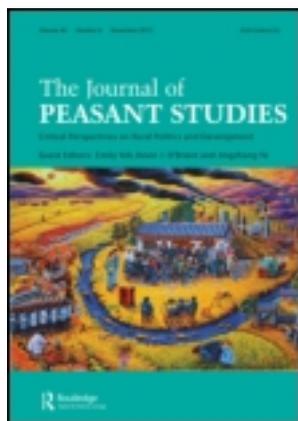


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## Power to make land dispossession acceptable: a policy discourse analysis of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE), Papua, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>

Takeshi Ito, Noer Fauzi Rachman and Laksmi A. Savitri

The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) in Papua, Indonesia, is a state-led mega-project to transform local agriculture through large-scale corporate investment in food crops and biofuels for foreign markets. The project has led to extensive land dispossession, accompanied by devastating social and ecological impacts. This contribution analyzes how discourse regarding food and energy crises has been employed to release land from customary tenure to a coalition of state, corporate and local elite actors. The interests of these actors have converged on the state-led mega-project to transform local agriculture through large-scale corporate investment in food crops and biofuels in the name of national food security.

**Keywords:** state; capital; agrarian environments; land grab; discourse analysis; food and energy estate; Indonesia

### 1. Introduction

The Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE) was officially launched by Indonesia's Ministry of Agriculture on 11 August 2010. According to the Grand Design created by the national government (GoI 2010), this large-scale development of corporate agriculture aims to produce food crops and biofuels for domestic and international markets.<sup>2</sup> The project goals are spectacular and the scale of planned transformation is massive. The MIFEE is expected to increase the production of rice by 1.95 million tons, maize by 2.02 million tons, soybeans by 167 thousand tons, cattle by 64 thousand head, sugar by 2.5 million tons and crude palm oil by 937 thousand tons, thereby reducing net food imports by US\$ 514 million (GoI 2010, 39). According to government estimates, the project will also create 44,900 jobs in the agricultural sector for both indigenous

<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Land Deal Politics Initiative LDPI International Conference on Global Land Grabbing at the University of Sussex in April 2011. We thank Wendy Wolford, Tania Li, Ann Perramond, and Eric Perramond, and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments. Takeshi Ito is grateful to the Colorado College Social Science Executive Committee for its generous support. Of course, all errors remain ours.

<sup>2</sup>The total targeted area of the MIFEE is 1,282,833 ha, which is expected to be developed in three stages (423,251.3 ha in 2010–2014, 632,504.8 ha in 2015–2019 and 227,076.9 ha in 2020–2030) (BKPRN 2010, 10, GoI 2010, 36).

people and trans-migrants and increase income by up to US\$ 13,500 per household per year (GoI 2010, 39).<sup>3</sup>

The creation of the food estate in Merauke is an integral part of the comprehensive national economic development plan unveiled by President Yudohyono's administration in May 2011.<sup>4</sup> The Master Plan for Acceleration and Expansion of Indonesia Economic Development (known by the Indonesian acronym MP3EI) sees Indonesia becoming one of the 10 major economies in the world by 2025. The master plan divides the Indonesian archipelago into six economic corridors (Figure 1), which are identified as economic centers and are expected to boost economic development by investing 4012 trillion rupiah (US\$ 455 billion) in eight strategic programs and 22 main economic activities throughout the country (GoI 2011, 49).<sup>5</sup> Each economic corridor has a specific development theme based on its potential (Table 1). With the realization of these potentials, Indonesia 'aims to position itself as one of the world's main food suppliers, as a processing center for agricultural, fishery, and natural resources, as well as a center for global logistics by 2025 or earlier' (GoI 2011, 16).

Recently, foreign investors have rushed to buy or lease large tracts of land in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America for the production of food crops and bio-fuels for foreign markets in anticipation of food and energy crises (GRAIN 2008, Cotula *et al.* 2009, Von Braun and Meinzen-Dick 2009, Zoomers 2010, World Bank 2010, Borras and Franco 2011, Deininger 2011, De Schutter 2011, Hall 2011, Li 2011). An emerging literature on the so-called land grab has focused primarily on the nature of large-scale land acquisitions as a contemporary enclosure of land for capital accumulation taking place between finance-rich countries of the North and resource-rich countries of the South with multinational corporations and private investor groups as the main actors. This focus, however, obscures a salient feature of the land grab in the era of neoliberal globalization: the role of state actors and their alliances with corporations in creating incentives for agricultural investments through regulations, laws and policies (Cotula 2012, White *et al.* 2012, Wolford *et al.* 2013).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Currently, Papua province is the least developed of Indonesia's 33 provinces. The 2009 Human Development Index values for Papua and West Papua were 64.53 and 68.58, which rank them 33rd and 30th, respectively, among the 33 provinces in Indonesia (Statistics Indonesia 2011).

<sup>4</sup>In September 2011, in order to accelerate the implementation of development in Papua, the national government issued Presidential Decree No. 66, creating the Unit for the Acceleration of Development in Papua and West Papua (known by the Indonesian acronym UP4B) (Down to Earth 2012, ICTJ-ELHSAM 2012). ICTJ-ELHSAM (2012) reports that the national government sees its support for development in Papua as a way of resolving the long-standing political problems of conflicts between Jakarta and Papua, including the Free Papua Movement (known by the Indonesian acronym OPM).

<sup>5</sup>The expected investment in the Papua-Kepulauan Maluku economic corridor is 622 trillion rupiah (US\$ 69 billion) or 15 percent of the total expected investment for the entire project.

<sup>6</sup>The active role of the state in large-scale land acquisitions represents a contradiction to the free market rhetoric of neoliberal globalization. As Philip McMichael suggests, the global land grab is understood not as a contemporary enclosure for capital accumulation but as 'a reflex of changing conditions of accumulation', giving rise to a reordering of international food production, circulation and consumption relations including a relocation of agro-industry from North to South (McMichael 2012, 681–2). In this context, another feature, not examined here, is a relatively new trend of regionalism, i. e. agricultural investments by corporations from emerging economies such as China, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam (Dauvergne and Neville 2009, Ravanera and Gorra 2011, Anseuw *et al.* 2012).

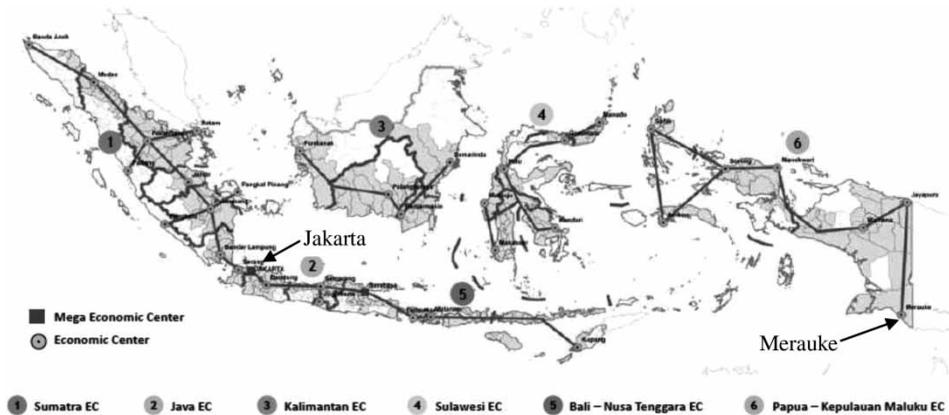


Figure 1. Six economic corridors in Indonesia. Source: Government of Indonesia (2011, 46).

