, intermediaries, and gatekeepers. This analysis should provide a deep foundation to understand the principles of everyday interactions in go-between practices. What follows is the theorisation of social relationships in everyday interactions of go-betweens. In the last section, I sketch go-between networks and show how go-betweens use different principles of everyday relationships.

Understanding the Dayak Social Sphere from Inside

It was around 3 p.m. on a hot Sunday in April 2015, and the village was relatively quiet. The family of Kakek Ladu (one of the first families who built a settlement around Banjor River), male and female, young and old, were sitting, joking, and conversing in front of a small stall belonging to Kak Tuai, the granddaughter of Kakek Ladu. They talked about the things going on in the village, including gossip about a family sitting in another small stall some 50 meters away. Not long after, two people from the other family who live in the eastern part of the village walked past Kak Tuai's small stall. They chatted and continued walking to the other small stall to join their family. As soon as they passed the road, the family of Kak Tuai started to gossip about their difficulties in life, including their jobs as cheap labourers in an oil palm plantation and their economic misfortune. I sat at Kak Tuai's small stall for one hour and listened to their conversation before I walked to the other family in front of the small stall to talk with them.

When I approached them to start a conversation, I said words of courtesy to them, but unexpectedly they responded coldly, asking, 'why are you here? You are supposed to be with them'. They then ignored me and continued their conversation in the Ketungau language. I sat there for 30 minutes, during which the family excluded me from their conversation, when Pak Koru (land provider and community mediator), also part of the family, arrived. Pak Koru works for the company as a field agent. When he saw me, he asked in Indonesian about my research, whether it was going well and whether I needed further information. I told him that it was difficult for me to keep up with the plantation development process and to get access to critical actors. He offered me to join him in the land measurement of

PT. CUP, so I could observe the technical practices of opening the land for oil palm plantations. I accepted his offer. That small talk made the other family members slowly change their gestures and become friendly, switching their language to Indonesian. They told me about their connectedness with Pak Koru and the other people at the small stall and how they interacted with each other.

On my way home, I again stopped at Kak Tuai's small stall to buy snacks and toiletries. Surprisingly, the response of Kak Tuai's family had drastically changed: they looked suspicious and ignored me by talking in the Ketungau language and thus excluding me from their conversation. Puzzled, I decided to stay longer at Kak Tuai's *warung* until all her relatives had left. When she was alone, I asked her what had happened. She told me the following:

*People in the kampong come from different family roots, with whom we share a place in a longhouse. I rarely visit other houses except those of my relatives. We only have regular interactions with 'our family', as you see. Moreover, when you visited the other **food stall**, they became aware and cautious of your presence. Because my father already told everyone in the village that you are part of our family, taking you just like his daughter. We felt you did not belong to our family when you returned from talking with them. We consider people from outside our group as others, with whom we did not need to have a close relationship or put our trust in.*

This short explanation needs to be understood in the broader context of the Dayak social sphere under the idea of '*kami*' dan '*yang lain*' or 'us' and 'others'. The literature on Dayak society focused on social relationships and highlighted the idea of 'us' versus 'others' (see Errington, 1987; Helliwell, 1995; Freeman, 1970, and Sillander & Couderc, 2012). This idea is essential to figure out positions, interactions, connections, and limitations of individuals as part of the group and towards the outer group; or to link up with the discussion of kinship by symbolising social relationships. The concept of 'us' and 'others' could be seen as a foundation of social relationships and differentiation of a social sphere, which applies to the Dayak people. The concept occurs in daily interactions in spatial locations, individual embeddedness and people's boundaries.

The discussion about the social organisation of the Dayak ethnic group, in general, can be divided into three different modes: the kindred (Freeman, 1970), the longhouse (see Errington, 1987; Helliwell, 1995), and the longhouse apartment or '*bilek*' (Freeman, 1961; Helliwell, 1995; Fox, 2006; Helliwell, 2006). Each mode of social organisation has its own set of principles to organise and form the social

structure of its members. In this light, the individual embeddedness in a specific social organisation led to seeing another individual as 'us' or 'others'. In addition, the social and organisational principles can also be defined through individual interactions in a dyadic relationship. In the following section, I will elaborate on the three dimensions of the social organisation of Dayak society.

Kin

Each individual of the Dayak ethnic group is part of the more extensive networks that connect him or her with the broader arena. Scholars have used the concept of kindred, which is identical to the extended family or clan and applied it to a unilineal descent group (Murdock, 1949; Goodenough, 1955). Under this lens, the focus is located on personal kindred that consists of people who have common relatives (Goodenough, 1955, p. 72). This classical point of understanding kindred has led other scholars to include affines and cognates (Geddes, 1954 in Freeman, 1961) and use the kindred idea loosely to describe general gatherings of relatives (Murdock, 1949 in Freeman, 1961).

In the context of Dayak groups, the idea of kindred is translated into the term family or *keluarga*, emphasising the individual connection through a genealogical relationship. The concept of family is used to show that individual connections are not only based on blood but also beyond it, including emotional links (feelings, emotions, trust and closeness) and symbolic connections of shame and honour (*malu*). The internalisation of social connections is carried out continuously so that each individual feels connected to a set of others.⁴⁹

However, the kindred idea also often translates into the capacity of individuals to extend their genealogical relatives based on individual preference. This means that individuals can have an 'individual choice of genealogy', which can be seen as an intrinsic feature of such 'loosely structured' social systems that provide individuals with options to choose their social alliances (De Jong, 2013, p. 55). In contemporary Sintang, an individual chooses an alliance not only based on individual strategies but also on grounds of the present situation and the long-term functioning of particular relations for the future. This individual choice of genealogy allows individuals to select an ally who is not only connected through actual kinship but through forming a social relationship through longstanding communications and interactions and treating someone as kin. It gives individuals more room to manoeuvre, choosing who should be put in specific social connections and

49 This feeling of connection, to some extent, is transferred by empathy, affection, and protection.

terms. This does not mean that applying this concept is always clear and strict. Sometimes, it can be used too loosely during interactions.

The idea of kinship is embedded in the gradation of individual obligations and power, with each connection having specific consequences and functions. The social construction of genealogical degrees (*purih*) explicitly forms and determines the position and power of an individual. These genealogical degrees are also manifest in unique gestures, acts, and forms of interaction. During my field stay, I observed that individuals always need synchronisation with others, especially unfamiliar individuals. This synchronisation occurs first by classifying the position of others, whether as an ally or an enemy and the genealogical degree with a question, 'Whose son/daughter are you?' The answer to this question helps to identify social positions reflecting different consequences for their acts, gestures, and access (i.e. how food is served and the sitting arrangement (in the living room, TV room, or kitchen)).⁵⁰ This kind of practice also appears among the go-betweens concerning to *lahan basah* of oil palm, as explained by Pak San:

A Dayak individual has the characteristics of always being direct and alert to interact with 'others' especially when the interaction involves a large amount of money and new opportunities. I would always choose a partner with individual capability and rich in local knowledge, preferably from my 'family' circle. (Pak San, informal interview, Ketungau Hilir, Mei 2015)

Pak San's account above shows the importance of always being selective in interaction with other individuals.

The principles of the family (as being connected through emotion and collective meaning) are often internalised and constructed into an individual's idea of building a dyadic relationship. An individual can choose an alliance through individual kindred but also build connections regarding emotion, situation, and function.

The above principles, which make up the social recognition of kin, blood, or full adoption, emphasize aspects beyond the process of social recognition of kindred. Social recognition always grasps individual moral kindness to establish the emotional effect of trust and safety and to increase comfort in sharing a new/the same space and place. This means that only some of these intentions will perma-

50 My observation suggests that places are essential in determining whether a relationship is close or far, such as the hearth or the kitchen as a place for family, and a living room place for others

nently be established successfully, especially when it has a small scope with many similar characteristics to share. In the new frontier's context, the application of kindred is slightly reduced, as it is often seen as not giving much additional value to individual mobility in everyday life. Nevertheless, an individual will usually use some kindred principles to establish connections and relationships in a broader sphere to guarantee they share the same safe space.

Longhouse or *Batang Panjang*

The longhouse is central to understanding the social sphere of Dayak individuals. Waterson (2012) argues that a house as an institution is key to understanding how social interactions are organised. Waterson emphasised that a house often means much more than a mere physical structure; it is the symbolic characteristics of the people living in it as well as the norms and values of the community itself. The Dayak society uses the idea of the house to identify kindred as the bearers of social structure.

Levi-Strauss stated that the principle of a house is to 'reunite' and 'transcend' (Gillespie, 2000, p. 32). A house delivers supernatural origins and immaterial wealth, such as status and honour, to create a biography of the house (Howell, 2003). It is a presentation of cosmological knowledge and principles of social organisation that may be read by the members of society (Fox, 1993). In Tana Toraja in northern Sulawesi, for example, a house is the centre of continuity in the form of a vital force (or *semangat* in Malay) rooted in the house structures, which are on trees/posts (Waterson, 1993). As such, a house in society is often translated into material or immaterial wealth for the transmission of names, goods, and titles and continues in the language of kinship. These attributes connect the members beyond their physical existence through the mentality of individual connections. A house shapes people and their sociocultural life, as manifested in the condition of social relations. A house becomes integral to the general maintenance and continuity of the 'flow of life' (Fox, 1980) and a kind of microcosm of the macrocosm.

Many Dayak ethnic groups, particularly Dayak Banjar, call the house a longhouse or *batang panjang*. Longhouse members come from different kin roots, but it becomes one social living unit that shares more than blood relations, i.e. norms and values, meanings, and symbolic mutualism (i.e. shared food or exchange gifts). In this light, the house idea is beyond kinship.

A longhouse consists of two main rooms, i.e. sharing room (*sawah*) and a family unit (*bilek/lawang*), which are managed differently by the house members. The physical construction of the house and its daily function separates the inner and outer worlds of the Dayak groups. A shared room (*sawah*) is a public space

for communal activities and interactions with members of the house and people from outside (i.e. celebrating rituals and inter-house negotiation). In other words, a shared room is available for everyone, symbolising transitional space in connection and relationship within the social world (Helliwell, 2006). Unlike a shared room, which functions as a place for collective action, a family unit (*bilek/lawang*) is managed and inhabited privately by one core family (often three generations).

In a longhouse, a wall separates the shared room and the family unit, and becomes the physical symbol of the inner and outer worlds. A longhouse constructs the social separation of being 'insider' and 'outsider' (Helliwell, 2006, p. 48). The term 'insider' is used to categorise all family unit members as one social unit that is attached by a similar responsibility and emotional meaning of the house. The members are responsible for protecting the house's honour and representing how the house will incorporate. In other words, a house shows outsiders its purpose and the status of the people living there (*Ibid*, 2006, p. 16).

Living collectively in a longhouse builds up a connection of emotional feelings and creates a sense of togetherness, where members spontaneously share food, resources, and even attentive feelings. It also develops a set of norms and values of sharing trust only within one social unit. This principle creates a sense of the inner world. In addition, the members also share the meaning of heirlooms, regalia/sacred objects (*pusaka*) (Errington, 1987). Moreover, a longhouse shows the house's power as a symbol and its vital role beyond the existence of kinship (Waterson, 2012) that contains inter-relationships between the inner and outer worlds.⁵¹ It underpins that all the instruments shape a sense of belonging and identity of becoming a house-based society (Waterson, 1995). The house attributes are attached mentally and physically to the house members and create the imaginary structure of an ally or the motion of 'us'.

On the other hand, the strong conception of being 'us' creates clear physical and social boundaries that enable them to see non-house members as outsiders or 'others'. Each house member's different meanings and emotions are strengthened to see others as untrusted and thus consciously create a social distance as a shield of protection to others. The 'us' and 'others' perspective prompts an individual to give a neutral response and be always circumspect to interact with individuals or groups from outside the house. A longhouse mechanism provides flexibility that allows members to enter and exit the community. It allows new house members to

51 To stabilise the intermingle of the inner and outer worlds, house members would choose a potential individual to play the role of an intermediary actor under the name of the head of the house or *tuai rumah*.

be accepted⁵² and long-time members who choose to leave the house. This mechanism allows fluidity, i.e. to shift into 'us' and 'others'. It enables a longhouse to have open characteristics and to apply a loose structure for its members. Although the physical longhouses have massively disappeared in Dayak villages, the mentality of a longhouse society continues to be manifested in people's everyday life to differentiate people as 'us' and 'others', including go-betweens.⁵³

Family Unit or *Bilek*

A longhouse above provides a way to understand how a Dayak individual perceives the idea of 'us' and 'others' through the place and space boundaries. To some extent, the idea of 'us' and 'others' eliminate the bonding through blood by living together. Therefore, it does not give a fully comprehensive picture of how the Dayak social sphere is constructed and used.

As mentioned earlier, the term *bilek* is used to call one of the essential parts of a longhouse located in the inner section, and it is also used to call a household that occupies it. As a social unit, a *bilek* has an 'autonomous unit' (Freeman, 1961, p. 31) to manage the members and apply equality of the members' rights (Helliwell, 1995). It shows that a *bilek* is principally not integrated into the longhouse structure; it is a freestanding entity with an independent structure.

A *bilek* inhabited by a family group often includes three generations – grandparents, son or daughter, her or his spouses and their children – whose memberships are acquired by blood (birth), marriage, or adoption (see Sather, 1980; Freeman, 1957). It refers to the Dayak social mechanism of cultural possibility to convert others to be a member of the *bilek*, without sharing bodily substance or parturition to create the relationships (Errington, 1987, p. 418).

The idea of individual incorporation into a family unit is deeply interconnected to the Dayak cosmology idea. It aims to synchronise the 'physical' and the 'soul' from unfamiliar feelings and uncomfortable situations of living in a family unit.

52 The process of moving and choosing to join a specific longhouse is essentially based on the consideration that kindred/cognates will feel secure and trusted to do collective actions. Besides that, it is also influenced by individual interests in high-level interactions (i.e. maintaining the dignity of the house, possessing a common purpose, and the leader being a ritual expert) (Freeman, 1961; Helliwell, 1995).

53 In Ketungau Hilir's case, villagers chose to build a house and keep the relationship close by living near the other members of the same family unit. This new spatial structure of a Dayak village is followed by intensive daily interactions between *bilek* families, including sharing food, information, gossip, and even caring for children. Meanwhile, interactions with people outside the *bilek* will always have an imaginary boundary and fade through cultural rituals (observation on social interaction, April-June 2015).

This synchronisation process could happen beforehand through the accumulation of living together and shared meals with people considered as others. It gives individuals a foundation to be connected through sharing trust and the emotional feelings of shame (*malu*), honour, and closeness. It is reflected in Mak Ladu's experience of how she and her family deal with others:

*I remember there was someone who stayed quite long in our **bilek**. This guy came from Ketungau Tengah, and we could feel kindness and a pure heart. He joined hunting with my father, helped us in the field, and never complained about my mom's food. It took quite some time before we could adjust to the presence and habits of others. After everyone felt comfortable sharing rooms, my father would invite him to enjoy the meal together. I could say that not every guest who came to my place would have a close connection. Some were just guests and never became a part of the family. Furthermore, I still uphold the same value after I left the **bilek** and moved to an independent house. (Informal conversation with Mak Ladu in April 2015).*

Mak Ladu's account shows that, the process of synchronization is always long and difficult for both parties. To some extent, sharing meals and a living space can build links and remove the feelings of unfamiliarity. Sharing space and resources also come from learning one another's personal characters, synchronised through trust and emotional feelings. In many cases, however, the links are formalised through an adoption ritual.⁵⁴ The process of adoption is complicated. It is held through a specific ritual called adopting a child or *anak angkat*.⁵⁵ A cultural mediator leads this adopting child ritual to synchronise the cosmic energy (*semenget*) and 'life or vitality' (*ayu*) through the transfer process of the cosmic energy and

54 In the case of Pak San's adopted son, Yanto, the adoption process began with intensive food sharing and living together for almost three months in the same house. It ended up with an official adoption announcement from Pak San.

55 Before the adoption ritual, both mother/father and son/daughter candidates have an oral (*basa*) agreement on bringing the relationship into further steps. One party needs to organise the ritual needs (i.e. rice wine/*tuak*, pig, chicken, steam sticky rice covered with banana leaves/*pulut*, and metal necessities/nails) to complete the ritual, and invited cultural-village figures as well as neighbours.

life or vitality from an old to a new *bilek*⁵⁶ (see Freeman, 1970). Before the ritual, the physical, cosmic energy, and life or vitality of the person who will become an adopted child is viewed as alien and from a different social sphere. The ritual process is the attestation of cosmological and social shifting. This understanding maintains the mental connections between the superstitious and human worlds. In this light, it was not only based on a social reason but also on maintaining the connection of human and spiritual aspects of the world, such as life or vitality and cosmic energy.

Thus, the idea of *bilek* or family unit may be understood as underpinning individual embeddedness in a social unit with a clear territory and social boundaries. Since individuals need to have their social connections and interactions with their *bilek* synchronised daily, they continually reproduce the social barrier between 'us' and 'others' in everyday life. The *bilek* members' move to independent houses and the current transformation in Kalimantan has made the social bonding among people more meaningful and substantive than genealogical relations (i.e. reproduction, wounding, and death). Under this concept, Dayak individuals, including go-betweens, figure out the relations between different entities (family origins, longhouse, or villages), as a consequence of which they become part of the overarching structure.

Between 'Us' and 'Others'

The explanation above suggests that Dayak individuals' idea of a social sphere is built by combining several principles applicable to the existing social organisation of kindred, longhouse, and family unit (*bilek*). As kindred principles are located in a construction of genealogical coherence as well as individual coherence (physiological and symbolic), they allow more space for individuals through cognates to choose the best connections to support their lives. Many Dayak groups, including the Banjor, use multiple identities in specific situations to gain benefits or to advance their interests. Hence, the Dayak identity is not only a label to identify where someone comes from and who they are, but also to enhance their power.

56 The purpose of the *nusop ayu* ritual, which often accompanies adoption, is to cut away the child's *ayu* from the *ayu* of his natal group and replace it with the *ayu* of his adoptive *bilek*-family. The child is given three items: a bush knife (symbolises the cutting away of the child's *ayu*), a small jar (termed in this context as *karong semenget*, which is a cask providing magical protection for the child's soul or *semenget*), and cloth (symbolises for covering for the freshly transplanted *ayu* of the child to shade it and prevent it from becoming shrivelled in the sun's heat) (Freeman, 1970, p. 21-22).

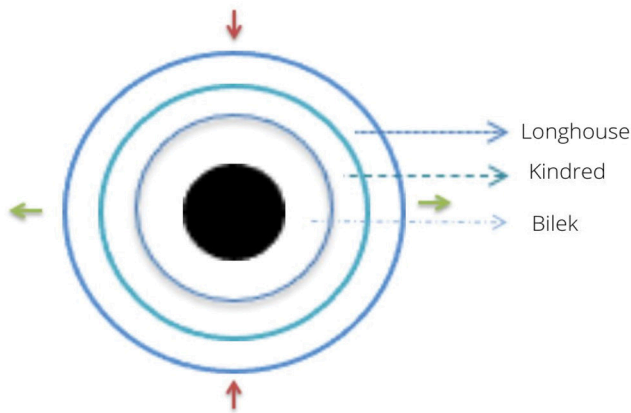


Illustration 1. Dayak Social Sphere

As such, in the social relationships of the Dayak ethnic group, the social sphere is determined by 'us' and 'others', where 'us' is often translated as allies or relatives with psychological and emotional attachment. On the contrary, 'others' are classified at a more emotional and physical distance, which often leads to a 'strange' and 'uncomfortable' relationship. 'Us' and 'others' are different at the concept level and have spatial significance, with relatives and neighbours inhabiting close spaces perceived as safe. In contrast, the alien space inhabited by non-relatives is more distant (Errington, 1987, p. 417). Even though close and safe spaces can be converted into an other territory if it is intruded upon by non-relatives,⁵⁷ the danger lies in a situation where no one is willing to act as a supporter, helper, or guard (Kaut, 1961, p. 268).

At the surface, the concept of 'us' and 'others' practically differentiates 'insiders' from 'outsiders', with individuals as the core of the relationships. This shapes the social relations and interactions of Dayak groups and helps individuals to set up their first network. This initial relationship serves as a foundation for individuals to maintain relationships and connections with other individuals and groups. With these concepts, Dayak people figure out the relation between different entities such as family, kindred, and longhouse (village/community), after which they become part of an overarching structure.

In more comprehensive interactions, the social relationship mechanisms embedded in Dayak society often overlap with other principles of social organisa-

⁵⁷ The other study by Errington (1979) in Luwu shows that it is related to the social realm and the world outside the kinship network, such as in the natural and supernatural realms.

tion. This overlap is due to the Dayak social environment that emphasises strong relationships built only with individuals who belong to the same group. To a certain extent, however, individuals will intensively relate to particular individuals outside of their group who are considered trustworthy. This social conception has often disadvantaged them after Kalimantan's transformation into a new frontier where individuals must move freely and always be flexible to secure new connections and relationships. Dayak individuals' dyadic relationships need to be explored even more in order to understand individual connections at the new frontier. Dyadic relationships open more social spheres for Dayak individuals to engage in the development and maintenance processes of oil palm in Sintang.

Dyadic Relationships in Dayak Society

The application of 'us' and 'others' often seems intermingled, depending on the situations and context individuals face. That, to some extent, serves as the basis for the Dayak ethnic groups to manage their social sphere, including social relationships and interactions. As discussed in the previous section, the initial interaction process of Dayak people is always located in their own *bilek* as an entity of their social system. The transformation (environmental and societal) of Dayak society, however, has forced them to engage with various other ethnic groups and arenas. This situation created an open competition between the Dayak and other ethnic groups, which made the idea of embeddedness in their *bilek* of limited use. Furthermore, it has created geographical and societal limits on other dimensions, such as economic, political, and bureaucratic,⁵⁸ which hampered them from gaining access to new opportunities in life in general.

To manoeuvre out of this kind of situation, the Dayak people must extend their social interactions to people from outside their own groups or create their social sphere beyond their kin group. This non-kin relationship is based on individual interactions that form a dyadic relationship with characteristics as loose, free, not tight, and fluid.

Personal relationships that apply dyadic interaction can be seen in friendships or interpersonal alliance. The idea of friendship is situated within the personal

58 This lack of specific embeddedness could be understood from Mul's explanation of his failure to enter the political level, 'last year I ran for a parliamentary seat, and I failed. I did not get enough voters to get me to the Sintang legislative (DPRD). I used the strategy of mapping voters through how close we are. I used my family connection to approach the voters. I did not build a new connection out of my safe space as I thought applying the closeness principle would give me more loyal supporters. However, I am wrong; it did not work for politics' (Mul, 29 years old).

social sphere. Bunnell et al., state that ‘friendships are forged, sustained and dissolved in and through the network, while also variously opening and foreclosing human spatial possibilities’ (2012, p. 503). Friendship interaction is thus located in two main dimensions social and geographical, which is different from the family concept. It does not have other attributes as bonding besides sharing similar interests.

In Dayak societies, friendship could be translated as *bekawan* rather than ordinary friendship or acquaintance⁵⁹ (*kenalan*). Friendship can be understood as a relationship between two individuals without having deep emotional feelings and less intimacy, although it could be highly demanding in terms of social obligations. Meanwhile, ordinary friendship does not have those principles that make individuals join an intensive interaction. A friendship interaction often creates an open-kind relationship, making the connection flow very flexible without forcing an individual to get involved intimately in a dyadic or direct connection. It means the instrumental bonding of friendship is not aimed at strengthening the ties but is focused on a dyadic act that often links to another person outside their ordinary relations with family, kin, or community. In other words, friendship as a kind of social relationship is located between ‘us’ and ‘others’, i.e. not too close and not too far.

To run the principle of friendship, two or more individuals engaged in a friendship relation share the same interests or join the same activities to create bonding in their network. Individuals within the friendship relationship will limit access to joining the ties by outsiders, making it a kind of bubble friendship. Creating friendship is the key to working together with different social spheres and, thus, becoming a good go-between. Nevertheless, this also means that an individual needs to be an outsider and keep a safe distance to ensure the relationships work.

The suitability of a similar dimension, feelings, and goals that appear during the interaction will open more complex relationships, such as a family-like relation or alliances that will provide access to new resources, both natural and social. It may be said that friendship is located beyond the boundary of existing relation sets within Dayak society. Rather than forcing individuals within the ties to share trust, meaning, or intimacy, friendship characteristics share also opportunities, information, and knowledge.

59 *Kenalan* or acquaintance has no personal connection through a dyadic relationship. It locates the interaction far and another individual as them. Therefore, there is the possibility of bringing acquaintance into a further relationship, such as friendship or family-like, if social space is often shared.

Unlike ordinary friendships, to engage in a long-term friendship, the initial situation should be created through reciprocity. In daily life, especially in go-between relationships, it is a form of understanding each other (*tau sama tau*), which provides a series of performances of mutual assistance to act, offer, and accept. Although, as stated by Wolf (1982, p. 173), the interaction between two individuals would be in balanced reciprocity,⁶⁰ or a tit-for-tat kind of relationship. Thus, it is often far from harmony and can become a fragile relationship, which makes individuals always careful regarding their acts, attitude, and words during an interaction. The friendship is rather full of alertness, which makes friendship a fragile relationship.

Still, the process and frequency of reciprocity between two friends implies determining the quality of ties, whether they are strong, weak, or absent. The perfect idea of connection through friendship is the highest frequency of reciprocity that will bring stronger ties, more fluid interaction, and higher caution to protect the relationship by shaping specific individual acts and vice versa. The implication and quality, however, are often not directly proportional. Aris, the head of the estate section in Sintang, shared the following with me in regards to friendship:

A good friend could transform into an enemy, although you feel that you are close enough and know each other. There is always the possibility that they change their attitude and gesture, even becoming very offensive. In my experience, some of my good friends had the heart to take over my jobs or destroy my career and network. That is one of the reasons I want to trust my friends as much as I trust my family. Moreover, it is necessary to know who they are and their family, just in case (Interview June 2015, Aris, head of smallholder plantation section at plantation service).

This quotation shows the fragility of the friendship idea among the Dayak people, especially they who have a role as go-between. There is always uncertainty about individual moves, and there is always a lack of emotional attachment and a high possibility of putting forward individual self-interests, which may create an unbalanced interaction in the future. Consequently, a go-between often tries ‘to be on the safe side or *jaga-jaga*’ in all their friendship relations. The interaction seems full of tricks and feint aimed at keeping the interaction flow more fluid.

However, a go-between has the motivation to make a relationship as close as possible, turning it into a dyadic relationship. This deep interaction aims to keep

60 The *bekawan* system has a different conception of friendship, as stated by Marshall Shahlines (1965), which is why it is essential to have balanced reciprocity.

the relationship working profitably for new opportunities in the future in the form of material and non-material benefits (i.e. valuable information, funding, or social insurance). Although only some interactions in friendship could end up as deep and personal ties, go-betweens must have similar interests and goals. It helps go-betweens to maintain friendship relationships for a lifetime or generations. In a stable relationship, it is possible to bring the relationship further to create 'family-like' relations by improving emotional attachment and more trust (Nelson, 2013, p. 259). Bringing the relationship into 'family-like' for go-betweens and Dayak individuals, are considered a safe set of social spheres in which next generations often inherit interactions and relationships.

Unlike friendships that are often between 'us' and 'others', an interpersonal alliance could be understood as a relationship that Dayak people, especially go-betweens build for mutual aid. While it is not considered more personal and intimate, it has to meet similar individual norms and values to ensure that the cooperation works. It could be in the form of a community, group, or social organisation. The engagement process among the members uses personal dyadic relationships made possible by indirect connections and a set of structures that limit each member of the same group to having interpersonal links.

While Dayak society applies horizontal positions in dyadic relationships, this horizontal connection is unequal to that constructed by the social structure. It makes one individual having greater status, resources, and power than their various dyadic partners (Landé, 1977, p. 77). In the social dimension, for instance, each individual under the kindred idea is located in an unequal position due to the application of genealogical counting (*purih*) to determine individual genealogical social positions and obligations.

In the context of economic and political dimensions, an interpersonal alliance might also be seen through the application of patron-client relationships. Patron-client bonds stem from personal relationships under established social organisations, such as kinship, official ties/bureaucratic/office, or village alliance, that are basically based on personal loyalty. It establishes individual power and unbalanced positions between two individuals. In Dayak society, this form of patron-client is clearly stated in the use of specific terms to define two individuals' power and obligations: client (*anak buah*) and boss/patron (*tokey*), emphasised by the presence of material bonding such as debt or jobs. This bond possibly happens in a long-term relationship that is often as strong as the bond of blood (Neher, 1994, p. 950).