Table 1. Themes of the economic corridors.

Economic corridor	Theme
1 Sumatra	Center for production and processing of natural resources and as nation’s energy reserves
2 Java	Driver of national industry and service provision
3 Kalimantan	Center for production and processing of national mining and energy reserves
4 Sulawesi	Center for production and processing of national agricultural, plantation, fishery, oil and gas, and mining
5 Bali-Nusa Tenggara	Gateway for tourism and national food support
6 Papua-Kepulauan Maluku	Center for development of food, fishery, energy and mining

Source: Government of Indonesia (2011, 47).

In this contribution, we argue that while the emerging picture suggests that multinational corporations and private investor groups are the primary actors in the global land grab, such private actors are often backed by legal and material support from national and local governments and corporations (Borras and Franco 2011, Cotula *et al.* 2011, Anseeuw *et al.* 2012). Besides the use of violence, what is the policy process through which such land dispossession from local smallholders, customary tenure and protected forests is made acceptable? There is an urgent need for detailed research documenting the local processes of the global land grab. This paper addresses this need by focusing on the coalition of interests between various actors including the state, corporate actors and local elites in the case of agricultural expansion in Merauke, a district in Papua province, Indonesia, bordering Papua New Guinea. A critical analysis shows that national and local political elites in alliance with multinational and Indonesian corporate actors have carefully framed the global food and energy crises into a national development scheme involving large-scale land dispossession.

The frontier is seen as a metaphor for national development (Fold and Hirsch 2009, Hirsch 2009, McCarthy and Cramb 2009), presenting opportunities and enormous potential for the state and capital to expand their territory, control resources and deepen production

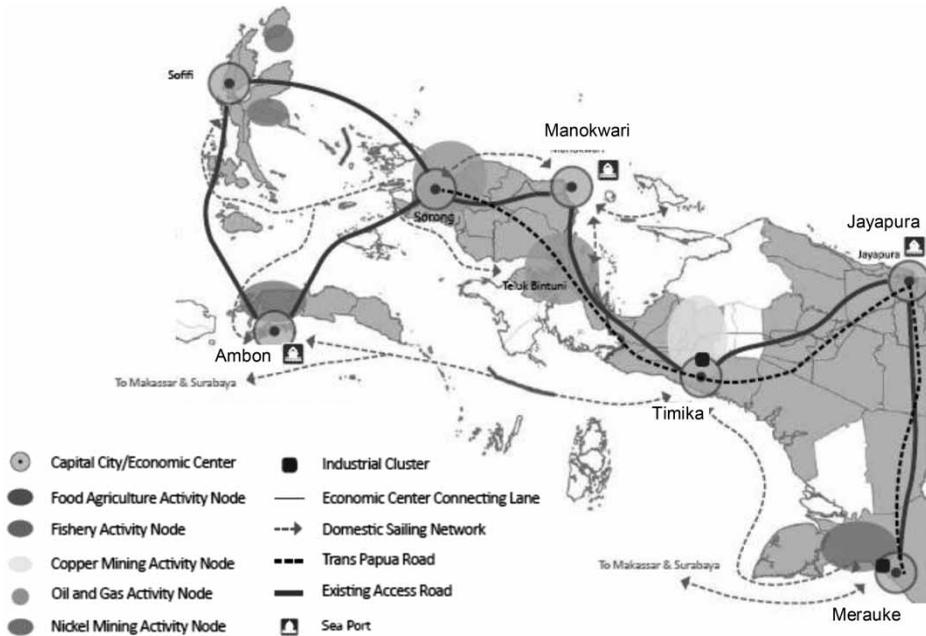


Figure 2. Papua-Kepulauan Maluku economic corridor.  
Source: Government of Indonesia (2011, 156).

relations. To agricultural developers, Merauke presents an ideal space for agricultural expansion, with 2.5 million ha of potential arable land, flat terrain and a suitable agro-climate. Yet, often ignored is the fact that the spectacular visions of agricultural development in Merauke are to occur on land occupied and used by the Malind people and other local/indigenous peoples (Figure 2). One of the main focuses of this contribution is on a question raised by Borras *et al.* (2011, 212) in the Global Land Grabbing Forum of the *Journal of Peasant Studies* (Vol. 38, No. 2): ‘How are these [land] deals discursively justified and legitimized, and in turn, challenged and opposed?’

Central to this question, we argue, is the discourse of food security and agricultural development employed by the state in alliance with corporate actors and local elites, that is, the capability of both public and private actors to connect food and energy crises to the concept of a food and energy estate. In this process, the spectacular vision of the MIFEE as an integral part of the Master Plan for national development has been presented in a manner that overshadows the socially unacceptable outcome of land dispossession. On the heels of the food and energy crises of 2007–2008, President Yudhoyono framed the crises as an agribusiness opportunity under the slogan ‘feeding Indonesia, feeding the world’, which was later fully embraced by the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce (KADIN).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Under the public and private partnership, Indonesia plans to be a major global food producer and to raise at least US\$ 101.5 billion in the 2010–2014 period from the production of 15 food commodities (Maulia 2010). Ten of the 15 food commodities are identified as ‘strategic’ and ‘key’ commodities: rice, corn, sugar, soybeans, palm oil, tea, coffee, cocoa, tuna and shrimp.

The remainder of this contribution is divided into three main parts. Section 2 employs discourse analysis in examining a coalition of interests among various actors including the state, corporate actors and local elites in the policy process, culminating in land dispossession from local smallholders and losses of customary tenure and protected forests in Merauke. It details the policy processes leading to the creation of the MIFEE, including the ways in which the concepts of the corporate agricultural estate and the discourse of food and energy crises have been deployed to make land dispossession acceptable, and the ways in which the large tracts of land have been allocated to corporations. Section 3 examines the ways in which the social and ecological impacts of the MIFEE have prompted local, national and transnational activists to launch counter-hegemonic movements, which have delayed the process of land acquisitions and the achievement of the spectacular goals of the MIFEE. In the conclusion, we argue that the MIFEE case illuminates the ways in which land dispossession was justified and legalized by a coalition of various actors – the state, corporate actors and local elites. Through the discourse of the food and energy crises, the interests of these actors converged on the state-led mega-project to transform local agriculture through large-scale corporate investment in food crops and biofuels in the name of food security for national development (Figure 3).

## 2. Policy processes to make land dispossession acceptable in Merauke

Our analysis focuses on actors, interests and narratives in policy processes by which land dispossession has been made acceptable via a discourse coalition (Hajer 1993). A discourse coalition is the ‘ensemble of a set of story lines, the actors that utters these story lines, and the practices that conform to these story lines, all organized around a discourse’ (Hajer 1993, 47). Our central argument is that in the policy-making process, a coalition of interests has occurred at the international, national and local levels between various actors including the central government, corporate actors and local elites around the narrative of ‘flattening Indonesia in Merauke’. We then show how this discourse coalition has influenced the policy-making process through discourse structuration in which ‘central actors are persuaded by, or forced to accept, the rhetorical power of a new discourse’, and through discourse institutionalization in which ‘the actual policy process is conducted according to the ideas of a given discourse’ (Hajer 1993, 48).

### 2.1 *Flattening Indonesia in Merauke*

The introduction of plantation estates in Indonesia is far from a new phenomenon. Students of Indonesian agrarian history have documented the ways in which the Dutch colonial state, through the ‘state domain’ declaration (*domein verklaring*) of 1870, imposed new land laws to take over native and kingdom lands and then legally granted large-scale land concessions to colonial plantation estates in East Sumatra and Java (Tauchid 1952, Gordon 1982, Stoler 1985, Kartodirdjo and Djoko 1991, Mubyarto *et al.* 1992, Fauzi 1999).<sup>8</sup> Establishing plantation estates or expanding agriculture in frontier regions is closely connected with the political history of capitalism, centered on the dynamic of accumulation, enclosures and

<sup>8</sup>Under the same principle but through the forestry laws of 1875 and 1897, the colonial state established teak forest-plantation estates in Java. As a result, the dual status for estates remained in post-colonial Indonesia (see Tauchid 1952).

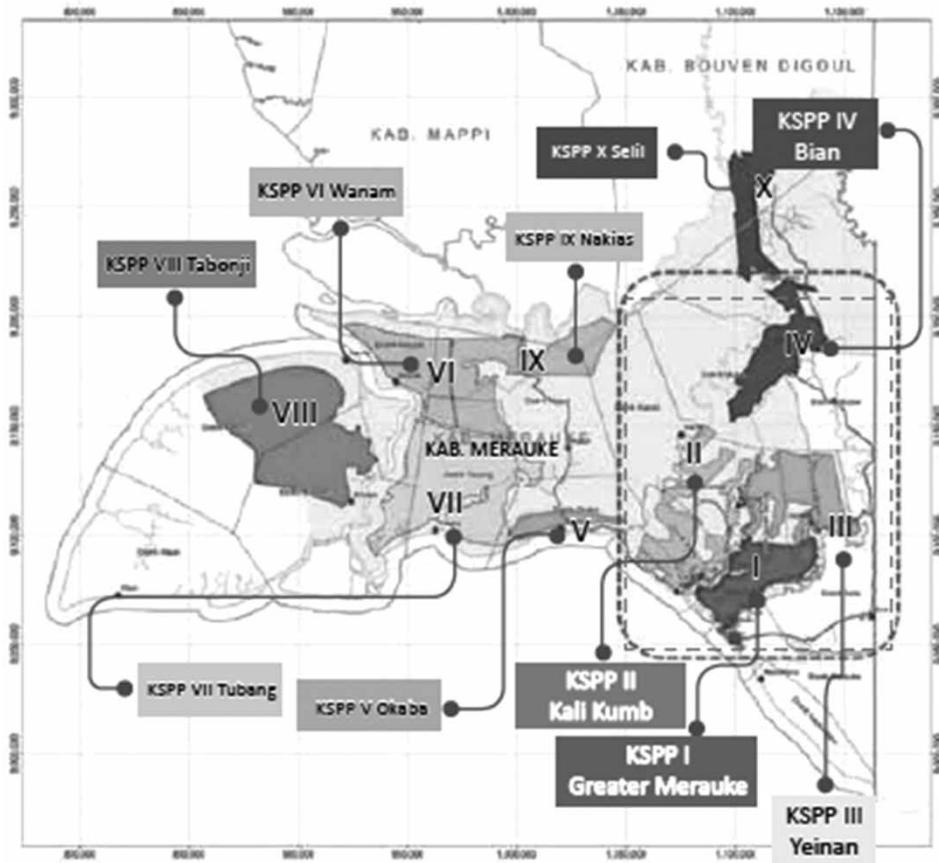


Figure 3. Designated clusters of the Merauke Integrated Food and Energy Estate (MIFEE). Source: Government of Indonesia (2011, 158). Note: KSPP stands for Agricultural Production Centers (Kawasan Sentra Produksi Pertanian). The cluster number indicates the order of development. The first stage of development (2011–2014) focuses on clusters I through IV.

dispossession.<sup>9</sup> The frontier is often seen as a target of the dynamic of capital. In this light, the MIFEE represents a spatial fix within which capital facilitated by the state finds a frontier where surplus land and labor can be put to work to start a new circuit of capital accumulation (Harvey 1982, 2003).

The dynamic of capital was poetically described by the Indonesian tycoon and founder of the Medco Group, Arifin Panigoro, who used the metaphor of a ‘flattening’ of Indonesia in Merauke.<sup>10</sup> Taking inspiration from Thomas Friedman’s book *Hot, flat, and crowded* (2008), Panigoro wrote,

<sup>9</sup>Equally important, agricultural expansion is closely linked with the processes of extending the reach of the state (De Koninck 1996, 2006, Tsing 2005).

<sup>10</sup>The Medco Group was founded in the early 1990s and has grown into a multinational oil company with oil rigs spread from Cambodia to Libya to Mexican Bay in North America.

Areas of 11 million hectares in south Papua, covering Merauke, Asmat, Mappi, Boven Digoel districts, have almost never been touched by agriculture, and it reminds the author of tiny peasant-farmers' paddy-fields (*sawah*) today. If the idle lands in Merauke were touched by productive hands, our food security will grow stronger. In addition, those agricultural products could be processed to become renewable energy (biofuel) for domestic need . . . . In short, from the solitude and 'virginity' of Merauke, I could have a better understanding of the thought of Thomas L. Friedman about the contemporary world which is hot, flat, and crowded, and his insistence on a green revolution around the world to sustain life on this earth. Thus, we need food, education, and energy . . . . It is our task together to flatten Indonesia. Without the free movement of goods and services and the sturdiness of food, education and energy triangle, the hot and flat world will destroy us. (A. Panigoro 2009)

The significance of Panigoro's narrative must be understood in the context of the formidable difficulty faced by corporate actors in acquiring large tracts of land for their agribusiness projects. The collective right to land has long been upheld by the land tenure system in Papua, particularly that of the Malind tribe (Verschueren 1970). The Malind-anim territory, forming an enormous triangle around the Bian River, is carefully divided into *boan* land controlled by clans and sub-clans. The right to use *boan* land is held by the clan, not by the individual headman of the clan, and only a member of the clan can access and use *boan* land.

Meanwhile, however, corporate actors found some strong supporters for their projects in Merauke. Johannes Gluba Gebze, who became the district head (*bupati*) of Merauke in 2001, aimed to develop Merauke into the center of rice production in eastern Indonesia. The rice estate project, named the Merauke Integrated Rice Estate (MIRE), was closely connected to Gebze's larger political ambition of creating a new province – South Papua Province – and becoming the first governor of that province, which would allow him to maintain power after finishing his last term as *bupati* (EIA and Telapak 2009). Gebze thus supported corporations that could help him to realize his political ambition.<sup>11</sup> Like corporate actors, however, he too was initially blocked in his plans by the supremacy of customary land rights.