In the context of go-betweens, patron-client relationships provide power in the form of exclusivity, loyalty, honour, and entourage.⁶¹ This creates more feelings that assert the go-between's importance. An observer would see the entourage as a life shield of the patron; it protects both the patron and the consequences of the patron's acts. In addition, it protects the patron's position, status, shame and honour (*malu*) by displaying superiority to differentiate him from ordinary people (Errington, 2012).⁶² Alternatively, to some extent, it helps go-betweens to manipulate the lack of inner potency, i.e. fragile charisma, the loss of other symbolic power and standing position. It suggests that an unequal position in this kind of dyadic relationship is not voluntary; it is formed by the structure in which an individual is embedded.

An individual who voluntarily connects with another individual can also be burdened by social values and obligations that make it obligatory for him or her to join specific activities or groups. An example of an obligatory relation in a dyadic relationship is a head village who needs to make contact with company people to support the government's investment program in the area. However, when the objective and vision are the same, the involvement could be changed from obligatory to voluntary. Another example in the oil palm setting is that of bureaucrats in the investment sector who are obliged to support government development programs. Ideally, bureaucrats involved in oil palm development provide a transparent process, fast response, and integrity to support the program. However, in practice, the institutional structures create a clear boundary and a rigid and inflexible process. This overlapping structure has a weakness, as it is possible to bring it into a personal sphere, as experienced by many go-betweens with a bureaucratic background in Sintang.

In summary, a dyadic relationship may bind individuals who are alike and unlike across occupational and class lines of particular importance, such as to solve problems/conflicts or gain political power. In a dyadic relationship, two individuals are building closeness and trust to reduce each other's suspicion. A dyadic relationship often brings about other relationships that strengthen intimacy or closeness. This strong connection in a dyadic relationship makes the relationship fragile, which is difficult to fix if it breaks up.

61 The entourage is not a homogenous group but consists of individuals, each of whom maintains a reciprocal bond with the leader.

62 The ties that bind two individuals in the patron-client relationship are embedded in the individual essence of *shame*, honour, or achievement that could be transferred and felt by other individuals who join the dyadic relationship.

From the explanation above, the Dayak people have a different understanding of their social sphere, which includes social interaction, connection, and a set of networks possible for an individual to build. The social interaction is to bond the 'outer' world with their own 'inner' world, which leads to more stable and long-lasting relationships. This understanding makes Dayak people cautious and calculating in their interactions and avoids a further relationship that has no connection to their initial social sphere.

As individuals, Dayak people are embedded in their family units (*bilek*) as a minor social organisation. Their embeddedness follows it in kindred and long-house units, where they share many essential meanings and things. However, Dayak people interaction can start from this small unit as a barometer of intimacy in the relationship. The intimacy process is connected to the idea of 'us'. However, to face new frontier situations, Dayak individuals must explore different social relations and networks that may offer them more opportunities, which profoundly affects the intimacy of their trusted lifeworld.

In addition to their embeddedness at different levels of society, Dayak male and female individuals also build private social relationships in several forms, such as acquaintances or *kenalan* who might include neighbours or *tetangga*, friendship or *bekawan*, personal alliances in the same institution or employment (colleagues) and patron-client relationships. Unlike a *bilek* that places interactions in the bubble of insiders, these other relationships occupy an in-between position, where 'us' and 'others' are interchangeable depending on the situation. The barometer for the intimacy of a relationship needs to be applied to both parties involved, which is also helpful to map who is close and who is not.

Social Networks as a Bridge to the Interstitial Spaces

A helpful concept to analyse the position of go-betweens is the notion of translation. Callon (1986 in Meyer, 2010) defines "translation as a process involving several moments: defining an actor; testing, stabilising and specifying the roles of this actor; and, finally, rendering it mobile" (Meyer, 2010, p. 121). In Law's words, "to translate is to connect, to displace, to move, to shift from one place, one modality, one form, to another while retaining something" (2002, p. 99). A go-between can thus be conceived as a form of translation with a specific emphasis on the following features: a need for at least two simultaneous translations and reflective and increased visibility of the role of translators. Agreeing with the other authors, Mosse and Lewis (2006, p. 13) note that translation refers to mutual

enrolment and the interlocking of interests that produces project realities. In this sense, go-betweens are sublime translators.

Latour (1999) notes that actors potentially modify or displace the “chain of translation”. In this light, the actors can be categorised as individual or collective social units to which each of the other actors is linked by social ties (De Jong 2013:47). As such, it has been considered that networks, including vertical, horizontal, or cross-cutting networks, all with both strong and weak ties, often have no boundaries. It means any person may consider him or herself as the centre of the network. In this translation process, go-betweens potentially modify or accommodate their interests to structural aspects and their individual characteristics.

To obtain better insight into the spaces of go-betweens for the translation process, it is necessary to investigate the social spaces that the network is a part of. ‘Frontier’ studies show that the process of frontierization not only transforms the natural resources in a geographical sense but also in political, economic, and socio-cultural terms (see Goodenough, 1969; McCarthy & Cramb, 2008; Wrobel, 1996; De Jong, Knippenberg & Bakker, 2017). It also means a change within the social space. A social space, in this sense, is viewed as being bounded by relations.

Peltier (2009) argues that the interactions inside the social space emerge out of the empty space and biased conditions, which he calls an “ungoverned space”. Although it is called an “ungoverned space,” this space is not empty. However, it is instead connected to other social space dimension, where legitimation, rules, collective dealing, and personal or group interests come together. Here the term interstitial space seems the most appropriate description. The term interstitial space particularly comes from Bhabha (1996) and refers to a “betwixt”. The flexibility of this space has often created an opaque situation and a bias to go-betweens who play a dual role in relationships (direct or indirect). In this sense, a go-between uses the ‘ungoverned space’ to their advantage by combining it with their capabilities and knowledge about the structural and cultural context within the space.

In a social context, Dotson shows that the interstitial space arises because of “cultural norms, habits of conduct, and perceptual capacities” in and within society (Dotson, 2014). The best known examples of actors in these spaces are intermediaries, brokers, and middlemen (Scott, 1972; Bonacich, 1973; Spaan, 1994; Dove, 1996). However, the presence of go-betweens in the interstitial space of oil palm development is complicated, as, go-betweens are linked to other actors through social relations and networks (De Jong, 2013, p. 60). Networks often have no boundaries and no clear internal organisations since any person may consider himself or herself as the centre of the network (Eriksen, 2010, p. 84).

In this light, the social network emphasises the relations in dyadic terms, which may serve as a new window for understanding the phenomena of go-betweens. This approach is different from the structural-functionalist or actor-oriented approach in which individuals are either considered as ‘puppets’ whose acts are defined by the structures in which they are embedded or as self-interested agents completely disembedded from their social and cultural surroundings. So, rather than solely perceiving go-betweens as “atoms” (structured or as agents), this study includes a social network approach, i.e. the actions of go-betweens are considered embedded in dyadic relations and the overall structure of dyadic relations (Granovetter, 1973).

According to Mosse and Lewis (2006), “within these networks of practices, both human actors and non-human actants (such as artefacts and devices) are related through a series of negotiations and defined in terms of the ways in which they act and are acted upon” (*ibid*, 2006, p. 14). In this interaction, the identities of the actors, the strategies of practice, and political representations take place between the actors. The system can be stabilised only when the actors can reconstruct their network of interactions, including a “translation” process. This process negotiates meanings and definitions into individual and collective objectivities and aims (*ibid*, 2006).

Furthermore, studies of social networks and interstitial spaces provide the insight that the interactions formed by various interests are not limited to one layer of the network but can spread to other layers. These multilayer networks mean that practices of go-betweens are bonded in inter-relational networks. In short, interstitial spaces can also be understood as individual spaces. These spaces are linked with agency characteristics and the structure within society. Go-betweens use interstitial spaces for the translation process. In this process, they can create or reproduce the specific emphasis for their identity. The borderline illegality or informal actions of go-betweens is one of the important aspects of the translation process and a strategy for their interaction.

Understanding the Go-between’s Network

As previously discussed, a Dayak individual sets his/her social sphere of networks by creating individual relations beyond their embeddedness in the Dayak social sphere. The principles of these relationships often apply to a go-between’s interactions and how they build their network. Mils explains the idea of it:

*Network is an art. You cannot learn it at college or other places. It is an art to develop connections and interconnections with people from different backgrounds, such as people in better or lower positions, people at the same level of power, or even people who are considered 'criminals' like thugs. To keep it stable, showing your competence or power is prohibited. I need to adjust to other people's positions, maintain relationships through good communication, and goodwill visitation (**silaturahmi**). You need to keep the relationship as it is. If you consider people as friends, colleagues, or patrons, then it is what they are. Meanwhile, when you think the relation is useless or you do not need it, it is necessary to manipulate it as if it were very important" (Mils, interview, October 2015).*

In principle, a go-between creates and maintains the networks for personal benefit. At the same time, this is different from a personal network that, in general, is driven by similar interests and goals between two individuals. The interaction within a go-between's network is an art of manipulative relationships that people are unaware of and do not feel uncomfortable with, as trust will appear between two individuals to some extent. Mils's explanation also shows that a go-between's acts are located in interstitial or in-between space, which means a go-between needs to have a foot in two worlds to effectively bridge structural gaps (Stovel, Golub & Milgrom, 2011). As such, a go-between always faces a relationship considered unstable or fragile.

The fragility of a go-between's relationships is caused by unpredictable manoeuvres, acts, and objectives that make it difficult to maintain in long-term, complex situations) or transactions (Granovetter, 1973). To be successful in mediating the process, for instance, a go-between needs to know people from different classes, positions and arenas. Their high-risk job, lack of access and unstable relationships have led a go-between to build a 'safety' relationship which provides protection and opens up connections with 'powerful/resourceful' actors. In other words, go-betweens use their networks to cope with the lack of access to natural resources. To minimise the risks, a go-between constantly explores their network and chooses the qualified dyads. In these established relationships (such as friendships and working groups), a go-between selects a potential partner by mirroring past experiences between go-betweens and their network (i.e. job success, equal contribution to work, good communication, and problem-solving). However, to engage in a new relationship, a go-between will be more selective and will look into the similarities that they have, such as characteristics (i.e. individual capabilities), interests (i.e. intermediate actors, personal benefits), and goals (i.e. material and non-material things). To some extent, a go-between needs to move forward from

their embeddedness in a specific group and apply a combination of principles to different forms of relationship.

The collection of dyads within a go-between's network does not automatically and immediately contribute to their work. Further, only some of their dyads will end up in long-term cooperation. The failure of the work will influence present interactions, which may end the relationship. This risk forces a go-between to maintain his/her potential dyads by keeping the intensity of interaction and building intimacy through the similarity of interests or bringing it to deep emotions. Conversely, ties that are too loose are often dangerous in maintaining the stability of interactions within the network. It means that to have a solid and potential network, a go-between needs to decide the flow of interaction, create personal trust, and leave social obligations behind.

It is thus understood that the ideal networks of go-betweens in Sintang need to be fluid and flexible in interactions so they can accommodate open-close interactions, which often leave out the attributes or social obligations that make the interactions rigid. Potential networks are pricey, so a go-between needs to put much effort and attention into managing the relationship. As Lindquist (2017) has argued, it is necessary to focus on the intersections between various modes of formality and informality and the mediating importance of new technologies underlying 'circularity' that connects the network of different actors and arenas (*ibid*, 2017, p. 216). In this light, a go-between's network comprises actors who are tied to one another through socially meaningful relations. It means that the role of a go-between is bonded in interrelated networks, which I prefer to call the personal networks of a go-between.

Go-between's Dyadic Relationships: Personal Bonding

The conceptualisation of how a go-between creates a network in the previous section has led us to look critically into the process of valuing interpersonal relations. The network is considered necessary for a go-between as another essential element of individual capital. A go-between's lack of individual capacity or structural gaps is possibly compensated by having a good and strong network. Granovetter (1985), in his study on economic behaviours, argued that most behaviours are closely embedded in a network of interpersonal relations. This argument avoids the extremes of under- and over-socialised views of human actions and refrains from analysing personal behaviour in order to develop a holistic overview of personal relations and networks. Individuals' behaviour will determine their acts, interconnections, and holistic personal relations. Therefore, it does not

guarantee that a ‘personal’ relationship is strong; it depends on the interpersonal relationships of individuals.

Further, to engage in a personal relationships, paying attention to an individual’s micro-level or dyadic relationships is expected. In the case of a go-between, micro-level relationships do not appear only because of formal and informal structures; instead, it is because of the intermingling of the two. Meanwhile, Stovel & Shaw (2012) have argued that this engagement of individuals in personal relationships is triggered by ‘the ambiguity of other actors’ acts. This means individuals tend to protect their own will by showing their persona. It forces a go-between to be always alert and to pay more attention to the ambiguity of other actors’ acts and the closeness between them (the relation to others) and their motives (see *ibid*, 2012, p. 140). Furthermore, the acts could have a gradual impact on their move and goals in the future. In other words, each act in a dyadic relation will determine the form of the relation.

The fact that a dyadic relationship takes place in individual interconnectedness in the case of a go-between becomes evident just before the negotiation process. As shown in illustration 2, a go-between is essential in linking two different actors and worlds that are not connected so he can obtain personal benefits. However, it is only possible when each individual is interconnected with the go-between through a dyadic relationship or at least a recommendation from the go-between’s inner circle.

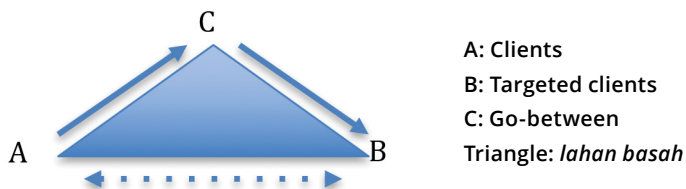


Illustration 2. Dyadic Relationship of Go-between

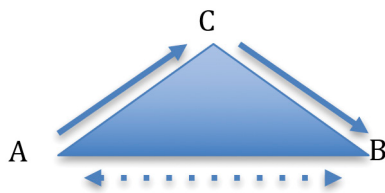
This application of a simple dyadic relationship can be seen around a go-between with an essential role of mediating and connecting one actor to another in a simple connection, such as in Yulia’s case. Yulia is a woman in her early 30s who plays the role of go-betweens as an oil palm fruit trader. She has a contract with two palm oil companies as a regular supplier of oil palm fruits. As a fruit trader, Yulia collects harvested fruits from smallholder farmers and sells them to company factories. Collecting oil palm fruits from farmers around her village is not without reason, as her connection to those farmers through kindred helps ensure that the

job is done and that a regular supply is available. In addition, personal connection is also valuable for price negotiations. Personal connections through the kindred principle helps a go-between to accomplish their mediating role.

Applying a dyadic relationship is not limited to simple interaction; it is also suitable in a complex situation, such as in the case of Harjana, a Dayak man. Harjana is originally from Ambalau, Sintang. An oil palm company that gained a plantation location permit in the Ambalau sub-district once asked his assistance to persuade the local people to accept the company's operations. The company offered him the brokerage job because of his structural position as a regional legislative and his ethical background (i.e. he is considered well aware of the norms and values of the people). His involvement in the legislative system of Sintang provides him with connections and networks with various actors, including influential figures inside and outside the district (including villages, the province, and even Jakarta). In addition, his expertise in being *kerampak* (straightforward and harsh), his openness, talkativeness, and rich experience make him a good negotiator or *penyambung lidah*. This job provides him with many benefits. To persuade him to accept the job, the company offered him oil palm plots, money, a campaign fund, and a family leisure guarantee.⁶³ Although for the company, it is considered insignificant as it will gain a significant profit.

Harjana accepted this offer, and the first thing he did in his new job was to choose potential dyads from his collection of networks and make them part of his go-between network. He eliminated the non-potential dyads by considering their influence in the decision-making process among the local people. He involved Arjuna and Hocek, who is from the same village (longhouse principle) and head of the sub-district and local leader, respectively, to be his second hand in translating the company's objectives. In return for their effort, Arjuna and Hocek would gain material benefits through monthly income and healthcare facilities from the company. Below, Illustration 3 shows, the general situation faced by Harjana.

63 The benefits offered by the oil palm company are considered financially insignificant compared to its monthly/annual revenue. For example, oil palm plots are imposed on farmers (included in their debt), and the money comes from farmers' debt and five-year campaign funds.



A: Oil Palm Company
 B: Client/Target investment/Community's representative, Arjuna and Hocek
 C: Go-Between: Harjana
 Triangle: lahan basah

Illustration 3. Example of Dyadic Relationship of Go-between

This illustration suggests that the oil palm company (A) has the power to control the local community's natural resources (B) by securing the government location permit. The mediation process through socialisation or *sosialisasi* to the local people was rather tricky. To make it a success, it was necessary to involve Harjana (C) to play the role of mediator or go-between. In this light, C acted as the go-between who connected A with B to fulfil A's objectives. Although A was the party that had the money in this interaction, C performed the vital role of controlling the information flow from both sides and doing negotiations to persuade them. The initial process (introduction) and the negotiations (manipulation) used the role of go-between, while the following action could use a direct dyadic relation without involving a go-between. Although this involved a triadic relationship, the paramount interaction was mostly a dyadic exchange between two actors (patron/donor-go-between, client/target investment-go-between). The involvement of a go-between in a complex situation bridges the micro and macro levels (Kaufman, 1974).

The two stories show that the interaction process between two go-betweens in the present and future is determined by specific dyadic connections that support a go-between's work. Further, it follows the success of past experiences that makes the relationship stronger and long-lasting. In other words, it is not necessary for go-betweens who had unproductive experiences to have high expectations of the other. This understanding of go-betweens' dyadic relationships also applies to general dyadic relationships. Landé (1983) mentioned that a dyadic relationship is based on recollecting past experiences, interactions, and future expectations (Landé, 1983, p. 442). These aspects become references for future collaboration and expectations. As such, go-betweens' relationships are always between personal and professional interaction.

Identifying the Bonding Ties of the Go-Between

In its social function, a dyadic relationship creates a close and deep interaction between two individuals, which gives them the flexibility to manoeuvre and build

trust. However, as discussed in the previous section, a go-between as an actor always looks for new opportunities and personal benefits. These personal interests create the perception that a go-between is embedded in wild and uncontrollable relationships. This perception, however, is not accurate. A go-between's social relations and networks are similar to other actors, except that they take into account and consider strong and weak ties. Further, a go-between is not unwilling to eliminate non-potential relations to reach their goals. To build this supportive relationship and network, a go-between needs to have specific mutual interactions that ensure it will end up in sustainable dyadic bonding.

A mutual interaction involves two or more individuals who contribute to specific acts in an almost similar value. In daily practices, mutual interaction⁶⁴ is adopted by Dayak people, such as during working together or *royong* to open a new field under the practice of *balas 'ari*.⁶⁵ A person who receives a good deed will immediately return it to avoid being morally indebted.

The ideal practice of mutual interaction among Dayak is similar to Gouldner's explanation (1960), which classified such interaction as reciprocity that needs to be balanced by people who are engaged in a long-term interaction, as those who fail to do so must be ready to receive a penalty or an unexpected demand. It shows that reciprocity has some characteristics of specific circular interaction and long-term bonding that creates strong ties, and compliance with the principle will have social consequences. This reciprocity is insufficient for a go-between who wants a flexible and sustainable relationship. This means a go-between needs to build bonding beyond mutual reciprocity.

As my fieldwork shows, all go-betweens in Sintang try to build bonding beyond mutual reciprocity in acts that result in indebtedness or *utang budi*, as said in Indonesian. A go-between will offer material and immaterial things that the recipient cannot return in kind. Indebtedness is a debt that cannot be paid. It creates interpersonal bonds resulting from long mutual interactions of service or favour. This kind of bond is everlasting and cannot be severed, thus providing the provider with unlimited access. In this sense, indebtedness differs from the economic concept of debt.

64 The Dayak people do not have a word or phrase to express their gratefulness; instead, they repay others' good deeds through mutual exchanges.

65 *Balas' ari* is one of the social conventions in Dayak society that has the purpose of helping each other by doing some work for others. The individual who gets help should repay through work. This system is always used during swidden-agriculture (*berladang*), building houses, and special occasions. Now, the system is adopted in oil palm settings during oil palm harvest, cleaning the plot, or fertilizing the plot.

Socially, indebtedness creates a manipulative debt. It is not limited to two individuals who directly bond but could drag others, such as their family or group, to also feel indebted. Below is an example of such indebtedness resulting from a close and deep connection:

*Mils paid the education costs of Sudar until he graduated from Untan. His law degree helped Sudar find a perfect job, making Sudar feel indebted to Mils. After that, all of Sudar's achievements in life are considered as part of Mils's favour [budi]. Not only will Sudar feel indebted to Mils, but his family does as well. Sudar knows that Mils's favour cannot be paid; hence he and his family are always ready to reciprocate or **membalas budi** Mils, including when Mils asks him to help to solve the oil palm conflict in the Ambalau sub-district.*

This indebtedness is also faced by actors who have no direct social debts. It is like a domino effect when an individual uses their collection of indebtedness to ask a favour from others who are not directly indebted to him only because they are indebted to others who are indebted to the individual. Below is an example of such a domino effect of indebtedness:

*San has known Djarwo since Djarwo was running for deputy district head. San collected voters for Djarwo and Mils in the Ketungau area as a payment for Djarwo, who had helped him to obtain an education certificate through the national examination for equivalency education programme (**kejar ujian paket**) A, B, and C. This equivalency education programme enabled San to run for village head office, which he won. As a village head, San made Hendrik indebted to him by giving him a village project by allocating development funds. When he was running for district head of Sintang in 2015, Djarwo asked Hendrik to collect voters for him in the Ketungau Tengah sub-district. Although he is not indebted to Djarwo, Hendrik feels he should help Djarwo as a reciprocation or **balas budi** between San and Djarwo.*

The two cases above show that indebtedness arises unexpectedly due to prolonged mutual interactions. However, this only happens under specific circumstances when an individual is forced to accept a favour because they lack the required sources and cannot repay the debt. The idea of indebtedness between two individuals is made possible after multiple interactions. As White (2004) mentioned, indebtedness is a concept used to understand multiple relationships that create bonding between individuals, which, in practice, could drag other relatives, such

as family or group, to feel indebted. Therefore, the application of indebtedness in Sintang appears in two primary forms, as described above.

An individual who cannot repay the indebtedness in monetary value will repay it through other means in order to show gratitude. This may be interpreted as an admission of inferiority. Although the expression of gratitude (*terima kasih*) has no additional value to the payment of social debt, it makes clear the untold contract of indebtedness, which makes those individuals always related through socially 'unrepayable' debt. Further, those people will do goodwill visitation intensively to show their ability and become followers of the go-between. A goodwill visitation (*silaturahmi*) is a moral act of keeping in touch through regular visits or communication with people of higher social, political, economic or cultural standing. While this indebtedness and reciprocation (*balas budi*) creates unbalanced social positions, they help keeping the network solid and sustainable. To some extent, this practice of indebtedness is an effort to keep an individual as a follower. However, it differs from patronage, which lacks loyalty and long-lasting relations.

In the case of a go-between, this idea of indebtedness and repayment of the indebtedness is applied to balance and maintain the dyadic relations of the go-between. The inability to pay back the debt will have consequences, such as disloyalty among the individuals involved. For many actors, including a go-between, this dyadic relationship with the bonding of debt is effectively used to extend power across a range of dimensions.

Providing and using unrepayable debts applies not only to influential figures but also to other actors in their relations. The long-term consequences of an unrepayable debt help a go-between to extend the bonding to build loyalty. Therefore, a simple exchange does not create a strong bonding of indebtedness, as it just gives a go-between limited access. In this light, the application of social debt aims to establish an 'invisible' bonding that a go-between could use whenever they need it to further their interests. In addition, operating in both formal and informal arenas makes them involved. Hence, they must build a more stable and safer network supporting access to information, capital, and other essential resources.

In the context of a go-between, the notion of indebtedness idea has been further utilised across different layers of social structure to create solid networks. Therefore, every go-between in different layers of social structure has always been connected. The similarity of aims often leads go-betweens to use the same type of network. Some go-betweens play more central roles, while the rest play more peripheral roles in understanding how the overall network is shaped. In Southeast Asia in general and Indonesia in particular, the explanation of Granovetter (1973) may be applied to see the strength of weak ties. Granovetter argues that, "one's

weak ties, which are not local bridges, might as well be counted with the strong ties to maximize the separation of the dense from the less dense network sectors” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1370). This idea of weak ties was supported by Epstein (1969), who pointed out that different parts of ego’s network may have different densities. He called those with whom one “interacts most intensely and most regularly, and who are therefore also likely to come to know one another the “effective network”; the “remainder constitutes the extended network” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 10-11). In other words, weak ties can make a network more resilient and adaptive to socio-environmental change.

The idea of weak ties suggests that the relationship has the potential to break up quickly due to low communication frequency and the lack of trust that makes it challenging to develop into a deep relationship. In daily life, for instance, weak ties have minor implications for people, as less trust and frequency of interaction have shaped the mindset of unrelated people with no obligation to do more things with other people in this circle. Meanwhile, in the view of a go-between, these weak ties have additional value in forming more flexible connections, as they make it easier for a go-between to move and manoeuvre with fewer obligations and costs to maintain the relationship. Thus, the process of a go-between connection has been built deeply in the form of indebtedness that results in the strength of weak ties.

In this light, a social-network analysis considers a network as personal capital. As explained by informants in Sintang, this perspective on understanding a network is also applied. At least for a go-between, the network is the essence of social interaction. Good networks will deliver more opportunities, as many people with good networks will transfer or inherit them. Therefore, transferring or inheriting the network will take quite a long time, as it uses the basic process of trust through introduction and attachment that will continue to give social support to other go-betweens until others accept it. Many go-betweens need to transfer their networks to their heirs. Only some heirs of go-betweens have the same capacity to play a similar role. In sum, indebtedness only sometimes creates strong/weak ties, as it depends on unexpected circumstances. It is optional to keep the relationship strong, as it differs from the idea of patronage.

Understanding Go-Between’s Network: Some Illustrations

To explain a go-between’s network, it is necessary to highlight several relationships, such as friendship, patron-client, and personal alliances, with different principles in the initial Dayak social sphere (i.e. a kindred, a longhouse, and a family

unit or *bilek*). The more combinations of relationships a go-between has, the more opportunities they will have to play their role. The connection through a dyadic relationship enables a go-between to work correctly in a network which is then easier to maintain. To understand this, I will present four go-betweens to illustrate different types of networks that are made up of dyadic relationships.

Mils Robi

Throughout Indonesia, relations between bureaucrats, oil palm companies, and go-betweens are often friendly because much of the process of oil palm activities has been recorded in bureaucratic paperwork. In many cases, including in Sintang, bureaucrats and go-betweens often spend years interacting with one another across different sites, which has become increasingly common after the implementation of regional autonomy in 2001. It is a long process to build go-betweens' personal and institutional networks. For instance, Rantau (a Manado man), the director of PT Senaning who domiciles in Pontianak and Jakarta, would spend a half day at the house of the head of Sintang district, *Pak Mils*, when visiting the company's oil palm plantations and office in Sintang. During his career, Mils has held strategic positions in Sintang (two head districts of Sintang for two terms, head of Economics Dept., head of Nanga Ella sub-district for one term, and DAD head for two terms). Since Rantau came to look for land for investment in Sintang, they had to know each other well. Rantau told me, '*Pak Mils* is my old friend'. Although some would shake their heads at such a display of nepotism, the more subtle interactions between Mils (a state bureaucrat) and the go-between of the company are widely recognised and accepted. In this light, the closeness between the two individuals from different institutions has been used by interested actors to create spaces for lobbying and negotiating for their benefit.

A related example of 'backdoor dealing' is when the head of the district – in this case, Mils – preferred to share valuable information about 'the district's free lands' and offered a role as the investment protector (*beking*) to the investors he knew. In return, he suggested that the investors make a tender contract with his nephew's company⁶⁶ (a material provider) to transform the lands into oil palm plantations. The successful dealings between Mils and investors entails a more complex network of go-betweens. As mentioned earlier, in this case, Mils has the authority to approve issuing oil palm permits. As Mils is embedded in specific structures and positions, he can measure the success of the processes. It means that 'positions are network locations occupied by the actors, and a relation between two

66 As informed by his close relative, Mils has a shareholder in the company.

positions is an exchange of opportunity for actors in those positions' (Markovsky et al., 1988, p. 223)

In order to mitigate the element of risk and to smoothen the process, Mils placed his 'friend' in other strategic positions for investment. He chose Henry as the head of the regional environment office and Bulton to fill the Forestry and Estate position⁶⁷ because of their loyalty to Mils Robi and their experience of working in the development program. The three of them were very close. They would spend much time together to drink coffee, share food, or celebrate one another's birthdays. As Mils positioned himself as the centre of the network and had the highest authority in determining the development direction and making the decision and policy of development programs in the bureaucratic sector, it would be easy to camouflage the process as a formal setting.