Against this background, Panigoro's narrative of a flattening of Indonesia in Merauke can be better understood. Panigoro's op-ed appeared in Indonesia's leading newspaper, *Kompas*, about a week after he was inaugurated in August 2009 as a member of the Gebze clan of Malind tribe through a customary ceremony in Merauke. The Gebze clan is one of the seven major clans of the Malind tribe, the native settlers of Merauke, and is also the clan of Johannes Gluba Gebze. In reaction to this development, some Malind customary leaders consented to land acquisition by the Medco Group within the Malind-anim territory, with the condition that the land be used in an environmentally friendly manner. For Arifin Panigoro and Johannes Gluba Gebze, this represented a step toward their ambition of dismantling social constraints on land dispossession.<sup>12</sup> Panigoro was

<sup>11</sup> *Bupati* Gebze supported PT (*Perseroan Terbatas*, or joint-stock company) Medco Papua's agribusiness pilot project on 200 ha of land in Merauke. Among other crops, PT Medco Papua was developing the 'system of rice intensification' (SRI), a form of intensive organic growing, on 20 ha of land in Tanah Miring for which Medco received large support from *bupati* Gebze to develop SRI into an industrial rice estate, the Merauke Integrated Rice Estate (MIRE) (Awat MIFEE 2012). Simultaneously, the government of Merauke, working with a university, implemented a land suitability study, based on which a zoning system for the planting of commodity crops (Dhyatmika *et al.* 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Other studies have also documented the use of custom (*adat*) to obtain consent from ethnic/customary/local groups to 'release' resources such as land and forest for development projects in contemporary Indonesia. See, for example, Simbolon (1998), Colchester *et al.* (2006), and Davidson and Henley (2007).

Table 2. List of corporations that have received concessions.

No	Name of corporation	Commodity	Permits (ha)	Location (sub-district)
1	PT. Papua Agro Lestari	Oil palm	39,800.00	Ulilin
2	PT. Bio Inti Agrindo	Oil palm	36,400.90	Ulilin
3	PT. Ulilin Agro Lestari	Oil palm	30,000.00	Ulilin
4	PT. Mega Surya Agung	Oil palm	24,697.00	Muting
5	PT. Hardaya Sawit Papua	Oil palm	62,150.00	Jagebob
6	PT. Agrinusa Persada Mulia	Oil palm	40,000.00	Muting
7	PT. Central Cipta Murdaya	Oil palm	31,000.00	Muting, Elikobel, Ulilin
8	PT. Agriprima Cipta Persada	Oil palm	33,540.00	Muting and Ulilin
9	PT. Dongin Prabhawa	Oil palm	39,800.00	Ngguti
10	PT. Berkas Cipta Abadi	Oil palm	40,000.00	Ulilin
	<b>Total oil palm permits</b>		<b>377,387.90</b>	
11	PT. Selaras Inti Semesta	Lumber	301,600.00	Kaptel
12	PT. Medco Papua Industri Lestari	Wood chips/ pellets	2,800.00	Kaptel
13	PT. Medco Papua Alam Lestari	Lumber	74,219.00	Ngguti, Tubang, Okaba
14	PT. Cipta Papua Agri Lestari	Lumber	90,225.00	Elikobel
15	PT. Plasma Nutfah Marind	Lumber	67,736.00	Ngguti, Okaba
16	PT. Inocin Kalimantan	Lumber	45,000.00	Ulilin
17	PT. Wanamulia Sukses Sejati	Lumber	61,000.00	Anim-ha
18	PT. Wanamulia Sukses Sejati	Lumber	96,533.56	Kaptel, Muting
19	PT. Wanamulia Sukses Sejati	Lumber	116,000.00	Kaptel, Okaba
20	PT. Balikpapan Forest Indonesia	Lumber	40,000.00	Okaba
21	PT. China Gate Agriculture Development	Lumber	50,000.00	Kimaam, Ilwayab
	<b>Total forest permits</b>		<b>945,113.56</b>	
22	PT. Kharisma Agri Pratama	Rice, corn, soy bean	40,000.00	Tubang
23	PT. China Gate Agriculture Development	Rice, corn, cassava	20,000.00	Okaba
	<b>Total food crops plantation permits</b>		<b>60,000.00</b>	
24	PT. Nusantara Agri Resources	Sugar cane	40,000.00	Ngguti, Tubang
25	PT. Agri Surya Agung	Sugar cane	40,000.00	Ilwayab, Tubang, Ngguti
26	PT. Hardaya Sugar Papua	Sugar cane	44,812.00	Jagebob
27	PT. Energi Mitra Merauke	Sugar cane	40,000.00	Okaba, Tubang, Ngguti
28	PT. Tebu Wahana Kreasi	Sugar cane	20,282.00	Tanah Miring
29	PT. Karya Bumi Papua	Sugar cane	30,000.00	Malind, Kurik
30	PT. Anugrah Rejeki Nusantara	Sugar cane	40,591.49	Tabonji
31	PT. Subur Alam Pratama Indonesia	Sugar cane	40,251.62	Tabonji, Kimaam
32	PT. Sukses Pratama Andalan	Sugar cane	40,946.50	Tabonji
33	PT. Lestari Subur Indonesia	Sugar cane	40,548.61	Tabonji
34	PT. Pelangi Prima Indonesia	Sugar cane	40,286.55	Tabonji, Kimaam
35	PT. Papua Daya Bioenergi	Sugar cane	13,396.00	Tanah Miring
36	PT. Bumi Agung Lestari	Sugar cane	50,030.00	Tubang, Okaba
37	PT. Valensia Indo Makmur	Sugar cane	50,001.00	Ilwayab
39	PT. Cendrawasih Jaya Mandiri	Sugar cane	40,000.00	Malind, Kurik

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

No	Name of corporation	Commodity	Permits (ha)	Location (sub-district)
40	PT. Belantara Abadi Utama	Sugar cane	40,000.00	Tubang, Kimaam, Ilwayab
41	PT. Synergi Tani Nusantara	Sugar cane	36,363.76	Tubang
42	PT. Sarana Istiqamah Sejahtera	Sugar cane	33,295.00	Jagebob, Sota, Tnh Miring
43	PT. Perwita Citra Nusantara	Sugar cane	50,000.00	Tubang, Ilwayab
	<b>Total sugar cane plantation permits</b>		<b>762,116.53</b>	
44	PT. Sino Indonesia Shunlida	Fishery	33,00	Merauke
	<b>Total permits</b>		<b>2,144,650.99</b>	

Source: Badan Kordinasi Penanaman Modal Daerah (BKPMMD) Kabupaten Merauke, 2011.

granted Gebze clan membership as a way to legitimize the Medco Group's use of over 300,000 ha of land.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover,  *bupati*  Gebze's ambition dovetailed with the central government's concern with food security and Papua's development. Since 2004, under Yudhoyono's presidency, food security has become a national priority to deal with Indonesia's rising population and global food price hikes.<sup>14</sup> As a member of the President's special committee on food resilience stated, 'We need to expedite the development of new crop-producing regions such as this, to strengthen our food resilience' (Dhyatmika *et al.* 2012). Meanwhile, the government introduced a 'New Deal for Papua' in 2006 as a way to address the uneven geography of development between eastern Indonesia and western Indonesia.<sup>15</sup> The central government's focus on Papua fit well with Gebze's and Panigoro's interests in establishing a mega rice estate operated by corporations. The interests of food security, development and the rice estate converged in the 2006 Great Harvest event (discussed in the following section), which showcased Merauke as the national strategic center for strengthening food security.

As seen above, the interests of the central government, corporate actors and local elites converged around the narrative of a 'flattening Indonesia in Merauke', which facilitated the construction of Merauke as a site of realizing food security, corporate agriculture and regional development. Furthermore, we argue that policy processes play a crucial role in bringing the narrative of 'flattening Indonesia in Merauke' into reality. To illustrate how the state, corporate actors and local elites put their shared social construct into practice, below we examine the following three sets of 'diagnostic events' (Moore 1987): (1) the emergence of the rice estate, (2) moving from the food and energy crises to the food and energy estate, and (3) creating special spatial planning.

<sup>13</sup>At the time of writing, PT. Selaras Inti Semesta, a subsidiary of Medco Agro (see a report by Awas MIFEE 2012), had received 301,600 ha, almost a quarter of the total area of the MIFEE and the largest concession among the 23 corporations involved (Table 2). According to Hilmi Panigoro, brother of Arifin Panigoro and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Medco Group, the Medco Group will focus on biofuels. He argues that Indonesia has bright prospects for biofuel production if the Indonesian government maintains plans to help this industry grow. Indonesia could learn from Brazil, which has arguably developed the best practices in the industry and in the design of its national bio-fuel program (H. Panigoro 2009).

<sup>14</sup>Yudhoyono's speech in 2004 before the National Food Security Council at the National Food Security Award, 9 December 2004 (Yudhoyono 2004).

<sup>15</sup>Presidential Instruction No. 5/2007 on the Accelerated Development of Papua.

## 2.2 Emergence of the rice estate

After President Yudhoyono took office in 2004, the government dealt with national food security via imports including those of rice. Indonesia has since become the fourth largest global rice importer, a situation that offers political fodder to government critics (McCarthy *et al.* 2012, 529). Before 2005, the government's rice import policy was still viable; any shortfalls in domestic rice production could be met by importing rice from the international market (Sulistyowati 2010). However, by 2007, food prices had risen dramatically, forcing the government to change its policy. This led the government to search for solutions in intensifying rice production in land-poor Java and/or identifying 'idle' lands suitable for industrial agriculture in the Outer Islands.

Meanwhile, in Merauke, an Indonesian conglomerate and the district head shared the same interest in transforming the entire district into a mega food estate. As noted earlier, the Medco Group was founded by Arifin Panigoro who was also an influential senior politician affiliated with the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDIP). Medco's subsidiary company conducted a pilot project of the 'system of rice intensification' (SRI) method of rice cultivation on 20 ha of land near Serapu village, and received support from *bupati* Johannes Gluba Gebze to expand the SRI cultivation, as Gebze considered the SRI to be highly productive and suitable for the area's topography and climate (C'roko Inter-Science/Theory 2010). In 2003, the district head proposed the idea of creating a mega food estate, the MIRE, to the government (Ministry of Agriculture). This idea was seriously considered by President Yudhoyono when he visited Merauke on 5 April 2006 to celebrate the 2006 Great Rice Harvest (Ministry of Home Affairs 2006, President Republik Indonesia 2006).

The Great Rice Harvest ceremony (*upacara panen raya*) is an annual state event in which the Indonesian president showcases the success of Indonesian agricultural modernization.<sup>16</sup> The ceremony in Merauke was huge, considering that the total population of the district is only about 400,000 people. Thousands of children lined the road to welcome President Yudhoyono when he arrived at the Merauke airport. A group of 200 Asmat and Malind dancers also took part in the ceremonial event. This was a celebration of the harvest of 16,339 ha of rice with a production level of 21,632 tons. At the same time, it was an odd event since rice is not part of the main livelihood system of the indigenous peoples of Merauke who danced and stood along the road. The Malind people, who are the indigenous inhabitants of Merauke, mostly mix hunting and gathering with the production of staple foods such as sago and tubers. Rice cultivation has been practiced mainly by migrant settlers from outside Papua.

The 2006 Great Rice Harvest in Merauke was symbolic in several respects. First, this was the first time that the Great Rice Harvest had been held in a frontier region like Merauke. During Suharto's presidency (1966–1998), ceremonies were held in the conventional rice-producing regions such as Java, Sumatera and Southern Sulawesi. Second, President Yudhoyono deliberately took the long journey,<sup>17</sup> accompanied by a large group of

<sup>16</sup>The package of agricultural modernization is termed *Panca Usaha Tani* (literally 'five agricultural efforts'), referring to high-yield varieties, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, construction of irrigation infrastructure, distribution of credit schemes and post-harvesting methods (Utrecht 1973, 164).

<sup>17</sup>The distance from Jakarta to Merauke is almost as far as from Jakarta to Tokyo or farther than the distance from the west to east coasts of the US. By plane, the flight time is 11–12 hours with two stops. The flight departs around 10 p.m. from Jakarta and arrives the next morning around 9 a.m. in Merauke. Only one airline services this route, with flights four times a week.

his new cabinet ministers.<sup>18</sup> Local government officials were also present, including Dr. Sudjuangon Situmorang, the caretaker of the Papua Governor, and *bupati* Johannes Gluba Gebze. Third and most importantly, during this ceremony, the concept of a ‘rice estate’ was declared publicly for the first time,<sup>19</sup> introducing a completely new type of agriculture in Merauke, namely, industrial monocropping agriculture operated by large corporations.

During the symbolic event, President Yudhoyono announced that the Great Rice Harvest signified the success of agricultural development in eastern Indonesia. He declared Merauke to be the national breadbasket and predicted a bright future of food export from Papua thanks to its suitable climate and abundant water for agriculture development. The Minister of Agriculture, Anton Apriantono, reported to the president that Papua potentially has 9.32 million ha suitable for agriculture, of which 2.3 million are located in Merauke. He also assured the president that his ministry would prepare a comprehensive plan for the area.

### **2.3 Turning crisis into opportunity: from food and energy crises to the food and energy estate**

The world food and energy crises of 2007–2008 hit severely in developing countries, reinforcing the Indonesian government’s commitment to achieving self-sufficiency in food. In early 2008, the petroleum price had reached a record high of US\$100 per barrel, followed by a 35 percent increase in food prices. The president’s spokesperson, Dino Pati Jalal<sup>20</sup> (2008), reported that President Yudhoyono had deep concern for the hardships encountered by many low-income countries and believed that the global crises demanded a global solution. The president swiftly reached out to global leaders to form a consensus on addressing the food, energy, and climate crises. On 27 March 2008, the president sent United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki Moon a proposal for a global conference to seek solutions to the crisis; one week later, the president also sent a letter to the President of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, voicing his support for the World Bank’s pledge of a ‘New Deal for Global Food Policy’. In addition, President Yudhoyono wrote letters to Japan’s Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda as the host of the G-8 summit in Hokkaido and Singapore’s Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong as the Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), urging them to tackle the crises collectively. In these letters, the president emphasized that Indonesia was not affected by the crises but was concerned about the impact of the crises on political stability in countries such as Haiti, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Senegal, the Philippines and Bangladesh.

In his own country, the president took the lead in coordinating various levels of state institutions and reached out to the private sector to sell his vision of ‘feed Indonesia, feed the world’. On 17 April 2008, the president called for a meeting with his cabinet members and the KADIN in Yogyakarta. The aim of the meeting was to formulate a response to the rising global food and energy prices. President Yudhoyono presented his

<sup>18</sup>In addition to First Lady Ani Yudhoyono, the President was accompanied by Abu Rizal Bakrie, the Coordinating Minister of Economics; Anton Apriantono, the Minister of Agriculture; Widodo AS, the Minister of Politics, Law and Human Rights; Bambang Sudibyo, the Minister of Education; and Prof. Dr. Ir. H. Ahmad Anshori Matjik, the Rector of Bogor Agriculture University.