The relations between these three friends are based on patron-client principles. Actors, such as Mils, exercise powers to influence the processes to serve his interests and that of his partners, and mostly the process takes place in the district government (see McCarthy et al., 2012, p. 561). The decision to place his 'people' in other strategic positions as allies is an example of how go-betweens extend their network and thus provide them with room to manoeuvre, monopolising the network and looking after the process. It ensures that all the networks would complete his actions and guarantee that the formal bureaucratic procedure will be smooth for his clients. In this unequal relationship, Mils and his alliances have a similar interest, i.e. collecting material and nonmaterial benefits, such as power and networks. In this sense, the success of Mils as a go-between with different roles – as an information provider, permit provider, and investment protector (*beking*) – is supported by his solid personal network, which is the accumulation of using various principles of social relationships, namely friendship, kindred/family, and patron-clientship. Through this accumulation, he could nicely extend his network into a more institutional one.

The go-betweens' involvement in an oil palm setting does not stop at the initial process of permits or securing the business in bureaucratic layers. It continues at other levels that involve various actors with different characteristics. Generally, the chain of go-betweens' involvement in oil palm is long and intense. This means each condition in an oil palm setting has profit points for go-betweens to

67 Henry Harapan and Eli Bulton have Batakese backgrounds and are considered 'outsiders'. Their close relationship with Mils Robi is very fruitful for their professional career as bureaucrats and go-betweens. The patron-client relationship between them and Mils had made Mils place them in strategic positions to support his role as a go-between and create a potential network.

be exchanged with different actors in various layers. For instance, go-betweens transfer development ideas to other parties in land transformations or oil palm development to ensure the processes would run smoothly. With a legal permit, the company intends to collect the community lands to be transformed into plantations without causing conflicts. As a new company is considered an outsider, the local community's resistance is always strong against such transformation. To transfer the aims and interlink an 'outsider' with an 'insider', the initiative to involve a go-between comes from the oil palm company. Additionally, the village elites with a strong cultural-political network have chosen to be go-betweens to minimize cultural barriers. Alternatively, in a more complex setting, the deliberation to involve go-betweens from villages is a kind of safety web of networks to cushion the rough process ahead, which is primarily full of friction and conflicts.

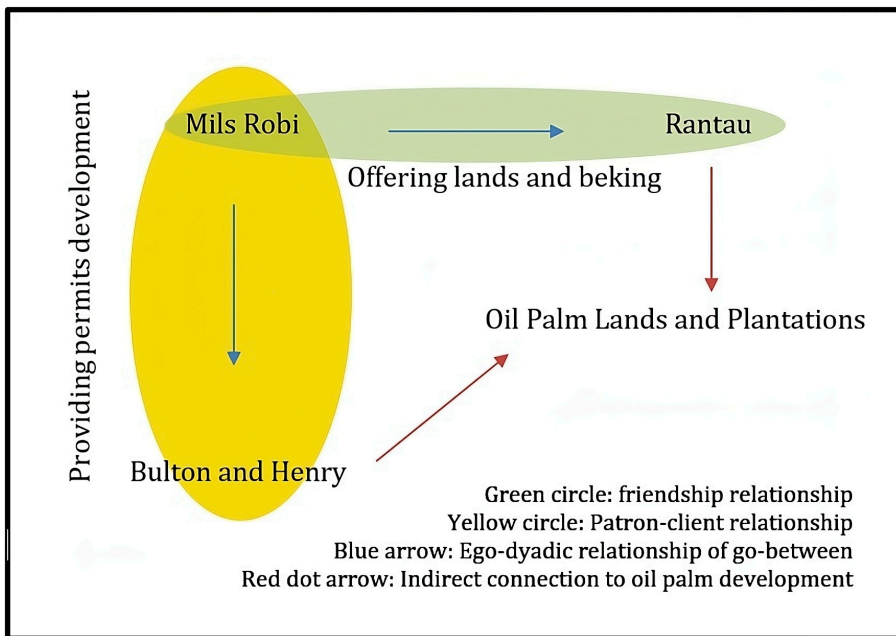


Illustration 4. Mils Robi's Network

Peter San

Go-betweens also have their own goals as active actors. Their involvement in the chain is primarily for their benefit despite their obligation to keep the harmony of the social sphere. Peter San is an ambitious go-between and politician in Ketungau Hilir. To reach his position, he chose the realistic strategy of involving others in the oil palm sector who would develop long-term activities in the future. He was a

village head with many experiences in rent-seeking activities (in rubber, logging, and goods). He worked in connection facilities for the state, market, and community along the river of Ketungau to Sintang. This kind of trajectory and strong characteristics prompted various oil palm companies around Ketungau to contact him to offer him an opportunity or to ask for his services, such as asking his potential influence to transfer 'new' knowledge on oil palm and launch collective action initiatives.

Peter San realised his potential agency and considered that his involvement in the oil palm industry could provide him with more access to potential networks and material benefits and could smoothen his path becoming a successful go-between. Peter San was a village head when PT. CUP and SKL initiated their plan to transform the areas into an oil palm concession in 2014. Having secured the location permit from the district office for the investment, the two company managers directly asked for his 'support' for their program and schemes. In return for his service, the company provided him with many opportunities, such as giving him oil palm plots and his family jobs as well as offering him company development projects. Those offers were given because of his position as village head, solid influences and voices in the community, and past experiences as a boss, local strongman, and shaman.

Although Peter considered the companies to offer a good opportunity, he agreed only sometimes. He always makes space for negotiations and lobbying to expand his opportunities. Aware of his power and strong position as village head, he decided to position himself between the companies' formal and informal structures. So he would not be easy to control. He opted to be an investment protector (*beking*) and development provider, taking a position as an 'outsider' of PT. CUP, however, limited his access to updated information on the company's activities. To resolve this, he placed his family members in the company system, including his son-in-law and brother-in-law, as foreman and security. He also adopted some of the companies' field assistance as foster children to get new updates on the current situation of oil palm development, including everyday information on land occupation, internal and external conflicts (i.e. land conflicts), the company's agenda, and how the companies treated oil palm plants. All this flow of valuable information also influenced his moves as a go-between.

This account of Peter San's role shows that he has developed a strong village-level position. At the community level, this position significantly impacts the community's willingness to accept oil palm as a new commodity. By performing this role, it shows that Peter San is embedded in two different networks, namely the personal network (as part of kinship and community member) and the institutional

network (as head of district and company partner). As a go-between, he actively used both networks to give him more space to manoeuvre, turning all his services into benefits.

Understanding personal network functions and the driving force behind them helps a go-between to offer exchanges. Peter's case, good information and knowledge on company activities could be accessed by norms and values of indebtedness, which is embedded in his relations with his networks. In this light, the lack of access to confidential company information was resolved by placing his kin and 'fictive kin' in the company system. The updated information from his network gave him an advantage that made calculating his moves and decisions easier. Further, the decision to involve his family members as his right-hand persons who worked in the companies added value to his effort to maintain his allies. His decision to involve everyone in the process will likely be part of his effort to maintain his institutional network.

The interrelation between Peter and other go-betweens from different layers of the networks also happened. The long chain of oil palm commodities has forced Peter and other go-betweens to expand their connections to more than one network layer. Although the application of rules in each layer varies and creates a barrier for other individuals outside the network, it is always possible for go-betweens to crosscut ties. For instance, to relieve the boundary of norms and values among actors, some go-betweens adopted a 'family-like' relationship to synchronise unconnected relationships. Peter, who primarily works on the village layer and sometimes at the district level, has engaged with an 'outsider' from Pontianak. To some extent, the extensive relations and closeness would give him more opportunities; besides, this prospective connection helps him to enlarge his network to higher layers (provincial).

To deal with the concept of 'us' and 'other', he decided to bring the 'outsider' into a 'family-like' relationship of foster children. However, he did not hold the complete children's adoption ritual to prevent him from having to fulfill social obligations. His rational choice of having more extensive networks rather than physiological and emotional links triggered the decision. Culturally, it is possible to change an 'outsider' into an 'insider' by applying 'fictive kinship' through family-like relations that persist over time (Nelson, 2013, p. 262). As a go-between who works at the village level, Peter has described the rational choice to locate 'the outsider' as his 'family-like' in his network:

I have an acquaintance, Hidayat, who lives in Pontianak. We met six years ago when he came to the village to implement the village fund from the central govern-

ment. Although he is not Dayak, and I did not do the ‘cultural things’ (rituals) to bind our relationship, he is the only one I consider, like family and son. He has involved me in different types of natural resources projects. Since that day, he has involved me in different projects; he introduced me to his network outside Sintang and helped me to become a more powerful go-between in the Ketungau area. He supported me to be village head for two terms by providing money (worth 200 million rupiahs). He gave me a gift of a solar generator (worth 5 million rupiahs) and 3 million rupiahs in cash to my wife. Using his loans, I could buy trucks, cars, and rubber/oil palm plots. In return, my home is always open for him, providing him with food during his stay here and guaranteeing his project in Ketungau Hilir is safe and well. I have some people here who are close to me because we are kin, but I consider them far relatives because our relationship is inaccurate.

The example above shows that Peter and Hidayat are interested in working as a go-between. They are firmly embedded in a specific network layer, albeit limited to other layers. As a strategy and to support their existence as a go-between, they decided to extend their relationship to ‘family-like’, which brings the institutional network to the personal network and eliminates the barrier of relationship.

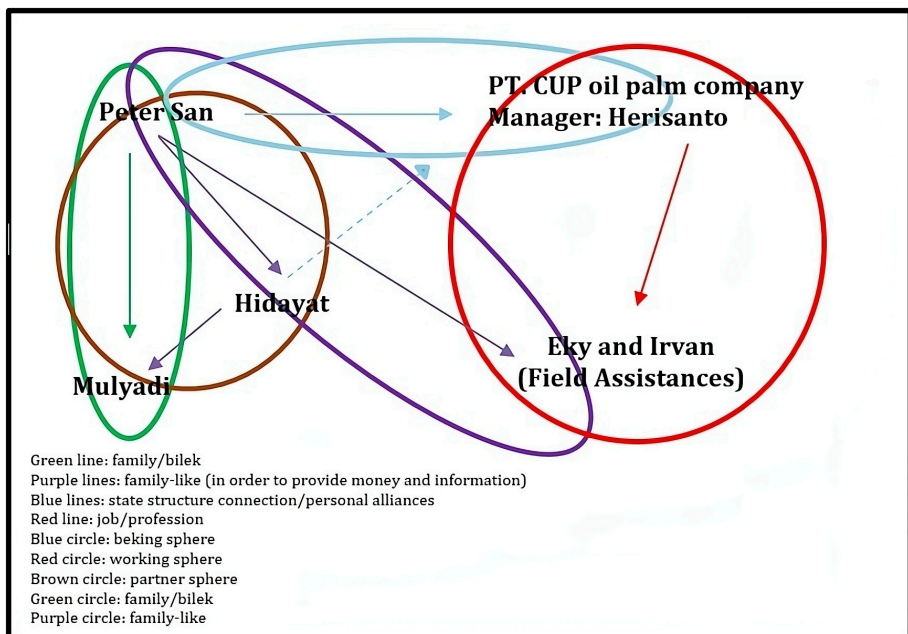


Illustration 5. Peter San's Network

Suharbono

The oil palm development process positions only some actors as government supporters; some take a position beyond the government structure as a counterbalance. An example is Suharbono, who works as an activist and lawyer at *Lembaga Bantuan Hukum/LBH Keuskupan Sintang* (Legal Aid Institute of Keuskupan Sintang). Before joining the LBH *Keuskupan Sintang*, he had a career as an independent lawyer and activist committed to supporting community rights to lands and the environment or narrowing inequality gaps. His involvement in those sensitive issues led him to engage in conflicts/frictions over natural resources during the investment process in Sintang. The different interests of formal and informal actors, which sometimes make negotiations and agreements end in a deadlock, have given space for other actors to play their role as go-betweens.

Suharbono has long-worked with law-facilitating agencies. This work has given him connections to many important provincial and village figures. Taking a position beyond the governmental structure has made him consider having good connections, and he prefers to keep his access to different kinds of networks open. This strategy of choosing networks has led him to explore his ethical connections, especially the Dayak alliance (i.e. DAD, Persatuan Dayak Uud Danum). He is well aware that the similarity through identity and ethnicity remains substantial in building social relationships, such as ‘us’ and ‘other’. Suharbono, who comes from the eastern part of Sintang, studied in Sintang and Pontianak and has spent much of his career throughout Kalimantan – including in Palangkaraya in South Kalimantan and in Pontianak, and Sintang in West Kalimantan. This experience has provided him with good connections to many strong figures with a similar ethnical background in those areas, such as Rafe, head of the Uud Danum Dayak ethnic organisation and Mike Abang, the former head of the regional representative’s council of Sintang/DPRD Sintang.

He continues to extend his networks to institutional networks by working under the Sintang diocese, which gives him more layers to his set of networks. He knows many powerful influencers and strong figures with various religious backgrounds, including Christians and Muslims. For example, he has a good connection with Prist Siau (head of the Sintang parish). His involvement as a conflict mediator has brought him to intensive connections with people with NGO/CSO backgrounds, such as Ricko (head of FAMKI/CSO Sintang) and Ancik (head of AMAN Sintang), which he considers his friend.

Behind the scenes, Suharbono also actively plays the role of a mediator or an 'opposition go-between' between the local people and the oil palm company engaged in conflicts or frictions. However, his involvement in the oil palm development process is often passive, or until people facing a conflict come to ask for his 'professional' help. The conflicts or friction mostly happen in upland areas after land transformation into oil palm have triggered some strong figures in the village to ask for professional help. In this kind of setting, the church as a religious organisation tries to accommodate the difficulties of its congregation and connect them to professionals like Suharbono. The memories and mapping of his friend's profession and expertise have made it possible for Suharbono to make deals with his clients in an oil palm setting. It could not be denied that working under the church as an organisation and institution have enabled him to build and share connections.

On the other hand, Suharbono has involved the local people through the transfer of new knowledge and education that has made them more aware of their rights to oil palm investments. This knowledge and legal support have bound him and his clients in indebtedness with no time limit and provided him with material and non-material opportunities.

He will convince the local people to follow his instructions and calculated movements during the problem-mapping activity. He will persuade the most influential local figures and make a 'backdoor' deal before submitting their claims or resolutions to the government and the company. This 'backdoor' deal has given him more benefits from both the local people and the company, leading to a win-win situation. The professionalism of Suharbono as go-between or *perantara* is genuine.

Suharbono's commitment to protecting the local people and being a facilitator of conflict have removed him from the governmental structure. However, the limited access to government information has prompted him to make individual relationships with people from inside the government. His dyadic relationships with powerful figures do not prevent him from having contact and coalition with his allies.

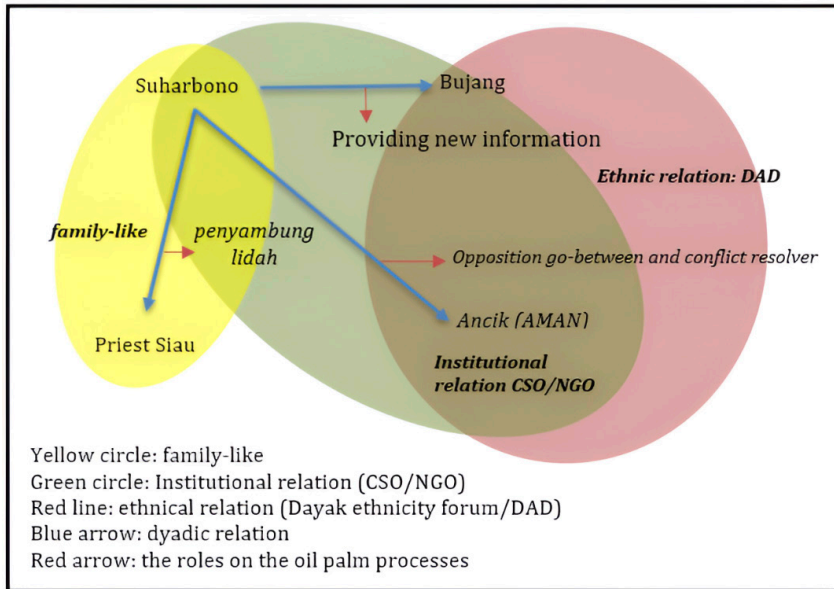


Illustration 6. Suharbono's Network

Yuli

Behind the scenes, Yuli plays the critical role of fruit broker who distributes oil palm fruit from companies and independent smallholders around Sintang to Pontianak. The lack of regulations on fruit transportation and trading and the increasing number of smallholder plots have given her space and the opportunity to play a brokerage role in the palm oil chain. As a woman, she faces more pressure and obstacles in her involvement in the men's world. She must complete his agency the same as male fruit brokers and create a similar network. The process of collecting potential networks is pushing her to make more effort.

Yuli builds good connections with people in different structural layers, from village corporate to state. This collection of various dyadic relationships helps her engage in brokerage activities and expand her roles in the palm oil chain. As a fruit broker, she will make contacts with local smallholders who have independent oil palm plots. Beginning with smallholders in a village in Binjai, she continues to build good networks in other villages, such as Ketungau Hilir and Kelam sub-districts in Sintang and several sub-districts (Nanga Ella, Batang Tarang) in Sekadau district. The initial access to the local smallholders is provided by her family unit (*bilek*) ties, which she continues by creating a dyadic connection with her allies and making many friends. It shows that her close inner circle has allowed her to expand her connection in various social ties.

Making a connection and creating new bonds are two different processes for Yuli. She has chosen smallholders who regularly sell oil palm fruits to her and apply economic exchanges to keep the business running. The process of selling fruits is mainly in direct transactions between broker/trader and client. Therefore, she uses a different interaction with some 'close relatives/family like' through patron-client relations to create financial debt and loyalty and monopolise the harvest fruits. Although patron-client relations are considered costly, the form of close relatives and family-like interaction gives her long-term benefits.

Different individuals and aims of the interaction are two important aspects that build connection and bonding. Another example is the interaction between Yuli and an oil palm company, which is considered full of business. Although it is considered formal, Yuli prefers to apply a dyadic relationship to ensure everything runs well. Without having dyadic interaction, it will be difficult for women to compete in the men's world. For example, she managed to get the oil palm fruit distribution permit by making good connections and personal relations with the manager of an oil palm company. Rather than bringing the relationship into a purely formal/professional space, Yuli has used companies' lack of regulations and capabilities to produce their oil palm fruits and offered to interact in an informal relationship. This understanding of the lack of space/unclear regulations and laws, and personal relations has given her more economic benefits.

Conclusion

Social relations and networks are the backbones of go-betweens' exclusive dealings, negotiations, and actions to complete their roles. Social relations and networks are embedded in a social structure where go-betweens exist. In the Sintang context, the social structure has been shaped by the domination of Dayak culture, which influences everyday interaction and social relationships.

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed the idea of Dayak society's social sphere. According to the discussion, an individual with a Dayak ethnic background is connected to several forms of social organisation, such as kindred, longhouse (*rumah panjang*), and family unit (*bilek*). The idea of kindred has addressed the connection of individuals drawn into genealogies as well as social genealogies. This kindred idea becomes the baseline for developing an individual connection in certain circumstances. Further, the social sphere of a Dayak individual is also formed by the material building of the longhouse. The longhouse has become an important social organisation connecting individuals from different genealogies

as they share similar identities, norms, and values as part of a specific house. These two forms of social relations and connections among Dayak have implications for the broader connections of individuals. Dayak individuals also build close and small connections with others through *bilek*, where they share more than values and norms: cosmic energy (*semenget*) and life or vitality (*ayu*). It makes the connection and relation within the *bilek* intimate and makes others of the *bilek* as 'others'. Under these forms of social organisation, Dayak individuals have constructed their connections and relational boundaries between 'us' and 'others'.

The idea of 'us' and 'others' is manifest in the life of Dayak individuals, although they are already living in a new form of *kampung* and an independent house. It is vital to categorise people as part of 'us' or allies, or as 'others' or enemies. In this sense, the 'us' versus 'others' principle alerts Dayak individuals when connecting with others in dyadic relationships. On the other hand, applying the social relationship principle is very dynamic since Dayak individuals have the right to choose the best position in social relations. When they need to be allies or turn into enemies, or vice versa, those connections and social relationships are particularly important for Dayak individuals to shape their social sphere and to become part of others' social sphere.

In this sense, Dayak people have a different understanding of their social sphere, which includes social interaction, connections and a set of networks possible for an individual to build. The social interaction is to bond the 'outer' world with their own 'inner' world, which leads to more stable and long-lasting relationships. This understanding makes Dayak people cautious and calculating in their interactions with outsiders and avoids other relationships with no connection to their initial social sphere.

Dayak people's interaction often also builds out of a small unit by applying a barometer of intimacy to relationships. The intimacy barometer has to trust individual relationships and connect deeply to the 'us' idea through applying a socio-cultural ritual that can transform the 'relationship' identity. In order to face new frontier situations, however, Dayak individuals explore different social relations and networks that may give them more opportunities. Dayak individuals build personal and social relationships in several forms, such as acquaintances or *kenalan*, neighbours or *tetangga*, friends or *bekawan*, personal alliances in the same institution or employment (colleagues) and a patron-client relationship. Unlike a family unit that places interactions in the bubble of insiders, those other relationships have an in-between position, where 'us' and 'others' are interchangeable depending on the situation. The barometer of relationship intimacy needs to

be applied to both parties involved, which is also helpful to map who is close and who is not.

In the second part of this chapter, I described how go-betweens support their roles and practices to connect with their clients in the process of oil palm. The go-between network is based on personal bonding that builds from a dyadic relationship, allowing them to bring everything formal into more personal and informal acts. Moreover, dyadic relationships bind go-betweens in a specific collection of ties that were used nicely and became part of their networks. It shows that dyadic relationships of go-betweens appear in different forms of connection, such as patron-client relationships, friendship or *kawaness*, family-like, or institutional ties. Each dyadic relationship has a specific appeal to make the ties solid yet flexible, such as indebtedness (*utang budi*), imaginary genealogies, and loyalty. The basic principles of the Dayak social sphere are implemented in go-betweens relationships and networks in Sintang to respond to the majority of Dayak society and the socio-political conditions after the establishment of regional autonomy that contributes to this shaping.

The final section of this chapter showed how go-betweens use these collections of social relationships and networks in everyday practices. Four case-studies have illustrated that the use of social relationships and networks is relatively dependent on the condition of go-betweens. The four cases of go-betweens in Sintang show several combinations of networks that a go-between often uses, namely the principle of a patron-client relationship, kinship/family, alliances, and friendship in his/her dyadic interaction. Each of the interactions has different characteristics that apply vertical or horizontal ties. However, a go-between brings it into a dyadic relationship and creates individual bonding through indebtedness or *utang budi* to ensure the success of their jobs. On the other hand, a dyadic relationship provides a go-between with more flexibility to connect with others. In sum, it shows that relationships and networks are very flexible and unique depending on the individual who uses them. The final chapter will explain the combination of structure, individual characteristics, and social networks found amongst go-betweens in Sintang.

Chapter 5

The Characterisation of Go-betweens

In this chapter I shed light on the features of go-betweens in the frontier region of Sintang that may provide some impetus for the theoretical discussion on go-betweens in the Indonesian context at large and beyond. I will do so by analysing how various aspects, in terms of individual capabilities/abilities, socio-cultural embeddedness, the practices that result from the iteration between them (agency and structure), and the way they interact with others in reaching their objectives or specific interests, shape go-betweens' actions, differences and the commonalities that emerge from these. To a certain point, it reveals similar patterns that underpin the actors' functioning and how they make various aspects of the three dimensions dominant in their practices. This chapter attempts to unravel further the set of commonalities that might lead to the development of a typology of go-betweens.

Go-Between Voices

I was sitting in the car of Djarwo, one of the candidates for Sintang district head, one month before Election Day in 2015. Djarwo was speaking quite openly. He and his followers were explaining the motives and how clients dodged regulations. I was curious about Djarwo, who was a famous doctor and politician originally from Java. Both bureaucrats and activists suggested that I should meet him. The political atmosphere of the regional election in 2015 stimulated go-betweens in the district to enter the public arena to ensure they would get a 'piece of the cake' in the coming years.

Djarwo, who was in his mid-50s when I met him, is about five feet and six inches tall and grey-haired. On this day, he was dressed in a white long-sleeve shirt and khaki trousers. He wears fashionable glasses and dresses like an established and competent politician. Apart from his entourage of people surrounding him, he is also noticeable for the two mobile phones he carries with him. Throughout our conversation and during a changeover of his activities, the phones rang. He switched off some calls, hung up others and promised to call others back later.

There were only three calls in which he needed more time for the conversation. He was speaking to different people from different parts of his life; inclusive of his clients and campaign-funding supporters. He spoke loudly, and everyone in the car could hear the conversation. He talked to the callers about his plan to develop the Sintang area, about available lands and other potential natural resources that could be exploited. He offered profitable investment programmes and promised to make enormous areas for investment available while ensuring investment protection in return for funding his campaign.

When he finished all his phone calls, it was my turn, and he started to speak quite frankly about himself and his involvement in the oil palm commodity chain:

*I have a Javanese background and I grew up in Jakarta. I obtained a degree in medicine from the University of Indonesia in Jakarta and began to work as a doctor in 1986. At university, I actively participated in the Islamic students association (**Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam/HMI**). I know many people in Senayan (referring to the national house of representatives) nowadays because many have an HMI background. After graduation, I served eight years in Sintang as a doctor and fell in love with the region. My profession made me interact with many people from the hinterland, learn their languages and customs, and be adaptive to their culture. Even many of them considered me a family member.*

*After eight years of moving from village to village, I ended up in the Sintang capital and started to work in the district's main hospital. I was appointed as the Public Health Office (**Dinas Kesehatan**) head in Sintang from 1993 to 1997. I obtained my master's degree from the National University of Singapore. After finishing my master's, I was appointed as the head of the Public Health Office of West Kalimantan from 2001 to 2004. My job as a doctor and head of the health office in West Kalimantan province created a new path for me as I started to know many influential figures from different backgrounds. I established personal relations with them and considered them my friends or **kawan**. For the election of 2005, Mils Robi⁶⁸ asked me to join him and run for vice-regent from 2005 to 2010. Our cooperation was successful, and our combination was considered good to represent the kaleidoscope of Dayaks, Christians, transmigrants, and the Islamic Malay people.*

68 Robi was Sintang district head for two periods from 2005-2010 and 2010-2015 (see chapters 3 and 4).

Since I was elected as vice-regent, I started communicating regularly with politicians and business actors in Sintang. I also started to build up connections outside the region, which were not only limited to actors in the political domain but also included people from civil society organisations. Some relationships start from formal interaction as colleagues, business or working partners. However, I learned to bring all relationships as close as possible without putting emotional connections.

*During my period as vice-regent, investments in oil palm increased considerably. It is difficult to map all the actors in the oil palm chain. I tell you, all people who engage in **lahan basah** or place themselves in strategic positions in the oil palm sector are involved. It is an open competition; everyone who thinks that oil palm might be beneficial joins in. The competition starts at a village level around the establishment of oil palm plantations. It continues at an inter-village level, extending to sub-district levels and moving to the district, province, national, and international levels. There is no difference between state officials, non-governmental actors, or villagers. Everyone tries to get a piece of the oil palm cake. It does not even matter whether you are on the side of the supporters or the ones fighting against the development of oil palm plantations.*

Talking about the local situation, during the electoral season, the campaign funding comes mainly from business people. It is not easy to run for a regent without support from investors. The election costs are too high. I used my money to run as a regent in the past election (2010-2015), but I lost everything. I am now selling my upcoming power to collect funding from potential investors by offering them future benefits. Every candidate does the same: We invite oil palm companies to support our campaign. The candidate whom Mils supports has collected more election funds than I. Mils does the negotiations with the firms to ensure the funding flow. The strongest candidate indeed comes from their inner circle Mils, and his clients.

The story clearly shows how Djarwo, from the Sintang district, operates by combining his structural position with his capabilities and his social network to support his election and, more importantly, his role as a go-between among the investor's other politicians and Mils, his patron. It took many years of acting within various social-cultural spheres before he could become one of the most important go-betweens in Sintang. He has a different ethnic and cultural background and grew up with different norms and values. However, his engagement with the

local people and powerful figures gave him almost the same opportunities as the go-betweens from Sintang. This implies that being raised in a specific context and knowing the structures might give go-betweens an advantage over outsiders, although it is not the whole story, and there is far more at stake.