<sup>19</sup>As will be discussed later, the idea of a food estate was introduced to the government by District Head Johannes Gluba Gebze around 2003; Gebze supported the high-yielding rice cultivation project in Merauke developed by the Medco Group.

<sup>20</sup>Dino Pati Jalal was President Yudhoyono’s spokesperson from 2004–2009 and now serves as the Indonesian Ambassador to the US.

solution to the crisis: ‘Increasing production and productivity of food, energy and mineral in order to improve Indonesia’s economy: from crisis to opportunity’ (Jalal 2008). He closed the meeting by calling on KADIN to prepare strategic solutions to the rising global food and energy prices.

In a second meeting on 30 April 2008, President Yudhoyono emphasized seven points, two of which helped to lay the foundation for the food and energy estate: the need to increase productivity by scaling up farm sizes and the designation of five agribusiness and/or agro-industrial areas as ‘special agricultural zones’ (Jalal 2008). In response, KADIN pinpointed the need to eliminate bureaucratic complexity for investment and proposed the establishment of a committee called the Action Committee for Increasing Productivity of Food, Energy and Mineral (KAP3EM).<sup>21</sup>

One of the KADIN’s concrete actions was to organize a conference and exhibition called ‘Feed Indonesia, Feed the World’ on 28–29 January 2010.<sup>22</sup> The conference, officiated by President Yudhoyono himself, aimed to

... [s]eek the accurate and coordinated solution either from the side of regulation or practice for farm land, estate, cattle and fisheries allocation, provision of infrastructure, fertilizer, high-yielding varieties, food manufacturing industry, funding support, and an optimal food research and development, which aimed to suffice the national, regional and international food security in a sustainable way (KADIN Chairman M.S. Hidayat).

In this conference, KADIN presented their roadmap for food security, which covered 15 food commodities to meet domestic and international demands. Requests addressed to the government included the guarantee of enough available land for agribusiness, consistent land use policy at all administrative levels, an easy process for obtaining and using land, and enforcement of land rights.

To the corporate requests, the government responded favorably. After attending the World Summit on Food Security in Rome, Vice President Boediono stated, ‘The government is ready to remove regulatory stumbling blocks that hinder investment in agribusiness’ (Hardoyo 2009). Among the concrete steps, the government revealed several key policies and regulations that would promote agribusiness investments in Merauke. These included Presidential Instruction No. 5/2008 on the Focus of 2008–2009 Economic Development, which mandates the National Spatial Planning Coordinating Agency (BKPRN) to suggest recommendations on spatial planning in Merauke and the Ministry of Agriculture to prepare policy to increase investments for the food estate; Government Regulation No. 18 2010 on Crop Plantation, which permits a maximum plantation size of 20,000 ha in Papua but limits the maximum to 10,000 ha elsewhere, and the Grand Design of the MIFEE produced by the Ministry of Agriculture.

#### **2.4 Spatial planning: legalizing the MIFEE**

The biggest challenge for the MIFEE is to make large tracts of land available to investors. On the ground, however, land is used by multiple actors who make claims to access resources for their living, including those who are normally considered by the state to be

<sup>21</sup>Komite Aksi Peningkatan Produktifitas Pangan, Energi dan Mineral.

<sup>22</sup>KADIN organized ‘Feed Indonesia, Feed the World II’ on 7–10 February 2012 in Jakarta. President Yudhoyono also opened this second conference, demonstrating his commitment to this national development project.

'illegal' claimers such as hunters and gatherers, indigenous peoples and local smallholders. Thus, land must be released from customary tenure and conservation forests. Only 4.92 percent (or about 235,176 ha) of the 4.78 million ha of the Merauke area is non-forested. The rest of the total area, which covers 4.55 million ha or about 95 percent, is still forested. If the MIFEE is implemented as planned, more than 200,000 ha of primary forests will be seriously threatened (Greenomics 2012). Furthermore, the current category of conservation forests would need to be changed in order to make large tracts of land available for the project. This would require more policy instruments, such as spatial planning, as requested by KADIN.

Spatial planning illustrates how ideas will be implemented in practice; thus it involves negotiations and contestations to achieve consensus on the control of space. The Law of Spatial Planning in Indonesia was revised in 2007.<sup>23</sup> While reflecting the trend of greater local autonomy since decentralization in 2001, the new law also ensures that local power does not supersede national authority in governing space.<sup>24</sup> It emphasizes the administrative hierarchy of national to local governments and a top-down process of planning. At the same time, a new feature of the law is an inclusive process; public participation is mandatory in planning, implementing and monitoring space utilization. According to the law, a development plan, particularly an investment plan, is only made effective by the spatial plan. Article 20 clearly states that the National Spatial Plan is a reference for determining the function and location of space for investment purposes. In other words, spatial planning, state simplification *par excellence*, has become a powerful tool to direct and specify the location of capital investment, thereby making land accessible to outside capital and allowing for eventual dispossession.

Following the Great Rice Harvest, in December 2007, the Coordinating Ministry of Economic Affairs called upon *bupati* Johannes Gluba Gebze to give a presentation about his concept of MIRE. Three months later, in March 2008, President Yudhoyono signed Government Regulation No. 26/2008 on the National Spatial Plan, which designated Merauke as a Primary Region (*Kawasan Andalan*) for economic growth. In May 2008, only a month after the Yogyakarta meeting, President Yudhoyono instructed<sup>25</sup> the Minister of Public Works and the Papua Governor to create a spatial plan of 'Greater Merauke', including the two districts of Mappi and Boven Digul, and to prepare land for agricultural investments. The Minister of Public Works was authorized to lead the National Spatial Planning Coordinating Agency (BKPRN) to produce a recommendation on spatial planning for Merauke and its vicinity. Thus, the crucial process of creating the MIFEE was located within the hierarchy of national-level to district-level spatial planning processes.

The most authoritative body, which validates spatial plans, is a national body called the National Spatial Planning Coordinating Agency (BKPRN). It consists of 14 ministries and is supervised by the Coordinator Minister for Economic Affairs. The BKPRN received the draft spatial plan for Merauke from the Merauke District government in September 2009. In May 2010, the BKPRN produced a recommendation consisting of six points:

<sup>23</sup>Law no. 26/2007 on Spatial Planning as a revision of Law No. 24/1992.

<sup>24</sup>See point c of the consideration part of the Law: 'along with decentralization policy that gives greater autonomy to the local government in spatial planning, this authority needs to be regulated to ensure an integration and harmony between locals and local to national'.

<sup>25</sup>Presidential Instruction No. 5/2008 on Focus of Economic Program 2008–2009.

- (1) to delineate the Merauke area into 18 subdistricts in the districts of Merauke, Mappi and Boven Digul,
- (2) to provide land for sustainable food crop farming,
- (3) to establish 10 clusters of production centers,
- (4) to prioritize land utilization in non-forested land and forest land allocated as production forest,
- (5) to develop strategic cooperation and place priority on infrastructure development, and
- (6) to give attention to land rights and local community institutional issues, as well as other issues including alternative energy development, an easy permitting process to encourage investment, a natural disaster alert system, and the 'agropolitan' concept.

To promote acceptance of these recommendations, a coordination meeting was held by the BKPRN in Jayapura on 6 June 2010. The meeting tried to reconcile opinions regarding scale, namely, how much land should be allocated. Opinions were split between two main camps: one led by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Public Works and the Merauke District government, and the other by the Ministry of Forestry and the Papua Provincial government. The Papua Provincial government insisted on limiting land allocation only to 500,000 ha of the 1.2 million ha proposed by the Merauke District government and backed by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Public Works. The provincial government backed their argument by pointing to the President's pledge at the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change in Copenhagen to reduce emissions by 26 percent, which was supported by the Ministry of Forestry. On the other hand, the Merauke government used the 'feeding Indonesia, feeding the world' slogan to justify the allocation of 1.2 million ha of land. The meeting failed to achieve agreement on the issue of scale. Later, a follow-up meeting in Jakarta resulted in a temporary agreement to the 550,000 ha proposed by the Papua Governor, until further approval of forest conversion by the Ministry of Forestry.

A close look at the list of location permits (Table 2) suggests the shape of the mega agribusiness project to be developed in Merauke. Unlike the spectacular vision described in the Grand Design, the area to be developed as the MIFEE will resemble large-scale monoculture plantations with cash crops such as lumber, oil palm and sugar cane for export, undermining the emphasis on food security. The area for food crops is 60,000 ha, which accounts for only 2.8 percent of the total area. Initially, the MIRE attracted some investors from the Gulf countries. The Saudi-based BinLaden Group signed an agreement to invest at least US \$ 4.3 billion to develop 500,000 ha of rice cultivation in Merauke. In March 2009, the Saudi investors decided to put their investment plan on hold because of the global financial crisis, forcing the Indonesian government to find other sources of investment and prompting a change in the project's name to include food and energy. Bayu Khrisna Murti, the Vice Minister of Agriculture, explained the name change from MIRE to MIFEE:

The name MIFEE did not suddenly appear. For the last three years within many meetings in the Coordinating Ministry of Economic Affairs, the concept of the Merauke Integrated Rice Estate (MIRE), proposed by the Merauke District Head in a connotation of rice basket, has been expanded to include other crops, such as: maize, sugar cane, and soybean. The name MIFEE is used for the sake of popularity to get investors' attention, and to emphasize that the area will be managed by corporations. (Anonymous 2010)

Vice President Boediono also made assurances that food was still a priority, stating that the government would 'review spatial planning to ensure that more land was used for

Table 3. Agricultural commodities by production cluster.

Cluster	Area	Commodity
KSPP-1 Greater Merauke	44,239 ha	Rice, corn, upland rice (padi gogo)
KSPP-2 Kali Kumb	50,140 ha	Sugar cane, livestock, corn, ground nut and soybean
KSPP-3 Yeinan	80,717 ha	Corn, ground nut, soybean, fruits and livestock
KSPP-4 Bian	52,926 ha	Ground nut, palm, fruits and livestock
KSPP-5 Okaba	27,705 ha	Rice and livestock
KSPP-6 Wanam	112,599 ha	Fisheries, corn, sago, rice and livestock
KSPP-7 Tubang	295,904 ha	Livestock, rice and sago
KSPP-8 Tabonji	315,142 ha	Livestock, rice and sago
KSPP-9 Nakias	173,971 ha	Corn, ground nut, soybean, rice and livestock
KSPP-10 Selil	65,280 ha	Palm and livestock

Source: Government of Indonesia (2011, 159).

agriculture as Indonesia aims to become a major global food producer' (Suharmoko 2010). At the same time, however, Indonesian corporations with ties to political parties and the military expressed interest in investing in the MIFEE to develop oil palm, sugar cane and industrial tree plantations, instead of food crops.<sup>26</sup>

While both the Papua Province and Merauke District spatial plans are still on hold, the district government has issued location permits to corporations interested in investing in the MIFEE. Panigoro's Medco Group with a focus on wood products, sugar cane for bioethanol, and other food and fuel crops has been the pioneer of agribusiness development in Merauke (Awat MIFEE 2012). In 2007, PT Selaras Inti Semesta, a subsidiary of the Medco Group, secured a 301,600 ha allocation for monoculture tree plantations. In 2009, a subsidiary company of the Medco Group acquired 169,400 ha of land with an Industrial Forest Plantation permit (HTI). Another subsidiary company of the Medco Group received a concession worth 2800 ha. In 2010, through another subsidiary, the Medco Group acquired 74,219 ha with an HTI.<sup>27</sup> The Rajawali Group led by Peter Sondakh from North Sulawesi also received location permits for its two subsidiary companies, PT Karya Bumi Papua and PT Cendrawasih Jaya Mandiri, and acquired 37,795 ha of land in the Kurik and Malind subdistricts. They plan to develop sugar cane plantations. From January 2007 to August 2010, the total area of concessions given by the Merauke district government increased significantly; 44 corporations received 2,144,650.99 ha (see Table 2), which is larger than the planned area of the MIFEE (Table 3).

### 3. Failure or success of the development scheme?

As seen above, despite the high-modernist vision of transforming local agriculture through large-scale corporate investment, the MIFEE faces formidable challenges within the government and from society, and has a long way to go before it realizes the scale of development as originally planned in the Grand Design (cf. Scott 1998). Contrary to the government's scheme, land developments associated with the MIFEE have not made much progress. The Papua Province and Merauke District Spatial Plans have been on

<sup>26</sup>For the profiles of the corporations investing in the MIFEE, see Part 4 of Awat MIFEE (2012).

<sup>27</sup>In these areas, the Medco Group produces wood chips that are used as a 'greener' fuel in South Korea and China to replace coal.

Table 4. Impacts of the MIFEE.

Aspect	Impact
Socio-cultural gap	The low level of education of Papuans, and their hunting and gathering mode of production, will exclude them in the transformation from household farming to corporate-mechanization farming
Demographic revolution	The labor demand of corporate farming is calculated to absorb about 4.8 million new migrants from outside Papua, which will leave Papuans as only 5 percent of the total residents. This demographic change will displace Papuans from access to economic power, as experienced by the Papuans during a transmigration program in the 1980s.
Economic marginalization	Agricultural modernization that provides no space for Papuans will further the socioeconomic polarization, leaving Papuans at the lowest level of the economic ladder.
Political marginalization	The greater economic power that will be better accessed by migrants than native Papuans may also bring migrants better access to political power as well in government offices and other forms of political leadership. This situation could potentially escalate social conflict in Papua.

Source: Zakaria *et al.* (2010).

hold because of controversial changes to forest land status. According to the new law, the spatial planning process allows for the possibility of changing forest into non-forest uses, but approval from the Ministry of Forestry and legalization from the House of Representatives should be attained. The Forestry Minister stated that the implementation of large-scale food projects, particularly in Merauke, would take a long time because of zoning problems. The government is still mapping the forest area in Papua to identify protected forests and avoid their conversion into plantations for the estate. The government has yet to determine zoning for the food estate and how much forested land can be used for it (Ekawati and Bisara 2010). Frustrated by the slow and complex process of land acquisitions in Merauke, the Ministry of Agriculture has threatened that the project site could be relocated to Central Kalimantan Province (Rahman 2011) and that the project's scale could be reduced radically by as much as 80 percent (Anonymous 2012).

The grand scope of the MIFEE has attracted not only investors but also environmental and social advocacy organizations, which are concerned with the environmental and social impacts of the project. Research by Greenomics (2012) points to predictable risks to the environment, as well as potential international pressure if environmental impacts are ignored. Greenomics recommended that the MIFEE be developed in stages, starting in the non-forest area, while conducting thorough research prior to forest conversion. In addition, the President's pledge of a moratorium on primary forest conversion in Indonesia, as stated in the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change convention at Copenhagen, should be considered (Ministry of Public Works 2010). Socio-cultural and political impacts of the MIFEE were also stressed by the fact-finding and field study conducted by Zakaria *et al.* (2010). They reported that the MIFEE ignored the cultural gap between corporate agriculture and hunting and gathering and that the plan marginalized Papuans in both socio-political and economic aspects (Table 4).