Another example which shows the complexity of the pre-conditions that constrain or enhance people to become a go-between is well illustrated by Djarwo's patron, Mils. When I first met Mils at his place, with recommendations from government officials and his right-hand man (*tangan kanan*) he spoke in the Dayak language to his visitors from the hinterland. While waiting my turn to speak with him, his right-hand man, a young man and a nephew of him, told me about Mils:

Bapak⁶⁹ is a friendly, tough, and ambitious person. He does a lot of good things for Sintang. It is good you are coming today, as he will be in Pontianak for the next five days. He will give you information about oil palm development in the region and his achievements as the former regent. He knows many people in the business sector and is a master at explaining the formal and informal settings to dodge regulations.

When my turn to speak to him came, I followed the young right-hand man into the room where Mils was sitting and invited me to come in. Mils offered me a cup of coffee with sugar. After knowing that I grew up in Java and studied at Gadjah Mada University, he changed his language to Indonesian. Even in his house, Mils dressed formally, wearing a white shirt and long trousers. He wore a fancy and expensive-looking watch and belt. Unlike other go-betweens, Mils only had one handphone, which rang constantly. He answered all calls, and one was from Henry, the head of the Environmental Department in Sintang (*Dinas Lingkungan Hidup*). His *tangan kanan* interrupted our conversation by connecting the callers to Mils three times. While our conversation was in Indonesian, he sometimes used English or Dayak terms to explain himself. It helped that we went to a university in the same city. He shared his perspective on the oil palm chain and development that had taken place in Sintang during his period as regent as follows:

*I call myself a bureaucrat, although I am also a member of civil society organisations. I am a Protestant church member, a member of the Customary Dayak Council (DAD), a businessman, and a political party member. I obtained a bachelor's from the Institute of Home Affairs Governance or **Institute Pemerin-***

69 Bapak is a respectful term for people with a high status or power.

tahan Dalam Negeri (IPDN), which helped me enter the policy scene. I earned a master's degree in business administration from Gadjah Mada University. I do not come from the local elite or a wealthy family (**orang mampu**). My father worked as a priest, and my mother was a teacher. I needed to build my network from below and establish relations with essential people in Jakarta, Pontianak and Sintang. The top network is very closed, and it took me some time before I could enter it. This was only after I achieved a good position in the bureaucracy and showed my true capabilities. Now, I have even become part of the inner circle of this network.

It has been a long journey to develop Sintang as it is today. I did much work to invite investors; I often travelled to Jakarta to negotiate over government funds to develop the infrastructure of this district. I visited the representatives of companies in Pontianak and Jakarta to make deals. I compiled many national, provincial and district regulations to create a safe and comfortable business environment for investors. My efforts to actively invite investors led to many benefits for Sintang and me personally.

Only some of my decisions to develop Sintang were supported by Sintang residents, and some plans were even rejected. For example, my effort to monopolise the flow of investments into Sintang had been rejected by NGOs, CBOs, and some business actors in Sintang and Pontianak, who opposed economic development. I did not feel any antipathy for those people and their voices but instead invited them to the district office and listened to their opinions. I cannot deny that some of them had interesting points of criticism. To them, I offered a good business deal, a position in the government, a scholarship for education, or a monthly income to become my **tangan kanan**. Of course, some of them rejected my offer, blaming me for using bribery, but others agreed and became my allies and sometimes offered me good advice.

The go-betweens in the above illustrations come from and operate in different social structures and contexts. Nevertheless, there are commonalities in their profiles. Both go-betweens, for example, are well-educated and have a master's degree. They took the political route to arrive at the upper echelons of Sintang society. They originate from different backgrounds but have similar skills to understand and use the prevailing norms and values in Sintang to become successful go-betweens. Both started from the bottom and arriving at their current position took a long way. The accumulation of knowledge and experiences by both go-betweens shows

how they can adapt to each situation while always being ambitious in their role as *perantara*, from one position to another.

Their career as important go-betweens in Sintang started after they earned good positions in the bureaucratic system of Sintang. However, the path had been prepared long before and together with individual ambitions, they managed to become even more powerful national actors. Between 2005 to 2010, while both were regents and vice-regents, the flow of new investments into the local region forced them to provide room for the new oil palm commodity in Sintang. The consideration of long-term benefits, particularly personal benefits, shifted their acts from legal to informal. Their jobs, roles as elected government officials, and a large entourage of powerful people and strongmen, created a strong and powerful image. Both Djarwo and Mils established their own business. Together with the construction of a remarkable and large-size house, expensive car and lots of property, that became the ultimate markers of success. In this respect, Djarwo and Mils can be considered go-betweens '*pur sang*'. However, they are just the tip of the iceberg. As data in the previous chapters suggested, go-between features in the new frontier context are far more varied. There are far more routes to follow, and most go-betweens must reach the middle ground and the top. Some might not even regard Djarwo and Mils as go-betweens but as local bosses. Therefore, before elaborating further on the various trajectories of go-betweens in Sintang and their common characteristics, we first need to arrive at a more comprehensive conceptualisation of go-betweens, which will be the main objective of the next section.

Critically Examining Existing Conceptualisations of Go-betweens

The discussions and debates about go-betweens have shown that various gaps in the analysis encompass this complexity of personality traits, interests and their variety of roles. Go-betweens have the main task of developing and organising societies, and as such, they form both facilitative parts of a chain linking two endpoints and points leading to the two ends (Sud, 2014, p. 594). Previous studies portray the intermediary actors as part of the structural dimension in which they are embedded (see Gillespie, 2016; Vel, 2014), emphasising their agency aspects (see Bierschenk, et al, 2002; Moose & Lewis, 2006). Only a few use the combination of those two or involve some network aspects for an explanation (see Stovel et al., 2011; Sud, 2014; Savitri, 2015). Those perspectives have all been used to under-

stand and frame brokerage activities in connecting actors in social, economic, and political systems to access and exploit resources.

Contrary to these previous studies, my research on go-betweens integrates those three dimensions, i.e. structural, agency and social relations or networks. The empirical findings in previous chapters (chapters 2, 3, and 4) show that go-betweens are complex actors and fulfil each condition in this long process of oil palm development and maintenance by exploring their structure, agency, and networks attributes. To grasp a more holistic picture of go-betweens, combining those three dimensions is important to understand better the variety and complexity of the go-betweens in Sintang society, especially from the last two decades to the present.

In the following, I explain each dimension independently and link it to the go-between practices in Sintang before arriving at a combined perspective. Through this combined perspective, I aim to shed more light on the important role of go-betweens in supporting and strengthening oil palm plantation development and maintenance in the Sintang setting while at the same time getting a better grip on who those people are and what they have in common.

Structural Aspects of Go-betweens

Structural perspectives attempt to explain the acts of go-betweens as the result of prevailing norms and values in a society (see Tsing, 2005; McCarthy, 2004). Different forms of social organisations within society allow for the emergence of go-betweens, while go-betweens' opportunities are at the same time also embedded in and constrained by the structure itself. Furthermore, go-betweens' practices are frequently unrecognised and unplanned, placing the activity in black or grey zones between formal and informal activities. This means that go-betweens or mediators appear and usually operate in the empty or at least less ordered and structured spaces of the state (Scott, 1998) or what Davis (2008) calls 'interstitial spaces'.

In the Indonesian context, the emergence of go-betweens rapidly increased after the political transformation between 1998 and in 2001. This situation created ambiguity in the relationship between national and provincial governments and the regional rulers since many go-betweens were involved, but also because the identity of regional rulers became blurred, and new positions were created while old ones became contested. The contestation of power led to the emergence of new interstitial spaces and many actors who tried to get a stake from the newly born opportunities to enhance their power or maximise economic and financial profits. In these settings, most of the go-betweens actively joined in the open competition or played a less visible role in the 'twilight zones' behind the scenes.

This situation not only provided space for go-betweens to emerge and play a part in the game, but it also further legitimised brokering practices: to smoothen the transition process. In Indonesia, the room to manoeuvre of go-betweens to establish themselves in a long-lasting position as intermediaries has often depended on the ruling class's type of apparatus. In the context of oil palm development in Sintang, for instance, many persons within the regional government apparatus are playing intermediary roles by providing important and valuable information to oil palm companies about policies and land regulations by smoothening permit processes for opening up plantations, by channelling money and goods from and to business people and to the ones in charge of power, or by providing safety and security throughout the entire oil palm plantation development process. Although these tasks within the government structure bring quite some benefits, some also move and work beyond the state, sometimes at the same time or even while opposing the state.

On the other hand, changes in the norms and values of society that came along with the far-reaching political and economic transition process often created unfamiliar, uncertain, and continuously shifting conditions at the community level. To some extent, this brings about a strong sense of locality, identity, and mental boundaries of us versus others responsible for creating distrust and unclearness of the importance of boundaries between formal and informal rules that formerly functioned to protect them from ambiguous situations. Under these conditions, cultural leaders, local strongmen, or people from the village council often stand up as advisors or negotiators between the community and the outside world. The power of their embeddedness in specific structural positions brings them even more benefits in these ambiguous circumstances.

The large-scale agricultural transformation in oil palm cultivation in Sintang has also caused a radical shift in the socio-cultural structures of local communities. Implementing a plantation structure with a monoculture-type of plant and rigid commodity chain under company management is something that most villagers are not familiar with, often leading to distrust and fear around oil palm cultivation. Oil palm companies use powerful actors who know well the Dayak cultural values such as shame (*malu*) and life force (*semenget*) to gain the support of local people. In the first and second phases of oil palm plantation development, many village heads in Ketungau and local strongmen took turns in becoming advisor for the company or negotiators in connecting the community members to the company's actors. Kek Salibah, for example, is one of the popular cultural leaders in Ketungau areas who played such a role:

*Kek Salibah's ancestors already held a particular position in the community as a shaman and customary head (**tumenggung**). He is the third generation who has such power. He knows very well the practice of **adat**, and the important values of community and is a decisive decision-maker for the community. He has a charisma that makes everyone allow him to take the lead. He is outstanding in positioning himself within the society and is able to show his **kerampak** (straight forward and harsh) where necessary. In the first expansion of the oil palm company in the Ketungau area in 1995, he was asked by the local government to get involved in the process as the representative of the villagers. He taught the company very basic ideas about Dayak people: how they interact with others, generally within their kindred group and their connection, through **semenget**, with the environment, land, and house. He also told them the importance of rituals and feasts (**gawai**), even though this activity, to some extent, often blurs the boundary between fear and distrust in engaging with new people or new things.*

These basic ideas of the Dayak people's way of living provided the company with the essential information. They helped them develop a specific strategy to approach the villagers and win their acceptance. On the other hand, Kek Salibah cooperated with the oil palm company and contributed to developing trust among some villagers in the oil palm programme. Villagers asked Kek Salibah to be their negotiator or even hand over their communal and private lands to the company based on his advice. His success in convincing villagers to accept the company brought him many benefits. For instance, the company provided him with a monthly income for 35 years, gave him five oil palm plots, bore the travel expenses of him and his core family several times, and granted him lifetime health insurance.

Go-betweens, such as Kek Salibah, were usually able to profit from 'being the one-eyed person in the land of the blind' in various ways. In addition to the compensation by the company for his work, they sometimes persuaded local people to hand over their lands and became a land provider themselves. The process was often not very transparent. In many cases, go-betweens used their power to reclaim other people's lands as her/his own, as they knew precisely individual or communal acts would be controlled to protect shame or *malu* and adjusted by family ties. It would be a shame for Dayak individuals to bring the problem to the cultural leaders, to the *adat* court. In this light, those norms and values protect go-betweens from being engaged in conflicts with others or causing even tensions.

The transformation of the agricultural land into oil palm plantations also had a big impact on the economic dimension of villagers, as it changed a long-standing and rigid socially organised land system generally in the hands of whole clans into one with open competition for everyone who owns capital. However, it also created a considerable gap between the wealthy and poor groups. The commodity chain often led intermediaries and powerful actors to take their position under these new conditions by offering their services, for instance, through buying or transferring the commodity or providing and channelling the related services such as transportation construction and labour. With this new structure in the making, various actors were skilful in adapting by always considering ahead the consequences of other actors' acts and the possibility for them to imitate these acts at different levels. As was the case with *Pak Markus*, one of the local strongmen in Sintang:

Pak Markus has a rough and sharp edged face. He has thin eyebrows and straight hair. His lips are thin, while his eyes are fiery and bloodshot. He has fair skin with Dayak symbol tattoos on his arms. He is only wearing old striped sailor shorts and an old white sleeveless t-shirt. He played an essential role as a land provider for PT. SAM oil palm company during the first phase of oil palm plantation development around his living areas. He is of Dayak ethnicity, a native of the area and has a position in the village structure. His involvement gives him access to information about a new investment program.

In 2008, the initial oil palm development started and thus, the manager of PT. SAM made first contact with him. The manager asked him to support the company's program by being a mediator between the company and local villages, collecting land from the villagers and providing the company with local information. Practicing this role, his main job was to persuade the villagers to agree and be willing to hand over their lands. Although some of the land negotiations failed, because many villagers already got information about the oil palm fraud scheme. This information made some villagers afraid and distrusted the company's oil palm scheme.

*In return for his participation in collecting the land, he earned both material and immaterial profits provided by the company. When the company was entering the second stage (after the first harvest of oil palm fruits or after five years of planting), he was again asked to play another role of being a go-between. In this new plantation structure, Pak Markus has the role of a **beking** (supported by a*

powerful figure) to protect all production processes and conduct conflict management between the villagers and the oil palm company.

Socio-political structures in Sintang have undergone a significant transformation by redistributing power, followed by new policies to open up areas for new investments. From the story of *Pak Markus*, his position in the village structure helped him reinforce his role as a land provider in the oil palm industry. However, it also shows that individual position in a local socio-cultural structure does not automatically contribute to the success of go-betweens throughout the entire oil palm plantation development process. From the profile of *Pak Markus*, it can be concluded that the combination of social and cultural structures is not enough to persuade the villagers to hand over their lands. There are other dimensions of importance for go-betweens to become successful. However, the socio-cultural structures provide a go-between with a better opportunity and better access to the long chain of oil palm development and maintenance process.

In general, the shifting socio-cultural structure allows both individuals and groups to freely engage in different kinds of open competition around land and new agricultural commodities and the related chains for their benefit (see Chapter 4). As supported by the result of this research, the structural dimension is important for go-betweens' practices, as it has opened a new set of roles as set out in Chapter 5. This structural dimension opens new space for go-betweens to act in the development and maintenance of oil palm plantations in the Sintang district. In terms of practices, eight types of go-betweens emerged from the shifting structures. These are (1) Information provider; (2) Permit supplier; (3) Land Supplier; (4) Fruit collectors; (5) Service provider; (6) *Beking* [protector]; (7) Opposing go-betweens; and (8) Right-hand man or *tangan kanan*.

The first three go-between practices are commonly found in the initial process of oil palm development when there is a monopoly of information, knowledge, and access that, to some extent, makes the procedures and regulations vague. The other go-between practices, such as fruit collectors and service providers, mostly appear in the maintenance process triggered by commodity and infrastructure demands and money ideals. Unlike the first five go-between practices that are also limited through the specific oil palm phases, a *beking*, an opposing go-between, and a right-hand man or *tangan kanan* are essential practices in both phases of the development and maintenance process. Their appearance is triggered by social and cultural shortages.

Table 3. Go-between practices

Go-betweens in terms of practices	Shifting structures	Actions	Indonesian Terms
Information provider	Monopoly of information and knowledge, close access (personal connection is necessary)	Provides information of free areas using government maps. Creating room for opportunities, such as investments. Provides academic results as a basis for development.	<i>Penyedia informasi, orang dalam, kenalan</i>
Permit supplier	Monopoly of power, money ideal, unclear procedure and regulations, rigid and difficult process	Makes the negotiation of the permit process smooth, quick, and easier.	<i>Calo, orang dalam</i>
Land supplier	Money ideal, monopoly of information and environmental access, land demand	Provides the required amount of land and numbers of people who are interested in converting their land into a new type of investment.	<i>Broker tanah, calo tanah, makelar tanah</i>
Fruit collectors a. Legal fruit collector: KUD b. Illegal fruit collector: <i>tengkulak</i> , trader or <i>tokey</i>	Money ideal, commodity demand, economic development, and absence of government control	Buys and distributes oil palm fruits from local smallholders to larger fruit brokers or directly to fruit factories.	<i>Pengepul buah</i> Legal: <i>KUD or koperasi</i> Illegal: <i>Tengkulak or tokey</i>
Service providers a. Transportation b. Construction c. Labour or <i>calo tenaga kerja</i>	Infrastructure demand, money ideal	Provides transport for oil palm plants, distributes fruits. Transforms land into oil palm plots and constructs roads, plantations, and new settlements. Transfers ideas of development to local community through empirical evidence. Provides labour to work in oil palm plantations from local communities or outside plantation areas.	<i>Penyedia jasa</i> a. <i>Makelar transportasi, Penyedia angkutan</i> b. <i>Kontraktor</i> c. <i>Calo tenaga kerja, Penyalur tenaga kerja, Agen tenaga kerja</i>

Go-betweens in terms of practices	Shifting structures	Actions	Indonesian Terms
<i>Beking</i> [Protector] a. Political <i>beking</i> b. Bureaucrats <i>beking</i> c. Military or Police <i>beking</i> d. Cultural <i>beking</i> : customary head, local strongmen/ <i>preman/ormas</i>	Lack of governance, power abuse, and absence of government control	Protects the investments. Builds trust between parties to smoothen the process of land clearing, negotiation, and mediation.	<i>Beking</i>
Opposing go-betweens	Environmental movement, absence of law and regulation, social-cultural conflicts and friction, distrust in government	Helps mediation process for conflicting parties. Protects local communities and environment via international donors' programs or state programs.	<i>Preman, Ormas, LSM, Aktivis</i>
<i>Tangan kanan</i> or Right-hand man	Lack of social trust, ambiguity of laws, rules, and regulations	Conducts negotiations with clients of go-betweens and protects the honour and power of go-betweens.	<i>Tangan kanan, Orang dekat, Orang Kepercayaan</i>

Table 3 shows how Sintang-based go-betweens perform a variety of roles. This variety in practice emerged after a shift in structure from centralised to regional autonomy, which drives power distribution that influences the opening of market forces. The new flows of investment into rich regional areas has initiated many extractive industries to make investments, including oil palm businesses. For instance, in the oil palm development chain, the shifting situation and openness of oil palm investment have given go-betweens room to play specific roles such as information provider, permit supplier, and *beking*. In addition, the shifting structure provides a limited contribution to go-betweens' job success in other roles.

From my research in Sintang, I have found that go-betweens are not limited to one space or one kind of practice. They move between different places and spaces. In other words, the new frontier situation in Sintang forms a long chain of oil palm establishment from development, maintenance, and distribution processes. Every post in the chain creates specific go-between practices. For example, some practices can only take place in a district, while others take place in a village or sub-district or between those areas. Certain practices require specific persons

to be go-betweens. However, this does not mean that only the structural aspects provide a go-between with a new space in a new frontier context.

In this sense, the structural dimension only cannot be used to understand the fundamental roles and go-between practices. If we look critically at go-between practices, the success of their jobs also depends on other dimensions, such as specific individual characteristics and the ability to sustain connections, good relationships, and networks.

Agency

In this section, I look at the role of go-betweens from an actor-oriented approach. The studies under this approach enable to take into account the actor's practices that are influenced by the agent's embeddedness in different roles rather than following the structure that exists in society (Bierschenk et al., 2002). This approach stresses the practices of the actors as having a strong influence beyond the structure or by individual capacity. Other studies that focus on agency take it further by considering go-betweens as skilled people, having a range of competency and genuine personal characteristics along with a flexible identity as their mode of operation (Mosse & Lewis, 2006). Both literature and the results of this research show that there are other things besides the structural aspects that give go-betweens an opportunity to exist and have specific roles in society, and that other things are agency aspects, or I call them individual characteristics.

Agency, however, requires specific characteristics to differentiate one individual from the other. To some extent, the characteristics have been achieved by individuals through long learning and experience processes and are presented as if they were natural or ascribed characteristics. These achievement characteristics are important for go-betweens to shape their images as professional, skilled, and competent people who are adaptive to many kinds of situations and conditions. The personalities of go-betweens give additional values to support them in long-lasting jobs and roles. In this sense, the collections of agency aspects also determine the competence of go-betweens.

In their professional career, a go-between is always required to have a complete set of individual characteristics that make it easy for them to do some moves and manoeuvre to complete their jobs. Moreover, go-betweens' jobs are located in between spaces between formal and informal, requiring them to meet and connect with people from different backgrounds. These difficulties make this role very specific only for competent and skilled people. It is rather difficult for ordinary people who lack individual characteristics to play a go-between role. To do so, go-betweens will always improve their individual potency and capability through

new experiences, status achievements, and shaping and reshaping their personality.

The aspects of agency or individual capacity provide go-betweens with a new chance and additional power, especially for those who have a lack in benefits in the structures in which they are embedded (i.e. power and position) and have a low to middle range network. There are minimum requirements that go-betweens need to possess: being a risk taker, multilingual, multiple identities, flexibility and sweet-talking. These five characteristics determine the general capability of go-betweens to accomplish their jobs successfully. This is nicely illustrated by Edy, one of the go-betweens in Sintang who works in the Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) as head of division or *kepala bidang* (middle range position).

*Edy has very good skills in communicating with people from different backgrounds. He offers good information of development planning especially in the oil palm sector to his clients. He also channels his clients to important figures in Sintang or represents his clients in negotiations. To fulfil this role, he always uses the important attitude of Dayak and Malay ethnicity, courtesy and lip service in sensitive and personal discussions without hurting other people's feelings and **harga diri** (honour). This also keeps his client in a good mood. By doing so, he manages to negotiate smoothly and strike a good deal.*

Working in a state office makes him interact with various people in the government and non-governmental sectors. These interactions make him able to use different languages. For instance, during his meeting with local NGOs he used the language of the activists to express his understanding and to respond to certain issues. This is part of his capability aimed to outmanoeuvre them. He changed into a completely different person when he started to interact with other actors in the business sector. He used business knowledge and language by repeatedly mentioning the outcome and profit of the development program.

Edy's individual characteristics and other related aspects enable him to be a successful go-between. His ability to adjust to situations and the person he is talking to is beneficial in negotiations or in channelling unrelated persons. Edy's self-development process, however, is also influenced by other aspects such as his position that provides him with more space in oil palm development and allows him to know many people.

The lack of basic and necessary individual characteristics prevents an individual from becoming a go-between. This happened to Mulyadi (32 years old) who

failed to become a go-between because he lacks the primary characteristic such as flexibility and the audacity to take risks. His father (Peter San, 57 years old) who often served as a go-between in the first and second phases of oil palm development processes explained his son's incapability:

*Since Mul was in senior high school, I kept telling him to take over my job as **perantara**. To prepare him, I taught him how to become like me. I usually involved him in my regular activities of rent-seeking, let him participate in negotiations with my regular clients, or asked him to join while I had some private meetings with company officials. I showed through practice the way of conducting effective **basa-basi** and sweet-talking with people or clients without having to appear that I was licking their boots. I kept telling him to always change his languages and identity depending on the person he is interacting with.*

*To prepare him as a go-between, I even asked him to stay with one of the important **perantara** in Sintang who is also my foster brother (**saudara angkat**) and I asked Mul to observe his acts carefully and learn from him. Within two years he could naturally copy and practice it, and it started to become naturally part of his characteristics. Although, in my opinion, Mul was not as flexible as me, he was often too arrogant and egoistic which sometimes made others feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, in some situations he often seemed too rigid and did not listen carefully to his client's demands. Sometimes I felt shame (**malu**) towards my clients. In very crucial moments, he often could not decide about taking risks, and hid behind me. It happened almost 5 times during negotiations with an oil palm company for service provider jobs. He could not make his own decisions about the best moves to smoothen the negotiation process, and his doubts always hindered him from taking risks. I am quite unhappy with him when he does not want to learn to take risks and be flexible, I cannot see him become a **perantara** (go-between).*

This anecdote indicates that there are minimum requirements which need to be fulfilled by an individual to succeed as a go-between. It also shows that individual characteristics can be learned, transmitted and copied by others. Although, as this case also shows, not all individual characteristics can be learned successfully and adapted as a personal characteristic.

Furthermore, some go-betweens, who mostly have bright and successful careers often also have some supporting abilities that are not easy to learn, such as charisma, ability to show their *kerampak*, and good at personal positioning. This

is shown by several go-betweens who are renowned in Sintang district as slick, or skilled go-betweens, such as Mils, Djarwo, Akisma, and Bujang. *Kerampak*, for example, is a characteristic commonly used by go-betweens to actually confront others through physical or verbal acts or by gestures such as standing up for themselves where necessary. However, the use of this behaviour should consider the best timing for more powerful effect. The ‘opposing go-betweens’ in particular are well-known for their use of *kerampak* by taking side against oil palm development in general. In this sense, the *kerampak* characteristic helps individuals or groups to emphasize their position that is often on a different track from other actors. In other words, *kerampak* behaviour could provide room to manoeuvre during negotiations.

Table 4. Individual characteristics to support go-between’s roles in development and maintenance of oil palm plantations

Individual characteristics	Details	Minimum requirement	Who needs to have these characteristics
Charisma	Achieved by having a lot of experiences in interacting with different kinds of people.	Supporting characteristic	<i>Beking</i> , opposing go-between
Basa-basi/ Courtesy	Cultural understanding of Dayak and Malay norms and value so as to be able to explicate indirectly and protect others from <i>malu</i> or ‘what other people think’ and guarantee long-lasting interactions.	Supporting characteristic	<i>Beking</i> , permit supplier, information provider, fruit collectors, land supplier
Risk-taking	Capacity to move and maneuver and be brave in the decision making process.	Basic characteristic	All go-betweens
Kerampak	Combination of being brave, vocal, harsh, and uncontrollable as unique cultural characteristics that only specific people have.	Important characteristic in the case of Sintang (particularly) and Indonesia (generally)	<i>Beking</i> , opposing go-betweens

Individual characteristics	Details	Minimum requirement	Who needs to have these characteristics
Multilingual	Capability to translate and understand different kinds of languages, not only national/ethnic languages but also languages that are used by actors from different backgrounds.	Basic characteristic	All go-betweens
Multiple Identities	Combination of experiences, roles, and personal traits to represent their image in relate to others.	Basic characteristic	All go-betweens
Personal Positioning	Ability to understand situations, positions, and client's moves and express this understanding through undetected gestures.	Supporting characteristic	<i>Beking</i>
Flexibility	The range of individual acceptance, coping, and movement in doing or responding to changing circumstances within social interactions with others in innocuous [inoffensive] ways.	Basic characteristic	All go-betweens
Sweet Talking	Process of keeping the interaction flow fluid through lip service.	Basic characteristic	All go-betweens

Table 4 shows the main personal characteristics of go-betweens in Sintang. Some of the characteristics have already been mentioned by other scholars to explain the performance of brokers, intermediaries, and local strongmen. For example, charisma (Hughes-Freeland, 2007; Werbner & Basu, 1998), multilingualism (Buriel et al., 1998; Weisskirch & Alva, 2002; Morales et al., 2012), and multiple identities (Kang, Sklar & Johnson, 2011; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Meanwhile, in the context of Sintang, there are specific characteristics that are shaped by the cultural identity of the Dayak people, such as personal positioning, being straight forward and harsh [*kerampak*], or small talk [*basa-basi*], which are based on norms and values of Dayak society as the foundation for most social interactions and relationships. The process of achieving these traits by go-betweens has often been neglected in studies and explanations of go-betweens. This research shows that these char-

acteristics are not given but created and achieved from long time of experience, through trial and error. The long process of learning and adapting would make those individual characteristics seemingly natural and already embedded in go-betweens' personality. That is why not all people can become a go-between, though many forms of individual characteristics can be learnt.

Not every go-between possesses a complete set of personality traits. In fact, most of them only own some of the characteristics. The limitation of individual go-betweens to achieve specific characteristics leads them to use different combinations to support their practices. In terms of agency, individual characteristics are very specific and personal. Due to the fact that they have only a limited set of specific agency aspects, go-betweens need to compensate this by making use of their knowledge of structural aspects such as norms and values, social organizational principles and the use of symbols such as black magic and witchcraft or by building a strong supportive network.

Networks and Social Relationships: Ties and Interaction

Go-betweens are involved in a vast sphere of activities in oil palm cultivation that makes this actor essential. Not just because of their number but also their sophisticated form of social organization. Their relationships and interconnections with many potential actors can be observed as a solid network, where individual action is enabled and constrained by the embeddedness into larger networks. Although, previous studies (see Lindquist, 2017; Savitri, 2015) that focus on brokerage acknowledge and even point out the importance of social networks for their functioning, they often do not give a full account of it that allows for a better understanding of the strong influence of networks on the emergence of go-betweens and the successful accomplishment of their jobs.

Networking itself can be understood as a process of bridging and bonding the participation of each individual into a collection of social ties and interactions amongst them (Law, 2002; Mosse & Lewis, 2006). The profiles of go-betweens outlined in Chapter 5 show the specific relationships that are key for go-betweens' entry into brokerage activities, and the further use of the networks to channel their work. In general, the main idea of relationships for people in Sintang stem from two different lines of thinking. The first is more or less based on the pre-existing ties related to the group organizational principles that are underpinning social relationships within Dayak society such as the family, (ancestor) house and community domain. The second is based on the individual capacity to break away from the limitation of being part of a group through creating their own ties that are based on a mixture of relational principles, such as patron-clientship, friendship

or *bekawan*, alliances, or colleagues (professional or in the informal scene). These individual ties provide more flexibility and freedom to manoeuvre, move, and take decisions to support their life as go-betweens. In line with an other study (Takata & Inoue, 2017), I have termed these relations ‘personal dyadic ties’.

The personal dyadic ties of go-betweens shows explicitly how and with whom the go-between regularly interacts in their daily life or how they choose a person to be involved. As a professional, the go-between already has several names of who they deem suitable as their ally to support their specific roles. These personal dyadic ties build up a feeling of closeness and blur the rigid boundaries and alienation feelings from the structural domain of Dayak social relationships. To build such interaction, a go-between usually applies different social relationship principles, which are based not only on the person itself but also on the situation, condition, time, objections, and location. Shifting from one tie principle to another is crucial to be conducted smoothly and fluidly to ensure the mediation and negotiation runs well. The go-between is understanding of the strength of personal dyadic ties that could be used to manipulate their jobs, make them often add specific acts in purpose such as using particular gestures, language, or face mimicry to address the importance of the relation. An example from Sintang is that of Peter San, who actively took part in oil palm development in Ketungau Hilir since 1995 and became a village head during 2012-2017. In April 2014, he transformed some areas in Ketungau Hilir into oil palm plantations. He plays several roles for CUP company, such as land supplier, labour supplier, and *beking* while applying different principles of social relationships.

He often uses kinship principles to collect land, as the tenants addressed the dyadic relation and targeting landowner from the same family roots as he is. Addressing the connection between himself and landowners makes it easy for him to persuade them and steer clear of direct rejection. Furthermore, this move helps him gain support and build trust in what he is doing and even reduce his targeting awareness of oil palm conflict in the future. To some extent, within a month, most of his family who owns lands in the future company concession area has handed over their lands and agreed to follow the scheme offered by the oil palm company management without many questions. Without doubt, this action was followed by other people who also own lands in the company concession area. In this sense, the family is indirectly of help to bridge Peter San with other villagers who own land. Unluckily, until mid-2015, the land payment had been delayed. Many landowners who are not part of his family complained about the late fee. Even some of them have openly spoken of their distrust of him. Without Peter San’s request, his family gives him the best protection to the scenario that has not run smoothly

through counter argument [*bemalu*] by saying it was not his fault but the company's. They gave the social protection until the company made the payment for the lands.

Peter San also plays the role of labor service provider for the same company. In completing his roles, he prefers to use the principle of patron-client relationship with the labourers, although many of the labourers are related to him. He argues that the patron-client relationship helps him to address power, obligations, and loyalty on specific dyadic relationships between him and the labourers. In his opinion, the decision to use such connection was excellent, considering the expected consequences in everyday life and effectively building up the professionalism of managing people on his client's side.

Peter San's involvement in the process of oil palm development can also be seen in other roles. His position as village head forces him to be a *beking* (protector) and a negotiator between the villagers and company. On one humid day in July 2015, I remembered a burn-land case around CUP oil palm plantation. It was caused by the slash-and-burn activity to open land for swidden agriculture. It caused fire damage to around 30 Ha that burned the new oil palm plots of the company, which led the company to threaten the villagers with legal action. To solve this problem, he applied the principles of being a family group who share *malu* to protect villagers from significant loss. On the other hand, to handle the company, he was applying *bekawan* [friendship] principles to speak personally and negotiate as a *kawan* with the company managers.

The experience of Peter San shows the application of different social relationships principles that go-betweens use alternately from time to time to maintain go-between roles. In broader cases of go-betweens in Sintang, the application of using social relationship principles could vary from one go-between to others, but they are like in the case of Peter San often based on dyadic ties. In this sense, these dyadic ties are the key to becoming a successful go-between. It means the collection of personal dyadic ties could provide a go-between with a potential network.

At the centre of a potential network are different network structures and social relationships, situated between bonding – that represents a high degree of connectedness with small personal groups – and bridging which is associated with a range of links with outside personal groups that represent an open diversity of networks that encourage the search for connections and access to new knowledge and information (Ramirez et al., 2018, p. 62). As such, the function of personal dyadic ties of go-betweens is beyond the ties itself, which is not only to connect individuals but also to provide access to natural resources, information, knowledge, or even protection. In some cases, personal dyadic ties determined the

role-play of go-betweens that are composed of dense personal dyadic ties, referred to as ‘bonding’. In the go-between case, the idea of bonding itself lies in the ability to establish and impose common rules and norms because network members have the power to decide who joins and who is excluded in the entire acts (Coleman, 2000). The significance of the bonding feature is facilitated through a common bond that allows an individual to make greater investment in others and predicts individual behaviours. In contrast, bridging in a go-between context is emphasized to a far greater degree by the importance of linking with outside of the closed groups to access necessary information and knowledge through a strategic position in network.

The application of the two concepts of bonding and bridging helps go-betweens to fulfil their roles in oil palm practices. In the process of performing and maintaining their roles, go-betweens in Sintang have generally four different types of connections that are based on bonding and bridging, referring to the way these relationships function in providing go-betweens with access to other persons and/or essential goods. The four different types of connections are not a black and white division but form a model of a dialectical process. The dialectical process can be analysed as an interrelated process as a consequence of complex structures within a new frontier and other dimensions such as flows of agency and dynamic social networks. In this sense, go-betweens are required to always consider and respond to the best set of social relationships and ties to support their actual acts in an oil palm context.

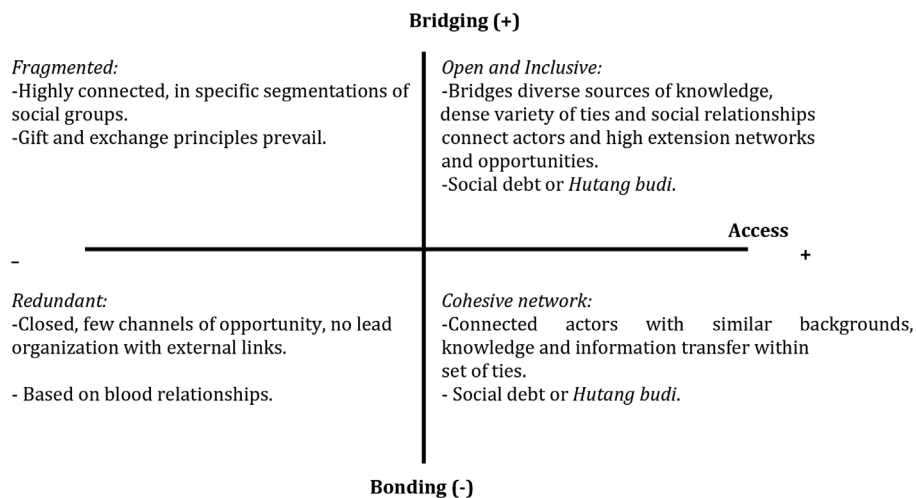


Illustration 7. Potential go-between's social relations and ties in the oil palm context of Sintang (adopted from Ramirez et. al., 2018, p. 62)

As the illustration shows, there are four different social relationships and ties that are often applied dialectically and shared by go-betweens and other actors in certain conditions and situations that determine their roles and acts: (1) 'Redundant' refers to the connection of an individual to their cultural position as a member of society through kinship or a specific social organization such as a kinship house. The interconnection of an individual within an organization is very strong. A go-between is not considered as an independent entity but a part of a group. (2) 'Fragmented' refers to a high connection between actors within specific fragmentation, although the participation is limited. A go-between starts to expand their connection beyond their embeddedness in a specific form of kinship or house by making a dyadic interaction with other people, in other forms of social organization such as patron-client, friends, and alliances. (3) A 'cohesive network' provides different ties of relationships and connections, although the bridging is limited to only those with a similar background, knowledge, or information. All the connections are bounded by a specific sphere that allows a go-between to have a specific path and role. (4) 'Open and inclusive' involves various actors with different backgrounds, knowledge, and complex relationships. It gives a go-between the best ties to manoeuvre. The ideal go-between has ties in all four dimensions and can easily move from one dimension to another and can use not only the ties from the various dimensions to accomplish his tasks but also to connect people across the various dimensions.

Besides the social relationships and ties that are built personally by individuals, there are other forms of ties that are cross-cutting ties. These cross-cutting ties often provide beneficial opportunities to those belonging to less powerful or excluded groups (Narayan, 1999, p. 1). However, in connecting to other people, there is a certain limitation for individuals or groups to extend their connection through cross-cutting ties. Within Dayak society, these cross-cutting ties apply under the concept of *bekawan*. It positions other individuals into 'not too far and not too close' relationships and ties. The *bekawan* adjusts the indirect connection of other individuals from outside their personal network who are still related to the density of their personal network.

The collection of relationships and ties within a go-between's personal network provides a new window to understand the roles of go-betweens in the Indonesian context. The use of networks and social relations do not only make everything run smoothly and fast, but to some extent it is also possible to help go-betweens to create new rules (rule-makers) to support their goals. The accumulation of social relations and networks provide individuals with the flexibility to engage in an unexpected movement between formal and informal contexts. Further, it gives

go-betweens a new opportunity to continue to play their roles. It means personal networks and social relationships are both essential and dangerous that need to be maintained well. However, relationships and networks cannot function effectively without the support of the other two dimensions, structure and agency.

The Go-between's World Considered Across All Three Dimensions

The particular explanation of each dimension in the previous sections shows that specific conditions lead to various go-between practices. While each dimension could be independently abstracted to analyse the functioning of go-between practices, which is commonly addressed by other studies on brokers and intermediaries, a comprehensive picture of the presence and roles of go-betweens in the new frontiers of Sintang is needed to encompass all three dimensions of structure, agency, and social networks and to look at interrelations between them. Integrating those three dimensions (structure, agency, and network) could address the shortage of one dimension to support go-betweens in playing their roles smoothly and successfully.

The narratives from the previous sections highlighted the strength of each quality that makes a go-between able to act, function, and exist in a new frontier context. However, if we look more critically, it implicitly combines three dimensions, for example, in the story of *Kakek Salibah*, Peter San, and *Pak Markus*, who became a go-between. All three apply a set of relationships to collect land. For instance, the story of *Kakek Salibah* shows his strong position within the community, as he was the customary head. The power in social and cultural relations led the company to contact him in the first place, not as a land provider but as a *beking* to protect the company's practices in the areas. It implies that what *Kakek Salibah* did was not only driven by the company's aims but also by his will.

The position in a specific structure also provides him other access to resources and power. During our interview, he stated his other objective 'the land in this area is unfertilised, and most of it is peatland that are difficult to manage for swidden agriculture. At that time, many youngsters had graduated from senior high school. They did not have a job, and it was an excellent opportunity for them and my family to work as an employee in the company' (*Kakek Salibah*, interview). Realising these objectives was a long-term process. He used his charisma wisely to attract followers and villagers to agree with the investment scheme. Understanding the norms and values within the society that protects personal and family honour and

how the relationships between individuals and groups are fragile, he kept doing *basa-basi* (small talk) to ensure no one became offended. He moved carefully to transfer and interpret both company and villagers objectives.

It is necessary to use simple and plain language for both parties to prevent a lack of power and knowledge. All of his moves always try to put in perfect timing and place, or in other words, a good positioning, while being a *penyambung lidah* (intermediary). Without overthinking the risks, he must constantly change his identity as a company client (*orang perusahaan*) and villager. To accomplish these acts is only possible by having a good position within the structure as well as strong individual capabilities. On the other hand, all his actions are based on his perfect dyadic relationships with other actors, and he nicely puts on different relationship principles. However, he had a limitation of relationships primarily located at village levels that limited his access to more expansive workspaces.

The combinations of three dimensions are also found in the story of Peter San and Pak Markus. However, the domination of the elements is different. Pak Markus, for instance, has limited access to the strategic position in the village; meanwhile, his connection is relatively more comprehensive, reaching both Sintang and Sekadau districts. As an open and *kerampak* person, he usually takes higher-risk jobs; he is also a go-between with little charisma. Meanwhile, his *kerampak* characteristic, to some extent, brings others into fear of rejecting him.

The broader connections he builds by playing a role as go-between makes him close to many company officers, including the manager. These good relations with the company officer made it easy for him to build professional and personal relationships with the vital government officers in the sub-district and district. The case of Pak Markus shows the domination of the network dimension and his connection beyond the village level. It also happens with Peter San, who has a broader relationship with people from different backgrounds, such as NGOs, government, companies, the local community, and other intermediaries in Sintang. As a go-between actor, he is considered to have complete individual characteristics. His lack is only his capacity to have multiple languages that stop at the local language and Indonesian. In the last few years, he had a perfect position in the village that made him build good relations and contact with people outside his place.

To some extent, those examples show different combinations of the three dimensions. Even the space those go-betweens use is limited at the Sintang district and village level. Understanding the excellent picture of how a go-between uses three dimensions to fulfil their roles brings us to look back at the first stories I provided in this chapter, the stories of Djarwo and Mils. Both actors combine

the three dimensions perfectly, making them strong go-betweens in the district. The connection they built is extensive, and they connect to people in the village, sub-district, district, provincial, and national that, to some extent, are directly connected to international parties. They were also supported by their individual characteristics, background and their long experiences. Djarwo and Mils have always succeeded in being a go-between, as they can use their power to reach their most significant personal aims. Their direct involvement is limited only to essential parts of their job. They will use their hand to handle it. Meanwhile, other parts of the jobs that are considered unimportant and give few benefits will be transferred to their *right-hand man* or shared in their circle of go-betweens.

From the stories described above, the possibilities for go-betweens to exist and play important roles in oil palm development lies in combining all three dimensions and their intermingling. It means one dimension is related to other dimensions, making it necessary to see all dimensions. It could be said that these three dimensions are crucial components to dive into a go-between's roles. This condition shows that specific acts do not determine a go-between's move since these operate by a set of patterns that combine all three dimensions, including individual potency, a set of structures, and relationships and networks embedded within the structure. As Table 5 shows, each of the dimensions is related to another.

Table 5. Potential roles of go-betweens in oil palm development and maintenance

Specific roles or persons	Individual Characteristics	Structure	Social Network	Agency
<i>Beking</i> , opposing go-betweens	Charisma	Norms and values, political-cultural competitions	Dyadic relationships in the form of vertical interaction with entourage, and applying a patron-client relationship	Influencing villagers and investors, based on those actors' vulnerability
<i>Beking</i> , permit supplier, information provider, fruit collectors, land supplier	<i>Basa-basil</i> Courtesy	Norms and values, interpersonal relationships, social sanctions, fragile social relationship and bonding	Horizontal relationship through ethnic network and personal alliances	Knowledge, negotiating skills Leverage to enforce and influence other parties

Specific roles or persons	Individual Characteristics	Structure	Social Network	Agency
All go-betweens	Risk Taker	Institutional support (state, market, and society), open space and competition (to do maneuver and negotiation), socio-cultural shifts, unstable condition and situations, provision of infrastructure (including commodity chain)	Tactical relations with various actors (state officials, investors, local strongmen, and civil society groups) through the application of the kinship network, the <i>kawanness</i> relationship, personal alliances, professional connections, and the <i>adat</i> institution	Access to influential authorities who have the potential to protect, help, provide, and enforce the actors involved, influence policies, mediate conflict and friction over oil palm practices, and facilitate a negotiation if problems arise
<i>Beking</i> , opposing go-betweens	<i>Kerampak</i>	Absence of trust, social sanctions, lack of power	Tactical relations with specialists to resist and counter that often use the embeddedness in kin networks, citizen participation in social activities and accountability mechanism, and connection to civil society groups	The use of bluff effect to put pressure on the other actors Effective means and repertoires of protest and negotiation
All go-betweens	Multilingual	Absence of knowledge and information, uncertain law and rules, new form of social construction, socio-cultural and environmental transformation	Horizontal relationship under the use of kin networks, personal alliances, or ethnic networks (kindred)	Knowledge, negotiating and translation skills

Specific roles or persons	Individual Characteristics	Structure	Social Network	Agency
All go-betweens	Multiple Identities	Norms and values, ambiguity of identity, interpersonal relationship	Dyadic relationship with personal alliances under the characteristics of friendship and <i>kawaness</i> ; or kin networks	Knowledge, influencing skills, negotiation capability, and legitimizing discourse
<i>Beking</i>	Personal Positioning	Norms and values, structural position, having diverse interactions, and vast experiences, knowledge, and information	Relations with other groups by knowing the interaction that applies in ethnic networks (kindred, long-house or village based) or other institutions	Further alliances with the other actors (state, civil society organizations, politicians, and powerful actors)
All go-betweens	Flexibility	Vulnerability of the other actors, absence of knowledge	Tactical relations with variety of powerful actors	Further alliances with various actors and a new opportunity to gain the power of legitimation and access to a new development program Able to follow the market force and do effective negotiations
All go-betweens	Sweet Talking	The application of strict norms and values, social sanctions, interpersonal relationships	Horizontal relationship within ethnical network	Access to influential actors who are able to provide opportunities, information, and protection

The table above shows that each individual characteristic is not an acted expression, but rather part of a pattern formulated by the combination of structure, agency, social relationships and networks. The combination of characteristics is

enacted in specific roles of go-betweens in the context of oil palm plantations. Risk taker, for instance, is not only a go-between's act but a pattern that combines the individual ability to be brave to take risks and apply them through the support of institutional organizations at a specific space and time. This is followed by maintaining a cohesive and fragmented network embedded in dyadic social relationship. Another example could be seen in multiple identities, as a set of individual flexibility formulates structural gaps that determine the identity, norms-values, and interpersonal relationships through alliances, friendship, and kin networks. From those two examples, the three dimensions of structure, agency, and social networks drive a pattern beyond specific actions go-betweens take. The lack of one dimension will influence go-betweens' real possibilities and performance in their interactions. Indeed, the decision to use a particular set of actions will be determined by the interconnection between those three dimensions that would appear in a specific pattern that leads us to arrive at the features of go-betweens in Sintang.

My analysis of go-betweens in a new frontier context is based on the understanding of all social dimensions of go-between practices in Dayaks, which is composed of social groups rather than individuals that determine the norms (i.e. attitudes, beliefs, identities) and values (*malu*, *semenget*) as well as access to opportunities, resources and power. Moreover, relationships are not based on communal interaction but on individual dyadic interaction. It allows individuals to make crosscutting ties to ensure access and limit the lack or gaps derived from Dayak social structure. In the context of go-betweens, crosscutting ties are often a bridge to ensure the intermingling of the three critical dimensions (structure, agency, and network) works properly. Crosscutting ties have the characteristics of being dense and voluntary, though not necessarily decisive. It helps to connect people with access to different information, resources, and opportunities. In this sense, crosscutting ties can be a social relationship that extends indirectly due to direct ties. For instance, to hire workers on a plantation, the company does not need to find them alone. They use the hand of Peter San to be their labourers' provider. Meanwhile, Peter San uses his connection to many ex-plantation workers by contacting them and telling them he needs workers for new plantations. The former workers in oil palm plantations would find people who were willing to work in plantations. In addition, as individuals get to know others from different spheres than themselves, it is less likely for go-betweens to have a picture of their relationships. It will grow into new connections and allies that support go-betweens jobs. The visual of the interconnection of those three aspects (structure, agency, and social relationship) may be seen in the diagram below:

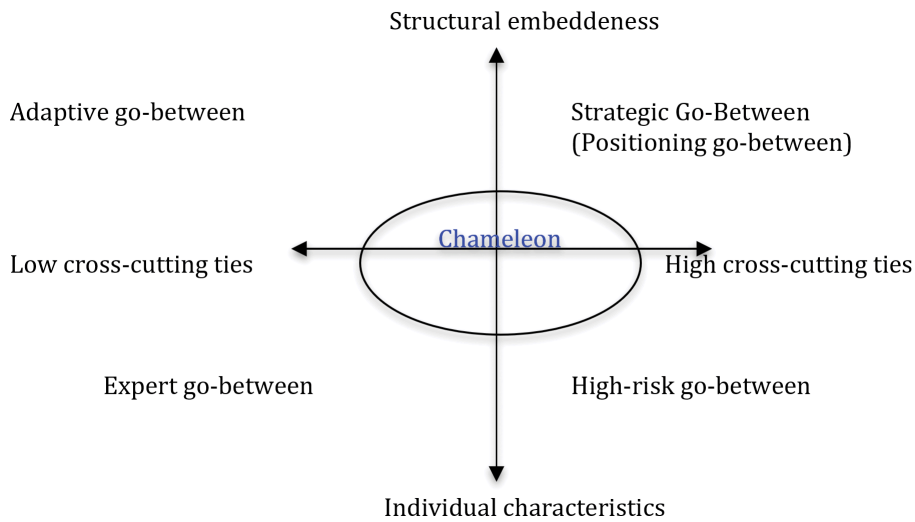


Illustration 8. Interconnection of Structure, Individual Characteristics, and Social Relationship

Illustration 8 shows how each element is intermingled. At the same time, only one the vertical axis combines by structure and individual characteristics, with ties of relationships crossing the horizontal axis. The low and high cross-cutting ties determine the nature of relationships. Furthermore, this diagram shows the five different types of go-betweens that reflect the three aspects of structure, individual characteristics, and social relationships and ties in the context of the new frontier in Sintang: (1) Strategic Go-between or positioning go-between who represents the combination of high cross-cutting ties and dominant support by the structural dimension. The strength of structure does not force a go-between to have strong individual characteristics; (2) High-risk go-between points at individual characteristics and has high cross-cutting ties as the main dimensions but lacks structural dimension; (3) Expert go-between addresses the uniqueness of individual characteristics of go-betweens that is supported by low cross-cutting ties and structure; (4) Adaptive go-between has strength in the structural dimension and is less applicable to cross-cutting ties and individual characteristics; (5) Chameleon is described as the combination of the four types of go-between types with a balanced combination of the three dimensions (structure, agency, and network). Below I will elaborate on all these variations of go-betweens.

Features of Go-Between in Oil Palm Context

From the discussion above, the three dimensions are included in terms of individual characteristics, socio-cultural structural embeddedness, and practices that result from the interaction between agency and structure and the way they interact with others in reaching their objectives or specific interests and/or connect people to others. In this section, I show a pattern that contains not just one action but a set of actions and can only be understood by applying all the dimensions together. It does not imply a rigid categorization but rather a set of commonalities that together lead to a specific type of go-betweens, despite their differences in terms of flexibility, time, and place. Based on the set of patterns in the oil palm context, a go-between in general always needs to be a chameleon, who is able to change and adapt to any situation and condition. I start with strategic go-between.

Strategic Go-between (Positioning Go-between)

The first type is a strategic go-between. This type of go-between has the characteristics of high crosscutting ties shaped by an open and inclusive network in their interaction and relationships. They receive strong support from the structure in which they are embedded. However, these two dominant aspects often need to be followed by strong individual characteristics that make this type of go-between hide behind the structure and high crosscutting ties. This set of features makes it easy for people with a specific position in the social network to become a strategic go-between. Many Indonesian bureaucrats intentionally use their position and power to play the role of a strategic go-between. However, they often use this role due to the persuasion of other parties, even though it does not mean they are not aware of their position as dual-role actors.

The idea of a strategic go-between is quite similar to the notion of a power broker. The term power broker emphasises structural aspects as an essential dimension to provide an actor with specific power to play intermediary roles intentionally or accidentally (see Savitri, 2015; Barker, 2016). However, the idea of a power broker does not classify the combination of features that enables an individual to become a successful broker. This research offers a new understanding of this type of go-betweens beyond the structural aspect by focusing on the dialectical interaction of the three dimensions of the structure, social relationships, and individual characteristics. The dialectical pattern of structure and social networks is critical to power. Still, the agency dimension is also crucial to determine the actor's manoeuvres. It is necessary to keep the pattern balanced and not rely on the structure only.

The *papa minta saham* (father asked for shares) case of Setya Novanto in 2015 is an example of the failed strategic go-between who neglected to balance the agency aspect at a national level⁷⁰ and relied too much on his embeddedness in the structure. Novanto focused on his interests while channelling and smoothing through negotiations with the government to extend Freeport's mining (gold and copper) contract. He perverted his strategic position as DPR (House of Representatives) chairman and chairman of the GOLKAR party, as well as mentioned the names of President Joko Widodo and former Vice President Jusuf Kalla and called them friends (*kawan*) of his as a strategy to ensure his clients and to cover up his involvement. As an impact of his role, he was considered to be violating the code of ethics and forced to resign from his strategic position as DPR chairman. This case is mainly seen from a structural perspective, as Novanto occupied a strategic position and intentionally misused his position by playing the role of a broker. However, the type of strategic go-between could also be used to understand the case and why it failed. Besides the structural dimension that Novanto nicely used, he neglected to use the agency and social network dimensions. The failure to adapt to the essential characteristics of having multiple identities and to function in high crosscutting ties of connecting with powerful actors and his lack of individual positioning had put him on the spot. He failed in his role due to the unbalanced use of various qualifications.

This type of go-between also appeared in the local and district setting. Specifically, in the oil palm setting in the Sintang district, the presence of a strategic go-between can be detected. Meanwhile, the intention of the local government of Sintang district to develop the region and invite investment becomes a crucial agenda. Many powerful bureaucrats, elites, and legislative members join the process to actualise the plan, leading them to play double roles as bureaucrats/politicians and go-between. For example, in the first phase of oil palm development, they offered their clients power, knowledge, and valuable information as a strategy to face the rigid and unclear procedure. Their strong capacity in state structures and connections with people in good positions enabled them to enter into negotiations under a *bekawan* relationship. In their intermediary jobs, they crosscut ties by making direct deals and negotiations with the most influential

70 After resigning as DPR chairman in 2017, Setya Novanto is being a suspect in the e-ID graft case, which reportedly caused 2.3 trillion rupiahs in state losses. He has a role in channelling and smoothing the E-KTP budget plans that started in 2013. He used a similar pattern to the *papa minta saham* case of exploiting his strategic positions as DPR chairman and chairman of the GOLKAR party and his high crosscutting ties to important state figures at the national level using the *kawan* term.

actors to ensure the process ran smoothly and beyond formal regulations. In many cases, the practice of overlapping roles as bureaucrat, elite, legislative member, and go-between is considered foul play and corruption.⁷¹ To some extent, they are doomed to failure in both jobs.

As is the case with Akimsa – the former head of Public Works services or *Kepala Dinas Pekerjaan Umum* and the current vice head of Sintang district – and Mike Abang – the former head of DPRD (Regional Legislative Council) and the head of Sintang DAD – who were arrested and lost their positions after they failed to play double roles as cultural and political go-betweens in 2014. Being part of the government and also as legislative members opened Akimsa and Abang to access natural resources and government allocation funds, which made them actively participate in various projects. Their involvement is beyond their capacity as officials by offering or involving their essential services. These extra jobs are often considered risky and not easy, although they provide large amounts of money. It forces them to keep an eye on all processes by choosing the right networks, guaranteeing the flow of money distribution, and involving the top bureaucrat for being their *beking*. One failure of this process would bring the double role as actors into jail under corruption indictment, as with Akimsa and Abang. Both of them had a premature plan by choosing the wrong network. They were overconfident with their position and capability to have *beking* from other top figures.

While their arrest has not impacted their social-political positions in general, it is embarrassing (*malu*) for having been charged with corruption that they find unbearable. As Mike Abang kept saying with a trembling voice during our interviews, *‘I feel malu for having been arrested as a corruptor. It is like being arrested for stealing chicken in a kampung. It was not my fault. I was framed to receive the money and I returned it to the state’*. After being arrested for corruption, neither Akimsa nor Abang feels guilty; they believe it was not their fault. Despite their confession, they cannot cover up their feeling of shame and embarrassment. In this light, the community structure, through applying the *malu* value, shapes individual control of being more careful about their actions and decisions in everyday life. Not only did they lose face, power, and position, but they also experienced abandonment by their friends and entourages as they could no longer be a strong patron.

They tried to gradually recover from their *malu* and regain their power by being active and involved in various public activities such as cultural events (*gawai* Dayak), attending natural resources exploitation meetings, regional development

71 As public officers could not enrich their selves or their party by exploiting their power and position, it impacted state income or inflicted financial loss for the state.

seminars, or meetings on oil palm friction and conflict that usually arose during the first and second phases. They showed their concerns about local community problems during the transformation of the new commodity and when the structure had become more stable. Joining these kinds of activities helped Akimsa and Abang reshape their position within the societal structure by creating a new identity as a cultural figures and showing their capability of being a patron. Even these kinds of manoeuvres in cultural and social spheres helped them to occupy other strategic positions and reclaim their political and cultural power.