One strategy for activists has been to launch a counter-movement by constructing a counter-discourse. The Office for Justice and Peace of the Archdiocese of Merauke (SKP-KAM), Papua nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) Cooperation Forum (FokerLSM), Papuans Solidarity to Reject MIFEE (*Solidaritas Rakyat Papua Tolak MIFEE* or SORPATOM), and the Indigenous People's Alliance of Indonesia (AMAN)

have built alliances to reject the MIFEE on the grounds of genocide, ecological destruction and marginalization. The countermovement groups argue that this project will contribute to the marginalization of indigenous Papuans by taking over the customary lands and resources that provide their livelihoods. The project is also likely to exacerbate existing human rights violations and accelerate environmental deforestation and degradation. AMAN used the discourse of genocide in its statement against the MIFEE made before the ninth Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York on 23 April 2010. AMAN representative Arifin Saleh remarked:

this food industry [MIFEE] is estimated to bring 6.4 million workers to Merauke and West Papua in general. The total population of West Papua is only 4.6 million people; 2.2 million of this population is indigenous, and 70% lives in remote areas. With a population of only 174,710 in Merauke, these plans will acutely threaten the existence of indigenous people within these areas, turning them into a minority in number, even leading to extinction in the future. This is, as we may say, structural and systematic genocide. This is unacceptable.

AMAN also requested the UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples to conduct a thematic study on development projects including the MIFEE and their impacts on cultural integrity and the human rights situations of indigenous peoples.

Campaigns against the MIFEE have been launched internationally through links with international organizations, not only by AMAN, but also by a local alliance of the Papuans Solidarity to Reject MIFEE (SORPATOM). The leader of SORPATOM, Rosa Moiwend Gebze, was invited by War Resisters' International (WRI)<sup>28</sup> to give a talk in London. She reported that the Malind people's land is being auctioned off to over 30 commercial investors without prior consent from the Malind landowners. 'Indonesia doesn't want our people, they just want our land', she said, insisting that Papuan self-rule is the only way to resolve the human rights violations that continue to plague indigenous Papuans (Gonzales 2010).

At the grassroots level, Yasanto and Sekretariat Keuskupan untuk Perdamaian (SKP) Merauke have actively warned of the impact of the MIFEE on the Malind land. Their advocacy prompted the Onggari clan to reject the transfer of land to companies interested in investing the MIFEE. Seven other villages in the Okaba subdistrict turned down an offer from a Korean company to buy their land. In the village of Domande, Malind subdistrict, where the Radjawali Group intended to transfer 22,900 ha land from seven clans, members of one clan rejected the sale. Public discussions to consolidate cooperation by engaging in film making, participatory mapping, and training on free and prior informed consent (FPIC) have also been used by the alliance of NGOs called the Community for Indigenous People and the Environment (*Komunitas Masyarakat Adat dan Lingkungan*, or KOMALI) to form a countermovement campaigning against the negative effects of the MIFEE. The objective is to raise public awareness of the MIFEE at the local, national and international levels.

Taken together, is the MIFEE project a failure or success? Whether or not land developments associated with the MIFEE will be implemented according to the plan and goal – strengthening national food security – may no longer be the central issue for the state and participating corporations. Initially, when discourse on the food and energy crises began in the Yudhoyono administration, it centered on the issue of food security for national

<sup>28</sup>WRI is an international network of pacifist and antimilitarist organizations with more than 90 affiliates in more than 40 countries (War Resisters' International 2011).

security. Such discourse successfully mobilized various levels of state institutions, corporate actors and the district government to work toward spatial planning and the release of large tracts of land for corporate agriculture, enabling a new circuit of accumulation. Enclosure, territorialization and legalization processes lead to new forms of land control, defined as ‘practices that fix or consolidate forms of access, claiming, and exclusion for some time’ (Peluso and Lund 2011, 668, cf. Hall *et al.* 2011). This point was also emphasized by McCarthy *et al.* (2012, 523), who noted, ‘Whether land schemes end up being developed or not, these acquisitions are important, given that they lead to the reworking of spatial plans and the issuing of land use permits’. In sum, whether the MIFEE is a failure or a success, the legalization process through a set of regulations leading to spatial planning has changed forms of access, claims to land and the exclusion of the Malind people, to the benefit of corporations via the state.

#### 4. Conclusion

Through critical analysis of policy discourse regarding the MIFEE, we have explored the ways in which land dispossession was carefully designed and made socially acceptable. We have focused on policy discourse regarding the creation of the corporate agricultural estate to solve food and energy crises because it is through this discourse that the process of accumulation by dispossession was legalized. As De Angelis (2004, 82) argued, the ‘discourse of enclosures ... must present itself not as a negative force, one that separates, brutalizes, and disempowers; but, on the contrary, it also has to wear the mantle of rationality, and project a vision of the future that *makes sense* to a multiplicity of concrete subjects’. As seen above, this point was central to facilitating the discourse coalition between the state, corporate actors and local elites whose various interests converged on the corporate agricultural estate.

As shown above, the policy discourse is predicated on the state’s vision of turning world food and energy crises into an opportunity via large-scale agricultural investments. From the beginning, the policy discourse appealed to corporate actors represented by the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce. For these actors, the frontier of Merauke represented potential because such lands, to borrow Panigoro’s words, ‘have almost never been touched by agriculture’. To further illustrate this, we traced the timeline over which the policy discourse legitimized corporate-led agricultural investments in Merauke, turning world food and energy crises into economic opportunities for corporations.

We also identified three important ‘diagnostic events’, which linked many interrelated events and social processes, giving birth to policy instruments to justify the MIFEE as well as resistance to it. The whole policy process was orchestrated to change the relations of ownership of up to 1.2 million ha, from control by the local community to control by the state through the spatial planning process. This enormous transfer of land control requires decisions and initiatives from the top hierarchy of state power (the President) to ensure that uprooting a community from its social and spiritual ties to land is a legitimate process. The process has mobilized three main powers – Papua local elites led by the District Head of Merauke, the state represented by the President and capital represented by the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce (KADIN). These powers have worked to form consent and legalize dispossession through two mechanisms: (1) the state, corporate actors and local elites, through the concept of the corporate agricultural estate, created the necessity and design for producing food crops and biofuels on a large scale in the frontier, and (2) the state, involving various levels of administrative institutions, created legally

binding spatial planning that allows corporations to acquire vast areas of land in the name of food security.

The process to make land dispossession acceptable will never be complete. It will always contain contradictions, as Roy (2010) noted regarding empire: empire rules through coercion and violence, but it also rules through consent and culture. The hierarchical and sequential process of development planning always involves different lead actors at different levels (e.g. inter-sectoral actors such as the Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Forestry, district heads and governors) that enliven the contestations and competitions and energize the market to create new accommodative mechanisms as the core of expansive capitalism process: a creative destruction. However, as Polanyi (2001) said, this will invite resistance that may come as unpredictable actions, which could make the process difficult to end, since it will call for continuous struggles, negotiations and contestations.

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