The above examples of the practices of strategic go-betweens show that this set of characteristics of go-betweens often manipulates the laws for negotiations under the table. The methods go-betweens use to complete their jobs (such as channelling, negotiating, smoothing and mediating) sometimes conflict with the applicable laws and regulations. It puts the activities of this type of go-betweens on the brink of criminal actions, such as corruption or bribery. In the oil palm setting and other settings, many go-betweens of this type will likely serve as a *perantara* in a more transactional sense rather than between formal and informal interactions. Moreover, this feature of go-betweens uses the existing structure and their embeddedness in it only for personal benefits. That is why some of them failed in their roles, as they failed to combine the three dimensions in a perfect balance.

Despite doing high-risk jobs, the success rate of strategic go-betweens is relatively high. In Sintang, successful strategic go-betweens are dominated by government officials and legislative members who have adapted to safe moves and a balanced pattern in playing their roles. Many go-betweens who have adapted to this pattern are occupying strategic positions within state structures. The involvement of strategic go-betweens is expected in the first phase of oil palm development. In practice, the execution of their roles is usually covered by multi-layered cross-cutting ties following the legal procedure scheme, which blurs the involvement of specific individuals who control behind the scenes and the clients themselves. In this light, the strategic position and good connections to important figures at different levels (village, district, and provincial) are two dimensions that dominate the set of characteristics of strategic go-betweens. The inability to control their ambition and greediness and to articulate their individual characteristics sometimes kills their career. It stresses the importance of balancing the two aspects and the application of individual characteristics for long-term roles.

Risk-taker: Go-between with High-risk Role

This second pattern highlights the importance of having a large network and individual characteristics to compensate for their lack of a strong structural position. Unlike other characteristics, this third type of go-betweens sees risk as a significant element in interaction while taking an opposite part to the mainstream procedure. This position with a specific structure often involves them directly in friction, conflict, and violence. I use 'risky go-between' to describe patterns beyond the mainstream structure.

These actors are called several names in the local language, such as local strongmen, *preman* (thugs), or *Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat* (LSM/NGOs). The pattern gives flexibility to an individual or group to perform independently. This type of go-betweens has been discussed by other scholars in other contexts related to oil palm in Indonesia. They address the capability of the actors to take an opposing position against standard social norms and values (see Bakker, 2015; Barker, 2009; Nordholt, 1991).

In the local context of oil palm plantations in Sintang, these actors form a cohesive network, which mostly departs from the interpersonal connections of a similar background, objectives, knowledge and information. It makes the people within the circle share specific ties and networks to support their position and those who oppose the mainstream structure. It opens their connection beyond their geographical space through meaning, similar ideas, or a shared sense of solidarity. The world of these risky go-betweens applies a rather loose structure, with many violent actors and followers. However, this cohesive network and its specific characteristics of high-risk actions show the lack of structural aspects that make this type of go-betweens often work in short-term roles. Their involvement is only in a particular situation and condition.

This type of go-betweens can be found in three different phases of oil palm plantations in Sintang. At the same time, certain situations open the ambiguity of power structures that often have severe implications for the local people. For example, the risky go-betweens play an essential role as a mediator and negotiator in unfair investments or specific actions in different phases that led to conflicts and frictions between the state, business actors, and the local community. This type of go-between becomes the controller of new investments and land transformation in Sintang. However, it only guarantees their movement is within their interests. Many individual go-betweens under this categorization have used this pattern to secure the positions of other influential go-betweens in West Kalimantan province and Indonesia in general, which I consider dangerous and risky. Meanwhile, others only use the pattern for short-term roles for material benefits.

Ricky's case below may help us to understand better risky go-betweens who play their roles for material benefits:

Ricky is dark-skinned and tall, with an athletic body and military gestures. His voice is loud and intimidating. He is of mixed Javanese and Malay ethnicity and grew up in diverse cultures. This background allows him to speak many regional languages, such as Malay, Javanese, and Dayak, from different sub-ethnic groups, in addition to Indonesian and some English. He also knows how to interact with other groups of people who come from various sectors. However, his popularity puts him under a different category of risky go-betweens.

*Many officials in the oil palm sector in Sintang see him as a local thug or **preman**. This title is partly due to his support for the local people who reject oil palm development, with conflict as a weapon to reach a solution. He would suggest that the company and government officials provide some money to resolve the dispute. Meanwhile, in the eyes of NGO activists, his agenda is more than just supporting and protecting the local people from natural resource exploitation. In many cases, Ricky preferred to ignite conflict, friction, and protest, such as blocking the company's activities, rather than offering negotiation and mediation. On behalf of the local people, Ricky would suggest pecuniary compensation to mitigate the tension. He often took the position of representative of the local people and demanded huge compensation. At the same time, he would make a back-door deal with the company for a solution and persuade the local people to bury the hatchet. These manoeuvres have made other activists in Sintang classify him as a company agent rather than an activist. To the locals, he is a good activist and **kerampak** performer, brave to take risks, and a good negotiator who fights for them.*

Ricky's path is full of risks and unsustainable for his long-term roles. He often acts fearlessly and uses a *kerampak* style to create a clear boundary with other actors and to show who he is. In this case, it is essential to continue to show individual capabilities and keep the networks cohesive as a cover to reduce risks. The combination of patterns adopted by Ricky is common among risky go-betweens in other settings different from oil palm. Some can use it to extend their roles on more dangerous and powerful actions in and out of West Kalimantan, as is the case with the famous politician, Odo, who has taken significant steps to be an

influential figure in West Kalimantan and as a national⁷² figure after playing a risky go-between role and engaged himself in the wider business and political networks. Another example is Harjana Bujang (a legislator and the former head of Sintang DPRD), who has become one of the crucial figures in Sintang due to his success in extending his role from being a risky go-between in his initial career to being a strategic go-between by diving into political circles and building up cultural power by strengthening ethnic connections under the Dayak ethnicity organization (DAD).

These examples from several risky go-betweens stress the role of individual characteristics and high crosscutting ties of networks as the dominant dimensions. In terms of individual traits, a risky go-between at least needs to be supported by essential personal characteristics (such as risk taker, multilingual, multiple identities, flexibility, and sweet talking) and some additional supporting characteristics to help him to intermingle in diverse social relationships and networks. However, the combination of these two dimensions needs the structural aspect to make a risky go-between complete and wholesome and provide them with the opportunity to take positions beyond the formal structure.

Expert Go-between: Go-between on Specific Domain

The collection of other combinations of aspects leads to a specific type of go-between with a clear working space and time resulting from particular services and roles. This type of go-between is seasonally needed by other parties seeking their services. They, therefore, need to have repetitive interactions with specific people in different dimensions, groups, or work sectors. They also have a broader working space compared to adaptive go-betweens. However, under this set of characteristics, men and women have unlimited access to these roles. I call them speciality go-betweens for this kind of pattern.

This type of go-between is called by many names/terms, such as *calo*, broker, or *orang dalam* (insider). These terms address the speciality of services they offer. In the Indonesian context, those local names are considered neutral. However, depending on time and setting, they could also bring a negative or positive connotation. Although for some scholars, those terms are associated with a profession that carries the stigma of vested interest, foul play, or even corruption (see Vel, 2014; Savitri, 2015). In the Sintang context, those local terms refer to a specific

72 He has several positions over the last decades, for instance, as head of Hanura or People's Conscience party [2016-], former head of MPR RI [2014-2019], former head of *Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia* or Indonesian Peasants Harmony Association [2010-2015], and former head of Kadin [Indonesian chamber of commerce] of West Kalimantan [1998-2004].

actor who plays intermediation roles in particular jobs that allow resources or information to flow between the weak connected party or unconnected actors with moderate risks. Some go-betweens of this type joined the government as head of a sub-government or government office or as head of a sub-district government office. In contrast, others were admitted into the inner circle of significant figures.

Meanwhile, in the oil palm setting, go-betweens of this type are positioned in overlapping and too rigid bureaucratic, political, and economic bubbles following the consequences of the ambiguous situation in the context of new frontiers or Indonesia in general. Specifically, these expert go-betweens come forward when the situation requires the use of specific intermediary actors, such as during the first phase of oil palm development to provide room for negotiations or during a trading activity (i.e. land) or an action that needs to be done smoothly and fast (i.e. legal permit, access to the community, agreement with the community). The ambiguities of the situation that force go-betweens to show the strength of their characteristics are clearly demonstrated during an interview with Henry, a famous official in Sintang who can play the roles well through continued improvement of his agency aspects:

*I am not originally from Sintang. I come from a Batak family. Before engaging in an intermediary role, I learned a lot about the norms and values of people in Sintang. I imitated the way the Dayak maintain their social relationship through **basa-basi** (courtesy and small talk) and sweet-talking with people, which is very different from my ethnicity's habit of straightforwardness. My coping with cultural differences is quite successful, as I actively interact with many Dayak figures. I keep a good relationship with people in this circle and benefit from being part of them. My connection with them indirectly helped me be well-known and quickly promoted to a strategic position in district offices. Since I started my career journey, I always get an office position considered '**lahan basah**', besides my hard work to carry out all the tasks and develop my professional persona.*

*I am now the head of **Dinas Lingkungan Hidup** (the Environment Office), which enables me to interact with many investors. Many investors did not understand the legal procedure enough, so they kept coming to my office for advice. Some of them used the gaps to ask my 'help' to smoothen and speed up the permit process, although they know it is not easy and usually takes time. In this ambiguous situation, I did the channelling service between my investor is clients and people with official authority in formal procedures, mainly my friend or **kawan**.*

I quickly granted this request because I am part of the government system with the legal authority to monitor the development of the business sector in Sintang.

What Henry said shows the importance of improving individual agency to play a go-between role. The ethnic bias of the personal background and lack of agency could be covered through a learning process. Henry's efforts underpin the Dayak community's collective identity and communal cohesion. While the story also stresses that there is not always a need for all roles, this type of go-betweens is real and important to face the intermingling of shifting structures and different social relationships.

The explanation above shows that go-betweens of this type have dominant individual capabilities, making them known as the experts of specific roles for their clients. Demand for these go-betweens and their importance in everyday life are shaped by other actors' vulnerability in facing unfamiliar conditions, the lack of information and knowledge, or the application of rigid structures. Some extend their ability to engage in beneficial social relationships and networks, supporting their roles as expert go-betweens. Those characteristics give them a specific period to engage in certain client roles. Their jobs are considered low-risk, focusing on smoothening the client's activities. The continuity of their engagement in particular roles depends on their success in managing their assignments. Meanwhile, failing to play their roles could bring unintended consequences to their career. In this light, most expert go-betweens' tasks highlight their dominant individual capability dialectically interrelated with other dimensions of the structure and social relationships.

Adaptive Go-between

I use the term adaptive go-between to explain this fourth type of go-between. It involves a combination of existing roles within the social structure and intense social relationships among actors without forcing the actor to have a dominant agency aspect. In addition, the combination of these three dimensions form a particular interconnected pattern, making adaptive go-betweens visible. The structural aspect determines the consistency and continuity of this type of go-between, even in an entire social organisation, for instance, within the long-houses or community. Further, the adaptiveness of this type of go-between allows them to play medium-term and long-term roles in low- and medium-risk jobs while being supported by fragmented interactions of *bekawan* or friendship.

This kind of go-between always connects to specific individuals who share similar roles, occupations, backgrounds, and goals for social and material benefits.

Generally, they play a role in bridging and accommodating infrastructure development, transferring information, or providing an understanding of new things. Often this category of go-between needs more knowledge, putting them into fragmented networks with people from the same segmentation. Therefore, this type of work has a moderate role and risk. Many adaptive go-betweens choose to maintain this work and see it as long-term rather than trying to play a more intensive and risky role. Many also consider this role well-structured and their presence necessary in everyday life. This situation often limits them to intensive cross-sectoral relationships when interacting with others from different dimensions.

In the local context, this adaptive type of go-between is usually called a *tokey* or *boss*. The *tokey* term is adopted from the Chinese word for a wealthy person who plays a vital role in the economic sector, like a trader or business intermediary. Nowadays, this term is also adopted by people of other ethnicities in Kalimantan, including Dayak and Malay ethnic groups, to describe a person with full access to material benefits and social networks to play a specific role in their community. By definition, this type of go-between has specific dimensions in the economic sector, although some also extend their role to other sectors, such as the political sector. My ethnographic research in Sintang found a similar pattern to what most of the adaptive go-betweens did when engaged in rent-seeking activities before the establishment of oil palm or when the previous commodities, such as rubber and forest products, were still thriving. Yuli described the situation in his soft voice as follows:

*I continued my family business and started trading and commodity brokering in the village before the introduction of oil palm in Sintang. Back then, this sector was monopolised by a few people, primarily people of Chinese descent, with only one or two **tokeys** in each village that did rubber trading. Luckily, my family had a good position in the village, and we interacted a lot with the Chinese. We imitated how Chinese **tokeys** ran their business, like giving debt and creating personal bonding to maintain the business. To ensure my medium-term and long-term role, I first affirmed the trust and loyalty of my clients before focusing on economic profits. I also maintained a network outside the villages by keeping in touch with other **tokeys** so I could receive updated information about commodity prices and market demand. The updated information helped me to prepare for commodity transition and quick adaptation. For example, during the introduction of oil palm, I was the first **tokey** in my area, slowly shifting the business orientation from rubber to oil palm. In contrast, the others kept rubber as the primary commodity.*

In everyday practices, this type of go-between keeps opportunities available for them by following the chain of commodity production from the very beginning until the commodity becomes stable. The decision of *tokeys* to take a risk on new and unstable commodities such as oil palm is due to the combination of their solid networks, stable position in the societal structure, and the application of risk-taker characteristics. In this light, an individual needs to apply this combination of characteristics to be an adaptive go-between with long-term roles.

In the different setting of shifting structure from rubber based to oil palm-based, the ambiguous and unstable transition has provided an opportunity for various actors, especially the local elites, (i.e. village head, native customs chief (*ketua adat*), customary leader (*tumenggung*), and hamlet head, to shift roles. Many local elites considered *penyambung lidah* or negotiators transformed themselves from everyday go-betweens engaged in socio-cultural problems to other go-between practices within the oil palm structure, such as the head of KUD (cooperative) or cooperative management. Their involvement in the oil palm structure was partly due to the rigid government procedure that required the involvement of community members as village representative in the development process. As the local elites are considered to have the capacity to do channelling, provide mediation, and persuade other community members, on paper, it would benefit various actors. However, the engagement process of being part of the oil palm structure is dialectical. At the same time, local elites were also driven by their motives and interests in gaining benefits, such as accumulating wealth and power by collecting lands, oil palm plots, money, and economic power. Moreover, participating in the oil palm structure also made it more efficient and effective for them to obtain reliable information, new knowledge, access to subsidies, or accumulate power that provided them with more ammunition when manoeuvring. However, their manoeuvre is light, not extreme, due to limited working space and the fact that it is only possible during the first and second phases of oil palm processes.

From the example above, a successful adaptive go-between moves under the pattern of actions to make them continuously involved in specific roles to accumulate individual experiences and capacity. The long-term experiences in certain practices and jobs contribute to a go-between's performance in handling problems in different situations and unstable conditions or dealing with other parties' manoeuvring. Those accumulated patterns allow this type of go-between to adapt to various contexts and settings or to work in different periods. Therefore, introducing a new commodity and applying new work-related practices such as oil palm are not problems but opportunities for this type of go-between.

This type of go-between can transfer and pass on their skill, personal capability, information, knowledge, and existing capital (including connection and network) to the next generations. The possibility of bequeathing the roles from this type of go-between often creates a monopoly system that aims to keep the circle stable and solid. At this point, protecting the interaction is just like the characteristics of a patron-client relationship. It enables this type of go-between to have more stable and long-lasting roles from one generation to another. Furthermore, it creates a clear boundary between relationships and interactions, limiting the number of actors. It becomes a tight space for other individuals outside the network to join and become this type of go-between.

From the explanation above, it can be understood that to maintain their intermediary roles, the adaptive go-between is always forced to be prepared with new commodities or power shifting that often replaces the existing structure. The limitation of working space of this type of go-between allows them to adapt to specific relationship characteristics and accumulation systems from their role as intermediate actors. Therefore, their inability to adapt to rapid transformation would bring them failure. At the same time, their capacity to see new opportunities, meet new challenges and take risks would enable them to play long-lasting roles. It means they are less affected by the shifting structure influenced by many factors.

Chameleon: Combination of Four: Adaptive, Specialty, and Risk (Mafia)

Go-betweens of this type play the most dangerous, powerful, and complex roles in Sintang and Indonesia. They hold an almost untouchable position that often camouflages their involvement. They are highly flexible to play complex roles. Go-betweens of this type are considered puppeteer or *dalang* who designs every step of the process and the involvement of other actors rather than an operator. The sequences are often multi-layered, which makes them very difficult to track. This type of go-betweens is often undetected by ordinary people, as a *chameleon* always covers his involvement through people around them.

Therefore, go-betweens of this type have many supporters called entourage or *anak buah* (literally 'fruit children') through the application of a patron-client relationship to manage their loyalty and personal connection. To some extent, the entourage 'presence sharpens these go-betweens' symbolic power. In doing their roles, go-betweens of this type work through other go-betweens in their exclusive circle of followers called right-hand man (*tangan kanan*). The *chameleons* use their *tangan kanan* to get the jobs done. Some of the *tangan kanan* have an excellent position in the structural sphere and are sometimes professional

go-betweens with lower risk than the chameleons. The involvement of other types of go-betweens provides the *chameleons* with complex cross-cutting ties of relationships comprising multi-layered interconnections between people. It is beneficial for a cover-up. These multiple strategies of using *tangan kanan* and applying high cross-cutting ties help to minimise the risk of unsuccessful roles and losing face for being unprofessional. It is not uncommon that the *tangan kanan* functions as the chameleons' life bumper to protect and cover up their involvement. Unlike *tangan kanan*, with more intimate relations and confidential jobs, *anak buah* is a mere daily assistant accompanying the *chameleon*. The presence of *tangan kanan* and *anak buah* around the go-between also creates the atmosphere of a powerful figure, which helps shape the *chameleon's* charisma, and to some extent, adds emotional support for the *chameleon* in terms of capability and control. In this light, the presence of *tangan kanan* and regular *anak buah* around the *chameleon* confirms the exclusivity of this actor.

The process of combining four kinds of go-between traits into one is long and complex. It relies on many factors from inside and outside of the go-between, for instance, personal aims, individual capability, opportunity, and the right path (supportive environment and right circle). None of the chameleons I met had short, easy tracks; instead, they accumulated experiences, ambition, and persistent actions. This condition pushes individuals to overcome their limitations by insisting on using the three critical dimensions of structure, agency, and social network as the centre of their completeness. It means that "the internal relations do not relate to each other as performed entities, nor do they emerge from these relations as independent entities" (Linton & Budds, 2014, p. 173). Considering the complex process, it forces this type of go-betweens to have a balanced dialectic between those three critical dimensions and hybridise in some of the barriers.

In sum, the chameleon type is a hybrid chain process of the three dimensions of structure, agency, and social relationships, which is understood in terms of how each dimension continuously shifts to make and remake the relation with other aspects. The structural dimension, for instance, has an important effect on the organisation of society, including the emergence of go-betweens and their roles, which give rise to new forms of structure. Meanwhile, social relationships and networks also shape particular kinds of connections and cross-cutting ties that go-betweens can use intensively. Like the two dimensions, individual characteristics which shape an individual's capability to do specific actions and performance also lead a go-between to play an active role in hybrid situations. In this sense, hybridity is the chain process of making and remaking over space, place, and time,

while combining the three dimensions leads a *chameleon* to do complex actions. Only certain people can do this hybridisation and play the role of a *chameleon*.

In the Indonesian setting, particularly in Sintang, this feature is labeled as a kind of *mafia*. The idea of *mafia* here differs from that discussed in the literature on the mafia in Italy, South America, or yakuza in Japan, where the term refers to well-organised, closed groups often seen as violent communities. Tania Li (2018) considers a plantation as a 'mafia system', a plantation system where everyone in the plantation chain is trying to steal. The practices of plantations are pictured as not an ideal system or even worse since it is possible to preserve structural violence, which leads Li to argue that plantations are a mafia system. From my study in Sintang, the idea of *mafia* is quite different from Li's definition. It is not particularly related to the structure of the plantation system but to specific people who act individually. The term mafia is often used to call an individual actor who controls, dominates, and designs the pattern of a system that gives them unlimited access to specific resources. That enables them to do hybridity that has been driven apart by the dualistic thinking of acknowledging that all things, at least so far as they enter our consciousness, are the production of our knowledge and material practices (Latour, 1993; Linton & Budds, 2014, p. 173-174).

Although people in Sintang regularly use the term mafia to classify the 'top go-betweens', I will continue to use the terms chameleon and mafia interchangeably. The activity of the chameleon is largely 'informal' and unregulated. They work in different bubbles compared to ordinary go-betweens. Many of the chameleon's roles in oil palm development are related to designing, legalising, and securing/protecting what is on the table rather than directly participating in the oil palm chain. Many are part of the government's structural system and embedded in well-structured positions in the governmental or legislative setting. They are also part of ethnicity-based organisations that continuously provoke them to engage with different opportunities related to regional developmental programs. Possessing power and a good position on very strategic layers of society allows the chameleon unlimited access to the most intimate relationships. The power of go-betweens attracts many people with different backgrounds to join the circle and connect closely with the chameleon, for whom close personality resemblance and loyalty are crucial to being admitted into his entourage.

Those combinations give the chameleon space to do complex manoeuvres by being a rule-maker, not just a rule-taker. Mils vividly recalled how risky it had been for him to design regional development in Sintang through oil palm expansion after being elected head of the district for a year:

*When I started serving as district head, the development process in Sintang was entirely left behind compared to other districts in West Kalimantan. Many investors came and tried to invest in Sintang, while most of the HGU land had already been used by the existing timber and log company. On paper, it is impossible to give a new permit. After one year, I changed and ratified some district regulations to accommodate investors' demands in Sintang. I started with the possibilities of taking over HGU land from the timber company and giving it to the oil palm company by involving my **tangan kanan** in the Regional Plantation Office (**Dinas Perkebunan**), Regional Environmental Office (**Dinas Lingkungan Hidup**), Regional Planning Agency (**Bappeda**), and Regional Secretary (**Sekretaris Daerah**) to take the actual act of giving the new investors permit. I also changed some of the land statuses to **areal penggunaan lain**. I issued a new regulation that exempts investors from paying tax C. I know it is a risky move.*

Mils's story shows that the decision to ratify the regulation addresses his hybridity actions of being a rule maker. His balanced interpersonal interaction and good management of individual positions allowed him to design safety measures and calculate all the motions that enabled him to move smoothly between formal and informal situations. Moreover, his capacity to take significant risks and skillfully seize new opportunities makes him a chameleon in a line of reliable go-betweens, making him known as a mafia in Sintang. In this sense, his involvement in the exclusive and untouchable networks, his occupation of strategic and good positions within different structures, and his insistence on always being ahead of others guarantees his long-term roles in any situation.

The role of the chameleon in the context of oil palm often penetrates other oil palm activities. For example, many chameleons are intentionally seeking additional benefits and opportunities through direct participation as service providers in oil palm processes. It drives them to be engaged in other economic dimensions through doing business. In addition, this *mafia sawit*/oil palm mafia is complemented with an understanding of the ambiguities of the oil palm structure, which leads to the insecurity of living under a new commodity structure and the prospect of receiving huge profits. In actual practice, the work system of the *mafia* is always similar. They keep working under the table, with a cover-up by other actors, but they are the primary source of investment. Again, Mils is an excellent example of *the mafia*, as he involves himself in the oil palm chain and uses his *tangan kanan* from his entourage circle and his family to play the role intensively.

The term chameleon above shows how go-betweens of this type do hybridisation to play a specific role by applying a specific pattern. To maintain their roles

and positions, these go-betweens always develop their capabilities, including the process of reaching the highest layers of societal structures. While expanding their workspaces makes them an active agents, the sequences of the maintenance process most of the time have intentional support through their *tangan kanan* and high demands from their clients. In this light, the chameleons must always place themselves between different dimensions to reach the spatial space and place while doing hybridisation.

Conclusion

Analysing the complexity of new frontiers in the oil palm context reveals how go-betweens' ideas take shape. In order to gain a better understanding of the complex and ambiguous conditions, it is essential to look at the three dimensions as the influencing factors for the emergence of go-betweens. Social sciences scholars have attempted to emphasize each dimension in the face of emerging go-between actors and roles. This chapter has explained three important dimensions: structure, individual characteristics, and social relationships and networks to support go-between practices in Sintang. In a sequence of processes, the three dimensions are interlinked and enable go-betweens to make rules not just as rule-takers but also to keep reproducing them for their objectives of material and non-material benefits.

As independent factors of influence, each dimension, i.e. structure, individual characteristics, and social relationships/networks, shape specific spaces for go-betweens. However, the analysis of go-betweens in Sintang shows that the interaction between the three dimensions has intensified the complexity in the new frontier. Even more, the process often moves far beyond the dialectic and thus forms hybrid connections between the three dimensions.

In combination the three dimensions allow the emergence of specific patterns, which can thus be understood as integral to the key characteristics of go-between. This conceptualization follows from the ethnographic research that I conducted in Sintang and focuses on the go-betweens and the identification of particular patterns as strategic for their existence and practices in the broader context of new frontiers, while recognizing that intermediary actors reveal the broader picture of new frontiers (De Jong, 2017). I found five different types of go-betweens: strategic go-betweens, risky go-betweens, speciality go-betweens, adaptive go-betweens, and chameleons. Each type has different combinations that lead to specific actions and roles in the oil palm sector.

Strategic go-betweens or positioning go-betweens represent the combined high cross-cutting ties and dominant support by the structural dimension. The strength of structure does not force a go-between to have strong individual characteristics. The execution of their roles is usually covered by multi-layered cross-cutting ties following the legal procedure scheme, which blurs the involvement of specific individuals who control the clients themselves behind the scenes. In this light, the strategic position and good connections to important figures at different levels (village, district, and provincial) are two dimensions that dominate the set of characteristics of strategic go-betweens.

High-risk go-betweens are distinguished by individual characteristics and have high cross-cutting ties as main dimensions but lack a strong structural position. In terms of individual traits, a risky go-between at least needs to be supported by essential personal characteristics (such as risk taker, multilingual, multiple identities, flexibility, and sweet talking) and some additional supporting characteristics to help him to intermingle in diverse social relationships and networks. However, the combination of the two dimensions, needs the structural aspect to make a risky go-between complete and wholesome and provide them with the opportunity to take positions beyond the formal structure.

Expert go-betweens address the uniqueness of individual characteristics of go-betweens that are supported by low cross-cutting ties and a good structural position. This type of go-between has dominant individual capabilities, making them known as the experts of specific roles for their clients. Their jobs are considered low-risk, focusing on smoothing the client's activities. The continuity of their engagement in particular roles depends on their success in managing their assignments. Meanwhile, failing to play their roles could bring unintended consequences to their career. In this light, most tasks of expert go-betweens highlight that their dominant individual capabilities are dialectically related to other dimensions of the structure and social relationships.

Adaptive go-betweens have strength in the structural dimension, but fewer cross-cutting ties and distinctive individual characteristics. Adaptive go-betweens are always forced to be prepared for new commodities or a shift in power that often replaces the existing structure. The limitation of working spaces of this type of go-between allows them to adapt to specific social relationships and accumulation the existence systems from their role as intermediate actors. Their capacity to see new opportunities, meet new challenges and take risks enables them to play long-lasting roles. It means they are less affected by the shifting structure that are influenced by many factors.

Chameleons are described as a combination of the four types of go-between with a balanced combination of the three main dimensions (structure, agency, and networks). The chameleon is a type of go-betweens that is characterized by a hybridity of features when playing a specific role in a specific pattern. To maintain their roles and positions, these go-betweens always develop their capabilities and networks. In this light, the chameleons must always place themselves between different dimensions to reach the spatial space and place while being engaged in hybridisation.

From the five types of go-betweens, there are similarities in that all of the types are marked by a combination the three dimensions of structure, individual characteristics, and social networks. The differences between the various types of go-betweens are located in the diverging mix of the three dimensions that are supporting the go-betweens different roles. From this understanding, the dynamic and different combinations of the three dimensions will not always form the same pattern of distinctive features of go-betweens. The patterns of features outlined in this thesis define the various roles of go-betweens specifically for the oil palm setting in Sintang. In a broader context, these features may also apply to others who act as go-betweens in wider Indonesian society.

Conclusion

Over the course of a year, I delved into an intriguing world of individuals who served as go-betweens (*perantara*) in Sintang district, in the west of the Indonesian part of Borneo. I tried to understand their roles in society and what their unique traits are. Embarking on this challenging journey as a woman entering a predominantly male domain was not easy. When I first arrived in Sintang, I felt overwhelmed by the complexity and ambiguity of the circumstances. I grappled with questions like where to find the go-betweens, how to identify them and what they looked like. The anxiety surrounding my research objectives, coupled with the unwelcoming, rugged and restrictive atmosphere of the Sintang environment, tested both my research capabilities and social skills. It was in 2015, that I began to unravel the shifting structural landscape in the wake of the political decentralisation and regional autonomy processes that were implemented earlier in Indonesia, which transformed the area into a new frontier. This profound transformation became a fertile breeding ground for the emergence of go-betweens. Nonetheless, I pondered why some people were able to leverage these evolving structures to assume this new role or position while others could not.

Beyond structural changes, the personal characteristics and agency of go-betweens emerged as crucial factors. Yet, exploring the dialectic between social and cultural structures and people's agency did not fully explain the success or failure of go-betweens. Another dimension seemed at play: social relations and networks. To fully comprehend go-betweens – why they assume and maintain their position, their actions, vocabulary, behaviour, and interactions – it was also necessary to delve into understanding and mapping their social relationships, networks, and practices.

This study therefore moves beyond a one-dimensional perspective by interrelating the structural, individual, and social dimensions through a tri-dimensional approach. In so doing, I aim to arrive at a more complete in-depth and broad understanding of the particularities of the people that wax and wane the oil palm cultivation process in West Kalimantan.

The fluidity of the oil palm cultivation field in West Kalimantan has given rise to a swampy social arena, an interstitial space known locally as *lahan basah*, marked by ambiguous systems and regulations. This poses challenges for go-betweens attempting to engage in this space and navigate it. Existing literature provides limited insight into how inclusion and exclusion processes shape the Kalimantan

lahan basah and the role of go-betweens in these fields. While some studies focus on specific go-betweens types, such as brokers, middlemen or local bosses (e.g. Cramb & McCarthy, 2016; Eilenberg, 2015; Lindquist, 2017; Lindquist, 2017; Sud, 2014), they often adopt a one-dimensional perspective tied to either political, economic or cultural domains.

For that reason, to come to grips with the role of go-betweens in Kalimantan's new *lahan basah*, this study envisions them as actors embedded in the in-between world, moving between nodes or dimensions. This movement correlates with changing gestures, traits, and social embedding through networks and organisational structures. Initial findings in 2014 revealed an increased presence of go-betweens in the oil palm context, playing a crucial role in the development process.

Intrigued by this transformation, I returned in 2015, and formulated the central research question: 'How do go-betweens position themselves, act in and navigate the interstitial spaces of the new extraction frontiers during the development and maintenance phase of oil palm plantations in Sintang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia?'

In retracing and documenting the logic behind the presence of go-betweens in Sintang, I closely followed my empirical analyses, which revealed that structural aspects (such as norms and values, laws and regulations), individual characteristics (including charisma, physical, gesture, and ways of thinking), and social relationships and networks all play varying but significant roles in shaping the position of go-betweens in contemporary Kalimantan.

Preliminary investigations disclosed that go-betweens in Sintang were not entirely new actors, but were rather long-standing figures, especially within Dayak communities, mediating the neglected position of the Dayak ethnic at the local and national levels. Conventional, single-site locations were insufficient to understand go-betweens. They were vital actors, constantly moving through divergent spaces of opportunity. Extending the research by following go-between networks across multiple sites revealed their involvement in the global oil palm chain.

Beginning the investigation in Ketungau Hilir, home to the Dayak Banjar and encircled by palm oil concessions, I traced local go-betweens as they navigated their networks. My genuine curiosity and status as a woman facilitated entry into their world, though it proved more challenging than I had anticipated. Employing an ethnographic and network-graphic approach, I acted as a go-between myself at times, adopting their characteristics to gain access and facilitate the research. Overall, this study aims to contribute to the theoretical debate on go-betweens

and to discussions on their role in natural resource extraction while advancing the ethnography of go-betweenes.

Emerging go-betweenes in the *Lahan Basah* of Sintang

Chapters One and Two outlined the structural dimensions that create a space for the emergence and crucial positions of go-betweenes in the Sintang district. Political and market-shifting structures have fundamentally molded Sintang into an area with the characteristics of a new frontier, giving rise to what is known as *lahan basah*. In the context of a new oil palm frontier in Sintang, a *lahan basah* can be metaphorically envisioned as a swamp – a realm rife with paradoxes, and shifting values and norms in a period of rapid change. This terrain is shrouded in ambiguity, a kind of ‘murky water’, challenging to traverse but open to various actors competing for access to its natural resources. The allure of Sintang’s *lahan basah*, with its abundant natural resources and strategic geographical location, has attracted numerous actors seeking to exploit and monopolize the area, facilitated by go-betweenes. This pattern of resource exploitation has persisted from colonial times to the present, with each period driven by distinct societal forces that have shaped the current structure in Sintang.

During the Sintang Sultanate, coastal Malay traders introduced goods and Islamic beliefs to upstream and hinterland kingdoms, influencing local ways of living and fostering the adoption of Islam. Under Dutch rule, Sintang served as one of several Sultanates indirectly governed by the Dutch. This era saw the Malays as a Dutch vessel controlling and extracting natural resources, enforcing a Dutch tax system through customary trade or *dagang adat*. Social stratification, mirroring Dutch practices, relegated Dayaks to the bottom layer and limited their opportunities for upward mobility.

After Indonesia became independent, Sintang was discovered as a resource-rich area with central government dominance, framing an investment model that turned Sintang into a new extraction frontier. The global demand for logs led to extensive deforestation, creating opportunities for go-betweenes in the economic dimension through valuable commodities.

The implementation of regional autonomy in 2001 reshaped the societal structure, in which power was redistributed from the central to the regional government. In response, the regional government opened areas for new investments, triggering a new frontierization process and transforming many spots in Sintang into *lahan basah*, particularly for oil palm. While this undoubtedly improved

villagers' income, especially for Dayak groups, including the Dayak Banjar in Kutungau Hilir, the conversion to oil palm plantations was often chaotic, involving various bureaucracies and lacking transparency, leading to the emergence of many more go-betweens in the new *lahan basah*.

This chaotic process provided unique opportunities for go-betweens, both within and outside the district, to become involved in the chain of oil palm development and maintenance. Their essential roles include translating information, mediating land negotiations, dealing with conflicts, and facilitating the delivery of oil palm products, integrating the local into global markets.

Chapter Two delved into the reshuffling of go-betweens in the Sintang district, focusing on the structural layers that enable Dayak go-betweens to play a dominant role in the oil palm *lahan basah*. The basic social organization of Dayak society has historically accommodated the role of go-betweens, as reflected in specific terms such as *tuai rumah*, *temenggung adat*, and *manang* – titles for figures who traditionally mediated between the Dayak social sphere and the wider world, both human and spirit.

During Suharto's regime (1996-98), national regulations that separated the social and cultural dimensions of governance replaced socio-cultural go-betweens with administrative officials. After Suharto's fall, decentralization and democratization in Indonesia paved the way for the emergence of ethnic group organisations that strengthened ethnic identities throughout society. This recognition of *adat* in the political dimension triggered the rise of ethnic group-based organisations, offering new opportunities for local communities, to access new *lahan basah*. The establishment of the 'Dayak Traditional Council' (Dewan Adat Dayak or DAD), for example, stratified Dayak society in Sintang, creating new Dayak elites who used DAD to act as go-betweens, increasing their power and control at the new frontier. The power of DAD in Sintang was strengthened by the legalization of the Dayak *adat* book, reinforcing the dominant position of the Dayak people and limiting the involvement of other ethnic groups in the palm oil *lahan basah*.

Towards a Tri-dimensional Approach to Go-betweens

The emergence of the new *lahan basah* in oil palm development has significantly influenced the role of go-betweens at the new frontier. The structural changes in Indonesian society, however, require a thorough examination to elucidate the complexities of go-between roles in this novel context. In chapters Three and Four,

I explored the numerous activities of go-betweens within the oil palm setting in the Sintang district.

Contrary to common misconceptions, the role of go-betweens is not solely driven by personal gains through immoral acts. Often, they engage in reciprocal relationships and strive to contribute to the community by sharing a portion of their benefits. In the context of the oil palm *lahan basah* in Sintang, go-betweens play some crucial roles related to the development and maintenance of oil palm plantations. Their positions encompass the roles of information providers, permit suppliers, land suppliers, fruit collectors, service providers, protectors (*beking*), opposition go-betweens, and right-hand men. The interplay between these roles has significantly shaped the oil palm system in Sintang, and the competitive nature of the go-betweens' roles allows only a select few to thrive.

To fulfill these roles, go-betweens must possess specific individual characteristics that are essential for navigating the dynamics of oil palm *lahan basah*. Individual characteristics constitute a crucial dimension of the position of go-betweens that determine an individual's capacity to fulfill their roles. The articulation of these characteristics is fluid and context-dependent, encompassing not only inherent traits but also learned behaviours, such as the ability to adapt quickly, imitate others, and adjust to the experiences in the social world. A failure to cultivate these characteristics can impede one's success as a go-between.

Successful go-betweens continuously enhance their capacities, focusing on specific essential characteristics such as being risk-takers, having multiple identities, being multilingual, applying flexibility, and possessing persuasive communication skills. These characteristics are vital for navigating the Dayak social world and addressing the slippery, unclear, and ambiguous nature of the oil palm *lahan basah*.

Within the *lahan basah*, some go-betweens face more complex roles that involve more actors and which are located on or around the boundary of Dayak norms and values. For such roles, go-betweens require complementary capabilities, including charisma, good personal positioning, adept use of *basa-basi* (small talk), and knowing the right time to employ *kerampak* (harsh and rough tactics). These capabilities enable go-betweens to control situations, assume a central position, and to maintain flexibility during negotiations, lobbying activities or new arrangement processes. The combination of essential and complementary characteristics allows go-betweens to traverse different dimensions and play significant roles in the oil palm *lahan basah* in Sintang.

However, possessing many or even most of the individual characteristics mentioned above guarantees the ability to perform certain go-between roles, but

not necessarily all of them. Living and moving through nodes, the translation process between different sectors of society emerges as another critical dimension to understand go-betweens in Sintang. This highly contextualised process involves go-betweens facilitating a range of interactions and social relationships (Chapter 4). Social relationships and networks form the backbone of exclusive transactions, negotiations, and actions undertaken by go-betweens to fulfil their roles. These social relationships and networks are embedded within a social structure shaped by the dominance of Dayak ethnicity. The principles of kindred, long-house, and *bilek* (specific territory for families) contribute to the development of individual relationships, forming dense individual nodes. Go-betweens also establish close connections through *bilek*, sharing not only values and norms but also individual substances, creating more intimate relationships.

The dichotomy of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ (or ‘others’) establishes boundaries in social relationships, guiding go-betweens in their interactions with clients. These notions underpin the dyadic relationships that are fundamental in building and maintaining go-between relationships and networks.

Go-betweens navigate the complex new frontier through dyadic relationships, leveraging the value placed on such connections within Dayak society to foster more personal interactions. These dyadic relationships enable go-betweens to build trust, maintain control, and ensure safety. By carefully employing dyadic relationships, go-betweens can establish cross-cutting ties with unrelated clients, allowing them to select the most effective connections and representations in various situations and contexts.

Dyadic relationships appear in diverse forms such as patron-client relationships, friendships, family-like bonds, or institutional ties. Each dyadic relationship is strengthened by specific factors, such as social debt, (imaginary) genealogical ties, and loyalty. The principles of the Dayak social sphere actively shape go-betweens relationships and networks in Sintang, responding to the socio-political conditions of post-regional autonomy. Indeed, the interplay of social relationships and networks is dynamic, influenced by the conditions of the go-betweens, their individual traits, and their embeddedness within the social structure.

Navigating the Oil Palm Swamp

In Chapter Five, I consolidated the various aspects and dimensions discussed in previous chapters and offer a comprehensive description of go-betweens in the *lahan basah* of oil palm plantations in Sintang. The three dimensions of struc-

ture, individual characteristics, and social networks, as outlined above, give rise to specific patterns that are integral to the features of go-betweens. These dimensions offer valuable insights into their existence within the broader context of new frontiers. Analysing the position and role of go-betweens in Sintang thus provides a more comprehensive understanding of these new frontiers.

In a series of processes, these three dimensions intertwine, enabling go-betweens not just to adhere to established rules but also to actively shape them to achieve their material and non-material objectives. While each dimension independently creates spaces for go-betweens to thrive, the case of Sintang illustrates that their interconnection adds further complexity to the new frontier, often transcending a simple dialectical relationship into a mode of hybridization.

From the three critical dimensions explored in this study, it is evident that none can be analysed in isolation to fully understand the roles of go-betweens in the oil palm context within the new frontier setting in Sintang. The interplay of these dimensions, in various combinations, give rise to five distinct typologies: adaptive go-between, speciality go-between, opposing go-between, positioning go-between, and go-between as chameleon. These typologies are not rigid but rather fluid for each go-between in *lahan basah*, with their adaptability grounded in the specific situations, conditions, and objectives necessary to maintain and sustain their roles.

The concept of 'style' helps in analysing people's patterns as both strategically planned actions and unconscious or conscious behaviours aimed at protecting existing lifestyles, pursuing new ones, and fulfilling social obligations (De Jong, 2013). The dynamic nature of a go-between's style establishes only loose patterns of practices. Simultaneously, the notion of style proves crucial, emphasizing its relevance in integrating socio-cultural components and moving beyond agency-structure divisions.

As individuals, go-betweens in Sintang share both fundamental and complementary characteristics. However, their styles are intricately interconnected in a dyadic, or rather triadic, manner with social structures, individual traits, and social networks. This entanglement of individual characteristics with structural aspects and social networks offers a more comprehensive understanding of their entire position. The nodes in society represent the substance of a swamp, forming primary particles exchanged in the intricate network of relationships, challenging the conventional understanding that ignores the fluidity of role changes through different aspects.

In this context, go-betweens can either withdraw or find ways to navigate the wetland between various social fields. The nodes and dimensions within *lahan*

basah connect social spheres both hierarchically and horizontally, providing spaces for go-betweens to operate. However, go-betweens do not navigate a rigid matrix. In this new frontier, they may either constrain themselves to or dedicate themselves to a particular matrix, with their individual characteristics guiding their actions. Only a few individuals can become go-betweens by effectively applying all dimensions of structure, agency, and social networks while maintaining enduring roles even in more complex and layered contexts. Consequently, go-betweens are not uniform actors, but individuals with distinct personal characteristics who navigate between structural conditions and social networks, showcasing their ability to seize opportunities and capitalize on them. In this context, go-betweens in Sintang emerge as a palm oil swamp go-between.

This study's theoretical contribution expands upon previous discussions of Indonesian palm oil development, which often focus on governments, businesses, NGOs, or local communities while typically overlooking the central role of go-betweens. Contrary to the view of go-betweens as complementary actors, this research emphasizes their crucial role in connecting various interests and opportunities in the process of regional development and transformation. In the intricate societal landscape of Indonesia, go-betweens emerge as pivotal actors. The tri-dimensional perspective developed in this study fills gaps in understanding socio-political and cultural situations in Indonesia.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, this study also holds implications for policy design in the Indonesian context, where go-betweens play a significant role in everyday life. Recognizing go-betweens as agents of change and involving them in policy participation processes and environmental management is imperative. By acknowledging their roles and power, categorizing go-betweens as a professional job with rights and obligations becomes crucial. Designing policies that govern their involvement in natural resources contexts can mitigate issues of leakage, ambiguity, and monopoly in Indonesia. Additionally, this research, specific to the oil palm context, provides valuable input for future studies exploring other issues around new extract frontiers.

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Declaration Data Management PhD Thesis

Radboud Social Cultural Research, Radboud University

Section A. Primary data / information

For my thesis I have collected **primary** data / information.

Yes ☒ → Complete section A.

No ☐ → Go to section B.

I declare that		
A1.	The data for my thesis are obtained with the consent of informants / respondents.	Yes/No
A2.	Privacy sensitive data / information is encrypted and is stored on a protected computer or server environment.	Yes/No
A3.	The data / information is securely stored for reasons of scientific integrity at least for 10 years after finishing PhD research.	Yes/No
A4.	Anonymized data / information is registered in a well-known data repository system (Research Data Repository, DANS-KNAW).	Yes/No/n.a.
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Section B. Secondary data / information

For my thesis I have used data / information **collected by other researchers**.

Yes ☐ → Complete section B.

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I declare that		
B1.	The data / information is obtained legitimately.	Yes/No
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C1.	A short methodological justification, and/or the syntax and method of data / information processing is deposited in a so-called 'publication package'.	Yes/No
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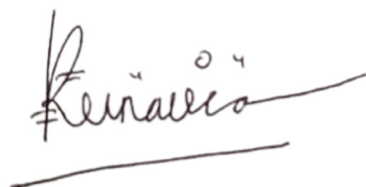
Title Thesis

Navigating Oil Palm Swamps: Rethinking the Role of Go-Betweens in Palm Oil Cultivation at the Kalimantan Frontier in Indonesia

Date

04 November 2024

Signature:

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Runavia', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

If one or more statements cannot be confirmed the Phd should explain in an Annex why certain conditions are not met following the 'comply or explain' principle.

Annex

This dissertation is based on ethnographic field research that was conducted in Sintang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia, from February 2015 to February 2016. Field research and the collection of data followed the ethical guidelines of the Radboud Institute for Social and Cultural Research (RSCR). To protect the identity of participants and to comply with privacy and data protection legislation, raw ethnographic materials, such as fieldnotes, cannot be shared with third parties, but these are securely stored on a password-protected computer with a backup on

a password-protected external hard drive. Given the personal nature of the data and the presence of sensitive information about personal networks and activities of participants, these ethnographic materials are also unsuitable for review by researchers who are unfamiliar with the field context or who have not visited the study site. Since go-betweens are located on the boundary between legal and illegal, the research involved significant risks for both the participants and the researcher. As a consequence, the use of ethnographic information about the field site is restricted to the principal researcher only.

Glossary

<i>Adat</i>	Custom or Traditional practices in local communities
<i>Anak buah</i>	Clients
<i>Anak angkat</i>	Adopting a child
<i>Ayu</i>	Life or vitality
<i>Camat</i>	Head of sub-district
<i>Calo lahan</i>	People associate land suppliers
<i>Bahasa sehari-hari</i>	Everyday language
<i>Bakawan</i>	Friendship
<i>Balas budi</i>	Indebtedness payment
<i>Basa-basi</i>	Small talk
<i>Bekking/Decking</i>	Backing or protector
<i>Bilek/Lawang</i>	Longhouse apartment
<i>Bemalu</i>	Counter argument
<i>Batang panjang</i>	Longhouse
<i>Dalang</i>	Puppeteer
<i>Desa gaya baru</i>	New style of village
<i>Gawai</i>	Harvest feast
<i>Ilmu</i>	Esoteric knowledge
<i>Hal yang biasa atau lumrah</i>	Ordinary
<i>Harga diri</i>	Honour
<i>Jagos</i>	Local strongmen
<i>Jemput bola</i>	Proactively ask independent farmers to sell their oil palm fruit
<i>Lahan basah</i>	Wetland
<i>Kebal</i>	Physically invulnerable
<i>Ketua adat</i>	Customary leader
<i>Kepala desa</i>	Head of villages
<i>Maap omong</i>	Excuse me for saying this
<i>Mafia lahan</i>	Powerful land suppliers
<i>Malu</i>	Shame or loses face
<i>Manang</i>	Shaman
<i>Masyarakat adat</i>	Indigenous communities
<i>Ngayau</i>	Head hunting
<i>Orang kampung</i>	Villagers

<i>Orang perusahaan</i>	Company representative
<i>Tempayan</i>	Big vats
<i>Kemitraan</i>	Partnership
<i>Kapling</i>	Oil palm plot
<i>Kebun inti</i>	Nucleus plots
<i>Keluarga</i>	Family
<i>Kenalan</i>	Ordinary friendship or acquaintance
<i>Kepala Keluarga</i>	Head of the family
<i>Keramat</i>	Sacred
<i>Kerampak</i>	Straightforward and harsh or Straight Talking
<i>Kiai</i>	Muslim leader
<i>Komisi</i>	Commission
<i>Pama</i>	Strong soul
<i>Pemain</i>	Partaker
<i>Penyambung lidah</i>	Negotiator
<i>Perpanjangan tangan</i>	Extra pair of hands
<i>Preman</i>	Thug
<i>Purih</i>	Genealogical degrees
<i>Pusaka</i>	Sacred object
<i>Sawah</i>	Sharing room
<i>Semenget</i>	Life force
<i>Silaturahmi</i>	Goodwill visitation
<i>Tangan kanan</i>	Right-hand Man or an actor with specific roles in helping other go-betweens
<i>Tau sama tau</i>	Understanding each other
<i>Terima kasih</i>	Expression of gratitude
<i>Tokey</i>	Local bosses
<i>Tokey buah</i>	Fruit local bosses
<i>Tumenggung adat</i>	Representative of a sub-ethnic group
<i>Tengkulak buah</i>	Fruit collectors
<i>Tuai rumah</i>	Head of the longhouse
<i>Tuai burung</i>	Augur or cultural go-between
<i>Uang pelicin</i>	Monetary payment or bribe
<i>Uang rokok</i>	Payment cigarette
<i>Umat</i>	Islam religion's members
<i>Utang budi</i>	Indebtedness

Samenvatting

In de afgelopen decennia hebben veel plattelandsgebieden in Indonesië een enorme transformatie ondergaan door de exploitatie van natuurlijke hulpbronnen, met name door de oprichting van zeer grote monocultuurplantages voor oliepalm. Deze ontwikkeling heeft geleid tot de creatie van zogenaamde Nieuwe Frontier-regio's. Een van die regio's in Indonesië is West-Kalimantan. De ingrijpende transformatie van deze regio heeft geleid tot het ontstaan van tussenpersonen. Tot voor kort was er weinig bekend over de rol van tussenpersonen in deze ontwikkelingen en waarom sommige mensen in staat waren om de evoluerende economie te benutten om een nieuwe rol of positie in te nemen, terwijl anderen dat niet konden. In deze scriptie onderzoek ik de rol van tussenpersonen bij de oliepalmtelt in de nieuwe hulpbronnenfrontier in Sintang, West-Kalimantan. Dit onderzoek is gebaseerd op een jaar veldonderzoek in 2015 in de regio, waarin ik ontdekte dat in de nasleep van het proces van politieke decentralisatie en regionale autonomie, de sociale en politieke organisatie van lokale samenlevingen aanzienlijk was veranderd. Als gevolg hiervan worden tussenpersonen steeds invloedrijker in sociale en politieke praktijken.

Hoofdstuk 1 beschrijft de natuurlijke hulpbronnen van Sintang in de oostelijke regio van West-Kalimantan en biedt nieuwe perspectieven op grensvorming ('frontierization'). Historisch gezien ontstond de oude 'frontier' in Sintang vanwege de rijkdom aan natuurlijke hulpbronnen, ofwel *lahan basah* ('wetland'). Grensvorming ging verder door politieke veranderingen opgelegd door de koloniale regering, het Maleise koninkrijk en de kerk, die aanzienlijke gevolgen hadden voor lokale gemeenschappen. Deze machtsverschuivingen gingen ook gepaard met de exploitatie van natuurlijke hulpbronnen, landclaims, controle over de lokale bevolking en de oplegging van nieuwe geloofssystemen door de autoriteiten. Later, na de Indonesische onafhankelijkheid, zette het proces van grensvorming zich voort door de winning van de natuurlijke hulpbronnen, waaronder houtkap, rubberproductie en oliepalmtelt.

Deze structurele omstandigheden rondom de oude frontier werden de basis voor het leven aan de nieuwe frontier in Sintang. De nieuwe frontiersituatie begon na de verdeling van de macht naar de regionale overheid, wat multinationale bedrijven uitnodigde om oliepalm te ontwikkelen in Sintang, met name in Ketungau Hilir. De transformatie van palmolie en het onderhoud daarvan creëerde nieuwe "*lahan basah*" waar tussenpersonen met elkaar concurreerden. De flexibiliteit en aanpas-

baarheid van de “*lahan basah*” creëert paradoxen die waarden en normen opnieuw vormgeven te midden van snelle veranderingen, waarbij de kritieke rol van tussenpersonen in de regio wordt benadrukt.

Hoofdstuk 2 beschrijft de machtsverschuiving in het Sintang-district na de implementatie van regionale autonomie. Deze verschuiving heeft ervoor gezorgd dat Dayak-mensen sleutelposities op verschillende niveaus van de overheid hebben ingenomen. Dayak-groepen zijn al lang bekend met het bestaan van tussenpersonen in hun leven. In het verleden waren deze tussenpersonen diep geïntegreerd in de sociale structuren van hun samenlevingen met specifieke vermelding van figuren zoals de *tuai burong* (waarzegger), *tuai rumah* (hoofd van het huis), en *manang* (sjamaan). Deze figuren waren cruciaal in het beheren, bemiddelen en faciliteren van de gemeenschapscohesie en het welzijn binnen het langhuis, onder de bewoners, en in relatie tot het spirituele domein, met als uiteindelijk doel harmonie te bereiken.

De invloeden van het kapitalisme in Kalimantan hebben ruimte gecreëerd voor nieuwe tussenpersonen, namelijk de *tokey*. Het ontstaan van *tokey* heeft geleid tot nieuwe sociaaleconomische structuren die hun rol omvatten en hun belang als sleutelpersonen in de economische dimensie vergroten. Tegelijkertijd heeft de Nieuwe Orde invloed gehad op de overdracht van macht van gemeenschap gebonden tussenpersonen naar nieuwe ‘staatsvorm’ tussenpersonen. Het leger, vaak ondersteund door lokale *jagos*, elimineerde de ruimte voor lokale bazen om economische transformatie buiten Java te garanderen.

Na de val van Suharto in 1998 leidde de beweging van Indonesië richting decentralisatie, vrijheid en democratie tot de vorming van etnische groepsorganisaties. In de politieke dimensie wordt de erkenning van *adat* de basis voor de vorming van etnische groepsorganisaties (zoals Dayak met Dayak Raden of Dewan Adat Dayak/DAD) en wordt gezien als een legitiem recht om verschillende sociale problemen op te lossen. *Adat* is een nieuwe kracht geworden voor lokale gemeenschappen, vooral Dayak-gemeenschappen, bij het verkrijgen van nieuwe *lahan basah*. Het helpt actoren van Dayak-achtergronden om macht te krijgen, om toegang te krijgen, te controleren en ruimte te creëren in deze nieuwe *lahan basah*. In deze zin heeft de opkomst van de Dayak-gemeenschap ook het vermogen van de Dayak-mensen verbeterd om toegang te krijgen tot middelen en heeft het hevige concurrentie en twisten onder de actoren in Sintang veroorzaakt, vooral onder de tussenpersonen. Hierdoor zijn de kenmerken van de tussenpersonen veranderd ten opzichte van het verleden.

Hoofdstuk 3 illustreert de macht van tussenpersonen in Sintang, van het dorpsniveau tot het districtsniveau, door het in kaart brengen van het werk van

tussenpersonen. De voortdurend veranderende structuur en dynamiek van de nieuwe frontier hebben een aantal verschillende rollen voor tussenpersonen gecreëerd in termen van hun praktijken. Door een actor-georiënteerd perspectief toe te passen op hun individuele kenmerken, ontdekte ik belangrijke rollen voor tussenpersonen in relatie tot de ontwikkeling en het onderhoud van oliepalmpiantages. Deze rollen zijn: informatieverstrekker, vergunningverlener, landleverancier, fruitverzamelaar, dienstverlener, *beking*, oppositie-tussenpersoon en *tangan kanan*. Dit zijn acht belangrijke rollen in het nieuwe oliepalmeecosysteem.

De rol van tussenpersonen in het dagelijks leven vereist het vermogen om verschillende ontwerpen en modellen te vertalen naar diverse logica van intenties, doelen en ambities van actoren en instellingen. De co-existentie van uiteenlopende rationaliteit, belangen en betekenissen vereist dat een tussenpersoon orde, legitimiteit en succes creëert, en natuurlijke hulpbronnen onderhoudt. Om te overleven, moeten tussenpersonen hun rol spelen in de nieuwe frontier en specifieke individuele kenmerken toevoegen. Hoewel sommige 'oude' kenmerken zoals charisma en meertaligheid nog steeds nodig zijn, moeten ze ook andere kenmerken bezitten zoals goede persoonlijke positionering, meerdere identiteiten, *basa-basi* en *kerampak*, zoet praten en risico's nemen. Ze moeten hun individuele vaardigheden en ervaring, presentatie en uiterlijk, en acties en gedragingen overwegen. Het succes van tussenpersonen ligt in het hebben van ten minste een combinatie van deze individuele kenmerken, waardoor ze in staat zijn om sociaal-culturele, politieke en economische trajecten te volgen.

Hoofdstuk 4 biedt een beter begrip van de rol van tussenpersonen in termen van de beperkingen en mogelijkheden van de sociale relaties en netwerken waarin ze zijn ingebed en die ze strategisch kunnen gebruiken in de context van oliepalmpiantages. Sociale relaties en netwerken vormen de ruggengraat van de exclusieve transacties, onderhandelingen en acties van tussenpersonen om hun rollen te vervullen. Sociale relaties en netwerken zijn ingebed in een sociale structuur waarin tussenpersonen bestaan.

In de eerste paragraaf van dit hoofdstuk werd het idee van de sociale sfeer van de Dayak samenleving besproken. Binnen dit idee wordt een individu met een Dayak etnische achtergrond gekoppeld aan verschillende vormen van sociale organisatie, namelijk verwantschap, het langhuis (*rumah panjang*) en de familie-eenheid (*bilek*). Door middel van *bilek* vormen Dayak individuen nauwe en kleine banden met andere individuen, waarin zij meer dan waarden en normen delen, zoals kosmische energie (*semangat*) en leven of vitaliteit (*ayu*). Het maakt de verbinding en relatie binnen de *bilek* als 'wij' en die van andere *bilek* als 'anderen'.

Onder deze vormen van sociale organisatie construeerden Dayak individuen hun verbindingen en relationele grenzen tussen 'wij' en 'anderen'.

Dit idee van 'wij' en 'anderen' dient als basis voor het onderscheiden van mensen als onderdeel van 'wij' (bondgenoten) of als 'anderen' (vijanden). Dit principe waarschuwt Dayak-individuen wanneer ze omgaan met anderen in sociale relaties. De toepassing van dit principe is echter vaak zeer dynamisch, aangezien iedereen de beste positie binnen of tussen sociale sferen kan kiezen. Door sociale interactie verbinden individuen de 'buitenwereld' en hun eigen 'binnenwereld', wat leidt tot stabielere en langdurige relaties. Dit begrip maakt Dayak-mensen voorzichtig en berekenend in hun interacties met buitenstaanders, waarbij ze relaties vermijden die geen verband houden met hun oorspronkelijke sociale sfeer.

Dayak-interactie wordt ook vaak opgebouwd vanuit een kleine eenheid door een intimiteitsbarometer toe te passen op relaties om individuele relaties te vertrouwen en diepgaand te verbinden met het idee van 'wij', soms door een sociaal-cultureel ritueel toe te passen dat het type 'relatie' kan veranderen.

Om echter om te gaan met nieuwe grenssituaties, verkennen Dayak-individuen verschillende sociale relaties en netwerken die hen meer kansen kunnen bieden, zoals kennissen of *kenalan*, burens, vrienden of *bekawan*, persoonlijke allianties in dezelfde instelling of werk (collega's) en een patroon-cliëntrelatie. In deze verschillende relaties gebruiken ze de barometer van relatie-intimiteit om in kaart te brengen wie dichtbij is en wie niet.

Het tweede deel van dit hoofdstuk beschrijft hoe het intermediaire netwerk is gebaseerd op persoonlijke banden die voortbouwen op een dyadische relatie om alles formeel om te zetten in meer persoonlijke en informele handelingen. Het laat zien dat de dyadische relaties van tussenpersonen zich manifesteren in verschillende vormen van banden, zoals patroon-cliënt, vriendschap, familiale of institutionele banden. Elke dyadische relatie heeft een specifieke aantrekkingskracht om de banden solide maar flexibel te maken, zoals schuld (*utang budi*), imaginaire genealogieën en loyaliteit. De basisprincipes van de Dayak sociale sfeer worden geïmplementeerd in tussenpersonenrelaties en netwerken in Sintang om te reageren op de sociaal-politieke omstandigheden van de Dayak samenleving na de vestiging van regionale autonomie.

De vier casestudy's in dit hoofdstuk laten zien dat het gebruik van sociale relaties en netwerken relatief afhankelijk is van de toestand van de tussenpersoon. Ze tonen verschillende combinaties van netwerken die vaak door een tussenpersoon worden gebruikt, namelijk het principe van de patroon-cliëntrelatie, verwantschap/familie, allianties en vriendschap in zijn/haar dyadische interactie. Elk van deze interacties heeft verschillende kenmerken die van toepassing zijn op verticale

of horizontale banden. Een tussenpersoon zal ze echter in een dyadische relatie brengen en creëert individuele banden door middel van schuld of *utang budi* om het succes van hun werk te verzekeren. Een dyadische relatie geeft een tussenpersoon meer flexibiliteit om met anderen in contact te komen. Samengevat zijn relaties en netwerken zeer flexibel en uniek, afhankelijk van de persoon die ze gebruikt.

Hoofdstuk 5 legt de drie belangrijkste dimensies van de positie van tussenpersonen uit: structurele aspecten, individuele kenmerken en sociale relaties/netwerken die de praktijken van tussenpersoon in Sintang ondersteunen. Elke dimensie vormt specifieke ruimtes voor tussenpersonen. De drie dimensies zijn met elkaar verbonden en stellen tussenpersonen in staat om regels voor materiële en niet-materiële voordelen te maken en te reproduceren. De analyse van de tussenpersonen in Sintang toont aan dat de interactie tussen de drie dimensies de complexiteit aan de nieuwe grens heeft geïntensiveerd. Vaak gaat het proces verder dan een eenvoudige dialectiek en vormen hybride verbindingen tussen de drie dimensies.

De drie dimensies creëren patronen die essentieel zijn voor de kenmerken van tussenpersonen. Ik heb vijf verschillende soorten tussenpersonen gevonden: strategische tussenpersonen, risicovolle tussenpersonen, specialistische tussenpersonen, adaptieve tussenpersonen en kameleons. Elk type heeft verschillende combinaties die leiden tot specifieke acties en rollen in de oliepalmsector.

Ten eerste, strategische of positioneringsintermediairs, die de combinatie vertegenwoordigen van hoge niveaus van dwarsverbanden en dominante steun vanuit de structurele dimensie, waardoor een tussenpersoon zwakke individuele kenmerken kan hebben. Hun rollen worden meestal gedekt door gelaagde dwarsverbanden die het juridische procedurele schema volgen, waardoor de betrokkenheid van specifieke individuen die de cliënten zelf achter de schermen controleren, wordt vervaagd. Ten tweede, hoog-risico tussenpersonen, die worden gekenmerkt door individuele kenmerken en hoge dwarsverbanden als hoofddimensies, maar die geen sterke structurele positie hebben. Een hoog-risico tussenpersoon moet ten minste worden ondersteund door essentiële persoonlijke kenmerken en enkele aanvullende ondersteunende kenmerken om hem of haar te helpen integreren in verschillende sociale relaties en netwerken. De combinatie van de twee dimensies heeft echter het structurele aspect nodig om hen te voltooien en hen de mogelijkheid te geven om posities in te nemen buiten de formele structuur.

Ten derde, specialistische tussenpersonen, die zich richten op de uniciteit van individuele kenmerken van tussenpersonen, ondersteund door beperkte overkoepelende verbindingen en een goede structurele positie. Dit type tussenpersoon heeft dominante individuele vaardigheden die hen bekend maken bij hun cliënten

als experts in specifieke rollen. De meeste taken van specialistische tussenpersonen tonen aan dat hun dominante individuele vaardigheden dialectisch gerelateerd zijn aan andere dimensies van structuur en sociale relaties. Ten vierde, adaptieve tussenpersonen, die sterk zijn in de structurele dimensie maar minder overkoepelende verbindingen en onderscheidende individuele kenmerken hebben. Ze zijn altijd voorbereid op nieuwe kansen of machtsverschuivingen, die vaak de bestaande structuur vervangen. Hun vermogen om nieuwe kansen te zien, nieuwe uitdagingen aan te gaan en risico's te nemen, stelt hen in staat een langdurige rol te spelen. Dit betekent dat ze minder worden beïnvloed door de veranderende structuur, die door veel factoren wordt beïnvloed. Ten vijfde, kameleons, die een combinatie van de vier typen tussenpersonen vertegenwoordigen met een evenwichtige combinatie van de drie belangrijkste dimensies (structuur, agentschap en netwerken). Ze zijn een type tussenpersoon die gekenmerkt wordt door hybride kenmerken bij het spelen van een bepaalde rol in een bepaald patroon. Deze tussenpersonen ontwikkelen voortdurend hun vaardigheden en netwerken om hun rollen te behouden. In die zin moeten kameleons zich altijd positioneren tussen verschillende dimensies om ruimte en plaats te bereiken, terwijl ze betrokken zijn bij hybridisering.

De vijf typen tussenpersonen vertonen overeenkomsten die worden gekenmerkt door een combinatie van de drie dimensies van structuur, individuele kenmerken en sociale netwerken. De verschillen tussen de verschillende typen tussenpersonen liggen in de verschillende combinaties van de drie dimensies die de verschillende rollen van tussenpersonen ondersteunen. Vanuit dit begrip zullen de dynamische en verschillende combinaties van de drie dimensies niet altijd hetzelfde patroon van kenmerken van tussenpersoon vormen. De karakteristieke patronen die in dit proefschrift worden beschreven, definiëren de verschillende rollen van tussenpersonen specifiek voor de oliepalmsetting in Sintang. In een bredere context kunnen deze kenmerken ook van toepassing zijn op anderen die als tussenpersoon optreden in de ruimere Indonesische samenleving of elders.

Deze studie concludeert dat het ontstaan van tussenpersonen in de huidige context werd veroorzaakt door de aanwezigheid van *lahan basah*, die wordt gekenmerkt door vaagheid, ondoorzichtigheid en ambiguïteit. Met behulp van een multidimensionale benadering van structuur, agentschap en sociale netwerken onderscheid ik vijf verschillende soorten tussenpersonen in Sintang. Deze studie biedt een multidimensionale benadering van tussenpersonen in Kalimantan, die ook actief en zichtbaar zijn in verschillende soorten *lahan basah* in andere delen van Indonesië, of zelfs in andere samenlevingen elders. Bovendien zal een specifiekere beleidsmaatregel voor tussenpersonen helpen om lekkage, ambiguïteit en

monopolie in de exploitatie van natuurlijke hulpbronnen in Indonesië te verminderen.

In deze context kunnen tussenpersonen zich terugtrekken of manieren vinden om *lahan basah* tussen verschillende sociale sferen te navigeren. De knooppunten en dimensies in *lahan basah* verbinden sociale sferen hiërarchisch en horizontaal, waardoor er ruimte ontstaat voor tussenpersonen. Tussenpersonen navigeren echter niet door een rigide matrix. In deze nieuwe grens beperken tussenpersonen zich tot een bepaalde matrix, waarbij individuele kenmerken hun acties sturen. Slechts weinigen kunnen tussenpersonen worden door alle dimensies van structuur, agentschap en sociale netwerken toe te passen, en door duurzame rollen te behouden, zelfs in meer complexe en gelaagde soorten contexten. Bijgevolg zijn tussenpersonen geen uniforme actoren, maar individuen met specifieke persoonlijke kenmerken die handelen en bewegen tussen structurele omstandigheden en sociale netwerken, waarbij ze hun vermogen aantonen om kansen te zien en manieren te vinden om hiervan te profiteren. In dit begrip komt de tussenpersoon in Sintang naar voren als een tussenpersoon in het palmolie moeras.

De theoretische bijdrage van deze studie is een uitbreiding van eerdere discussies over de ontwikkeling van Indonesische palmolie, die vaak gericht zijn op de overheid, bedrijven, NGO's of lokale gemeenschappen, en meestal de centrale rol van tussenpersonen negeren. In tegenstelling tot de opvatting van tussenpersonen als aanvullende actoren, benadrukt dit onderzoek hun cruciale rol in het verbinden van verschillende belangen en kansen in het proces van regionale ontwikkeling en transformatie. In het complexe sociale landschap van Indonesië komen tussenpersonen naar voren als sleutelactoren.

Het driedimensionale perspectief ontwikkeld in deze studie vult lacunes in het begrip van de sociaal-politieke en culturele situatie in Indonesië. Naast de theoretische bijdrage heeft deze studie ook implicaties voor beleidsontwikkeling in de Indonesische context, waar tussenpersonen een belangrijke rol spelen in het dagelijks leven. Het is noodzakelijk om tussenpersonen te erkennen als agenten van verandering en hen te betrekken bij beleidsprocessen en milieubeheer. Door hun rol en macht te erkennen, wordt de categorisering van tussenpersoon als een professionele activiteit met rechten en verantwoordelijkheden cruciaal. Het ontwerpen van beleid dat hun betrokkenheid in natuurlijke hulpbronnencontexten regelt, kan problemen van lekkage, ambiguïteit en monopolie in Indonesië verminderen. Bovendien biedt dit onderzoek, specifiek voor de context van oliepalm, waardevolle input voor toekomstige studies die andere contexten rond nieuwe extractiegrenzen verkennen.

Summary

Over the past few decades, many rural areas in Indonesia have been undergoing a massive transformation with its natural resources being exploited more rapidly than ever before through the establishment of incredibly large mono-cropping plantations of oil palm. This development has led to the creation of so-called New Frontier regions. One such region in Indonesia is West Kalimantan. The profound transformation of this region became a fertile breeding ground for the emergence of go-betweens. Until recently, little was known about the role of go-betweens in these developments and the question why some people were able to leverage the evolving economy to assume a new role or position while others could not. In this thesis, I examine the role of go-betweens in the cultivation of oil palm at the new resource frontier in Sintang, West Kalimantan. It is based on a year of field research in 2015 in the region, where I discovered that in the wake of the political decentralisation and regional autonomy process, the social and political organization of local societies had changed considerably. As a consequence, go-betweens are increasingly influential in social and political practices.

Chapter 1 looks at Sintang's natural resources in the eastern region of West Kalimantan and offers new perspectives on frontierization. Historically, the old frontier in Sintang arose because of its natural resource wealth or *lahan basah* ('wetland'). Frontierization continued through political changes imposed by the colonial government, the Malay kingdom and the church, which had significant impacts on local communities. These shifts in power were also followed by the exploitation of natural resources, land claims, control of local people and the imposition of new belief systems by the authorities. Later, after Indonesian independence, the process of frontierization continued through resource extraction, including logging, rubber production and oil palm cultivation.

These structural conditions around the old frontier became the basis for life on the new frontier around Sintang. The new frontier situation began after the distribution of power to the regional government, which responded by inviting multinational companies to develop oil palm in Sintang, especially in the areas of Ketungau Hilir. The transformation of palm oil and its maintenance created new *lahan basah* where go-between's competed. The fluidity of the *lahan basah* creates paradoxes that reshape values and norms amidst rapid change, highlighting the critical role of go-betweens in the region.

Chapter 2 explains the shift in power in Sintang district following the implementation of regional autonomy. The shift has allowed Dayak people to move into key roles at the district, provincial and national levels. Dayak groups have long been familiar with the existence of go-betweens in their lives. In the past, these intermediaries were deeply integrated into the social structures of their societies. Figures such as the *tuai burong* (augur), *tuai rumah* (head of the house) and *manang* (shaman) played a crucial role in managing, mediating and facilitating community cohesion and well-being within the longhouse, among its inhabitants and in relation to the spiritual realm, ultimately striving for harmony.

The influences of capitalism in Kalimantan have created a space for new go-betweens, namely *tokey*. The emergence of *tokey* has led to a new socio-economic structure encompassing their role and gained importance as key go-betweens in the economic dimension. At the same time, the New Order has influenced the transfer of power from community go-betweens to new 'state form' go-betweens. The military, often supported by local *jagos*, eliminated the space for local bosses to ensure economic transformation outside Java.

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, Indonesia's move towards decentralisation, freedom and democracy led to the formation of ethnic group organisations. In the political dimension, *adat* recognition is becoming the basis for the formation of ethnic group organisations (such as Dayak with Dayak Councils or Dewan Adat Dayak/DAD) and is seen as a legitimate right to solve various social problems. *Adat* has become a new strength for local communities, especially Dayak communities, in accessing new *lahan basah*. It helps actors from Dayak backgrounds to gain power to access, control and create space in this new *lahan basah*. In this sense, the rise of the Dayak community has also improved the Dayak people's ability to access resources and triggered fierce competition and contestation among the actors in Sintang, especially among the go-betweens. This changed the characteristics of the go-betweens from what they had been in the past.

Chapter 3 illustrates the power of go-betweens in Sintang from the village to the district level by mapping the work of go-betweens. The constantly changing structure and dynamics of the new frontier have created a number of different roles for go-betweens in terms of their practices. Applying an actor-oriented perspective to their individual characteristics, I found important roles for go-betweens in relation to the development and maintenance of oil palm plantations. These roles are information provider, permit supplier, land supplier, fruit collector, service provider, *beking*, opposition intermediary and *tangan kanan*. These are eight important roles in the new oil palm ecosystem.

In everyday life, go-betweens have to translate all designs and models into a different logic of intentions, goals and ambitions of actors and institutions. In many situations, the coexistence of different rationalities, interests and meanings requires a go-between to produce order, legitimacy and success, and to maintain natural resources. In order to survive, go-betweens need to play a role on the new frontier, and to do so they need to add specific individual characteristics. While some of the 'old' go-betweens' characteristics such as charisma and multi-lingualism are still required, they also need other characteristics such as good personal positioning, multiple identities, *basa-basi* and *kerampak*, sweet-talking and risk-taking. They need to consider their individual skills and experience, presentation and appearance, and actions and behaviours. The success of go-betweens lies in having at least some combination of these individual characteristics, which enables them to follow socio-cultural, political and economic trajectories.

Chapter 4 provides a better understanding of the role of go-betweens in terms of the constraints and opportunities of the social relations and networks in which they are embedded and which they might use strategically in the context of oil palm plantations. Social relations and networks are the backbone of go-betweens' exclusive dealings, negotiations and actions to fulfil their roles. Social relations and networks are embedded in a social structure in which go-between agents exist.

The first section of this chapter discussed the idea of the social sphere of Dayak society. Within this idea, an individual with a Dayak ethnic background is linked to several forms of social organisation, namely kinship, the longhouse (*rumah panjang*) and the family unit (*bilek*). Through *bilek*, Dayak individuals form close and small ties with other individuals, in which they share more than values and norms, such as cosmic energy (*semenget*) and life or vitality (*ayu*). It makes the connection and relationship within the *bilek* as 'we' and those of other *bilek* as 'others'. Under these forms of social organisation, Dayak individuals constructed their connections and relational boundaries between 'us' and 'others'.

This idea of 'us' and 'others' serves as a basis for distinguishing people as part of 'us' (allies) or as 'others' (enemies). This principle cautions Dayak individuals when engaging with others in social relationships. However, the application of this principle is often very dynamic, as everyone can choose the best position within or between social spheres. Through social interaction, individuals connect the 'outside' world and their own 'inside' world, leading to more stable and long-lasting relationships. This understanding makes Dayak people cautious and calculating in their interactions with outsiders, avoiding relationships that have no connection to their original social sphere.

Dayak interaction is also often built from a small unit by applying an intimacy barometer to relationships in order to trust individual relationships and connect deeply to the idea of 'we' sometimes by applying a socio-cultural ritual that can change the type of 'relationship'. However, in order to cope with new border situations, Dayak individuals explore different social relationships and networks that may offer them more opportunities, such as acquaintances or *kenalan*, neighbours, friends or *bekawan*, personal alliances in the same institution or employment (colleagues) and a patron-client relationship. In these various relationships, they use the barometer of relationship intimacy to map who is close and who is not.

The second part of this chapter describes how the intermediary network is based on personal ties that build on a dyadic relationship to bring everything formal into more personal and informal acts. It shows that the dyadic relationships of go-betweens manifest themselves in different forms of ties, such as patron-client, friendship, familial or institutional ties. Each dyadic relationship has a specific appeal to make the ties solid yet flexible, such as indebtedness (*utang budi*), imaginary genealogies and loyalty. The basic principles of the Dayak social sphere are implemented in go-between relationships and networks in Sintang to respond to the socio-political conditions of Dayak society after the establishment of regional autonomy.

The four case studies in this chapter show that the use of social relationships and networks is relatively dependent on the condition of a go-between. They show different combinations of networks often used by a go-between, namely the principle of patron-client relationship, kinship/family, alliances and friendship in his/her dyadic interaction. Each of these interactions has different characteristics that apply to vertical or horizontal ties. However, a go-between will bring them into a dyadic relationship and create individual ties through indebtedness or *utang budi* to ensure the success of their work. A dyadic relationship gives a go-between more flexibility to connect with others. In summary, relationships and networks are very flexible and unique depending on the individual who uses them.

Chapter 5 explains the three main dimensions of the position of go-betweens: structural aspects, individual characteristics and social relationships/networks that support go-between practices in Sintang. Each dimension shapes specific spaces for go-betweens. The three dimensions are interlinked and enable go-betweens to make and reproduce rules for material and non-material benefits. The analysis of go-betweens in Sintang shows that the interaction between the three dimensions has intensified complexity at the new frontier. Often the process goes beyond a simple dialectic, forming hybrid links between the three dimensions.

The three dimensions create patterns that are essential to go-betweens' characteristics. I found five different types of intermediaries: strategic intermediaries, risky intermediaries, specialist intermediaries, adaptive intermediaries and chameleons. Each type has different combinations that lead to specific actions and roles in the oil palm sector.

Firstly, strategic or positioning intermediaries, which represent the combination of high levels of cross-cutting ties and dominant support from the structural dimension, allowing a go-between to have weak individual characteristics. Their roles are usually covered by multi-layered cross-cutting ties that follow the legal procedural scheme, blurring the involvement of specific individuals who control the clients themselves behind the scenes. Second, high-risk go-betweens, who are characterised by individual characteristics and high cross-cutting ties as main dimensions, but who lack a strong structural position. A high-risk go-between needs to be supported at least by essential personal characteristics and some additional supporting characteristics to help him or her integrate into different social relationships and networks. The combination of the two dimensions, however, needs the structural aspect to complete them and give them the opportunity to take positions beyond the formal structure.

Thirdly, expert go-betweens, who focus on the uniqueness of individual go-between characteristics, supported by low cross-cutting ties and a good structural position. This type of go-between has dominant individual skills that make them known to their clients as experts in specific roles. Most of the tasks of expert go-betweens show that their dominant individual skills are dialectically related to other dimensions of structure and social relations. Fourth, adaptive go-between, which are strong in the structural dimension but have fewer cross-cutting links and distinctive individual characteristics. They are always prepared for new goods or a shift in power, which often replaces the existing structure. Their ability to see new opportunities, meet new challenges and take risks enables them to play a long-term role. This means that they are less affected by the changing structure, which is influenced by many factors. Fifth, chameleons are described as a combination of the four types of go-between with a balanced combination of the three main dimensions (structure, agency and networks). They are a type of intermediary characterised by a hybridity of characteristics when playing a particular role in a particular pattern. These go-between continuously develop their skills and networks to maintain their roles. In this sense, chameleons always have to position themselves between different dimensions in order to reach space and place, while being involved in hybridisation.

Of the five types of go-between, the similarities are characterised by a combination of the three dimensions of structure, individual characteristics and social networks. The differences between the different types of go-between lie in the different combinations of the three dimensions that support the different roles of go-between. From this understanding, the dynamic and different combinations of the three dimensions will not always form the same pattern of go-between characteristics. The patterns of characteristics outlined in this thesis define the different roles of go-betweens specifically for the oil palm setting in Sintang. In a broader context, these characteristics may also apply to others who act as go-between in wider Indonesian society or even elsewhere.

This study concludes that the emergence of go-betweens in the current context was triggered by the presence of *lahan basah*, which is characterised by shadiness, opacity and ambiguity. Using a multidimensional approach of structure, agency and social networks, I distinguish five different types of go-betweens in Sintang. This study offers a multidimensional approach to go-betweens in Kalimantan, which are also active and visible in different types of *lahan basah* in other parts of Indonesia, or even in other societies elsewhere. In addition, a more specific policy on go-betweens will help to reduce leakage, ambiguity and monopoly in the exploitation of natural resources in Indonesia.

In this context, go-betweens can either withdraw or find ways to navigate the wetland between various social spheres. The nodes and dimensions in *lahan basah* connect social spheres hierarchically and horizontally, providing space for go-betweens. However, go-betweens do not navigate through a rigid matrix. In this new frontier, go-betweens confine themselves to a particular matrix, with individual characteristics guiding their actions. Few can become go-betweens by applying all dimensions of structure, agency and social networks, and by maintaining enduring roles even in more complex and multi-layered types of contexts. Consequently, go-betweens are not uniform actors, but individuals with specific personal characteristics who act and move between structural conditions and social networks, demonstrating their ability to perceive opportunities and find ways to capitalise on them. In this understanding, the go-between in Sintang emerges as a go-between in the palm oil swamp.

The theoretical contribution of this study extends previous discussions of Indonesian palm oil development, which often focus on the government, companies, NGOs or local communities, and usually neglect the central role of go-between. Contrary to the view of go-betweens as complementary actors, this research emphasises their crucial role in linking different interests and opportunities in the

process of regional development and transformation. In the complex social landscape of Indonesia, go-betweens emerge as key actors.

The tri-dimensional perspective developed in this study fills gaps in understanding the socio-political and cultural situation in Indonesia. Beyond its theoretical contribution, this study also has implications for policy design in the Indonesian context, where go-betweens play a significant role in everyday life. It is imperative to recognise go-betweens as agents of change and to involve them in policy participation processes and environmental management. By recognising their role and power, the categorisation of go-between as a professional activity with rights and responsibilities becomes crucial. Designing policies that govern their involvement in natural resource contexts can mitigate issues of leakage, ambiguity and monopoly in Indonesia. In addition, this research, specific to the oil palm context, provides valuable input for future studies exploring other contexts around new extraction frontiers.

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When I began this journey, my understanding of go-betweens and palm oil was limited. At the time, I simply envisioned studying palm oil cooperatives and emerging go-betweens, particularly how they operated on the boundary between legality and illegality. That perspective changed when I met Edwin de Jong. He opened my eyes to the complexities of go-betweens, revealing that their role extends beyond legal frameworks. With great enthusiasm, he broadened my perspective, guiding me to examine go-betweens through three distinct lenses: structural analysis, an actor-oriented approach, and social network theory. Viewing go-betweens from multiple dimensions allowed me to grasp their complexity at new frontiers.

This journey felt like navigating uncertainty, fraught with challenges, anxiety, stress, and moments of confusion. Moving through this hybrid world was far from easy. There were times when I felt lost in the darkness, overwhelmed by uncertainty, and even intimidated by the masculine and shadowy nature of go-betweens. Yet, with each step forward, I found support from many generous individuals, for which I am immensely grateful.

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About the Author

Runavia Mulyasari completed her undergraduate and master's degrees in the Department of Anthropology at Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In 2013, she became a PhD candidate in the multidisciplinary New Indonesian Frontier (NIF) research project, funded by the Beasiswa Unggulan from the Indonesia's Directorate of Higher Education (DIKTI). Her interest in palm oil studies began in 2010 when she joined the Wealth and Poverty research project between UGM and Toronto University, in which she examined intermediaries in rubber and oil palm plantations. Since then, she has focused her studies on understanding the role of go-betweens in the oil palm context. Currently, she works on a tourism program at Universitas Gadjah Mada, focusing on actors, social relations and networks, critical tourism studies, and agrarian change. In 2024, she received a grant from the Marie Curie program under the MARS: Non-Western Migration Regimes in a Global Perspective project to serve as a guest researcher at Leiden University. She is now becoming a postdoctoral researcher at Sussex University, UK under the UKRI-Ayrton funded Participation of Women in Renewable Energy (POWERE): Inclusive Innovation with Floating Photovoltaics in Remote Island and Coastal Communities project (2025-2027).

Over the past few decades, rural areas in Indonesia, particularly in West Kalimantan, have undergone major transformations due to the rapid expansion of large-scale oil palm plantations. This development has given rise to lahan basah (“wetland”), a fluid socio-economic space characterised by opportunity, competition, and shifting power dynamics. Based on a year of ethnographic fieldwork in Sintang, this study explores the emerging role of go-betweens: individuals who mediate between actors and institutions within this evolving resource frontier. Their emergence and influence are shaped not only by structural changes following decentralisation, but also by personal agency and extensive social networks. The study identifies five types of go-betweens—adaptive, speciality, opposing, positioning, and chameleon—each representing distinct strategies for navigating the volatile conditions of lahan basah. These roles are dynamic and context-specific. By analysing the interplay of structure, agency, and networks, this study offers a nuanced perspective on brokerage in Indonesia’s resource frontier and contributes to broader debates in anthropology and development studies.

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