



# Brewing Tension: A Case Study of a Coffee Plantation in Indigenous Land



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# **Brewing Tension: A Case Study of a Coffee Plantation in Indigenous Land**

**T**he world can't resist a good cup of coffee. From 2014 to 2018, there was an increase in coffee consumption worldwide. The coffee trade at the global level reflected this increase. In 2015, the global coffee industry was valued at approximately US\$77 billion, with trade accounting for US\$66.5 billion. Eager to be part of the global trade for coffee, the Philippines is gearing to increase its annual export at the rate of 2.3% (International Coffee Organization, 2018).

Domestic demand is seeing an increase. The country has been increasing its export of instant coffee by volume since 2011 and is poised to become one of the world's five largest consumers by 2021. Coffee is being pushed as the Philippines' next big thing. The road to global coffee domination is, however, not without its tensions and casualties. On paper, industry-driven development projects look good and benign. Development has never looked appealing and timely. Coffee, its manufacturers will argue, has become an everyday necessity. And yet, a warm cup of coffee belies the struggles and tensions on the ground.

The way coffee is treated has evolved. From an ordinary agricultural product, it has become a significant part of everyday social life and an important commodity to be traded, able to earn traders and speculators large amounts of profit. The trade has, however, created an imbalance in the coffee chain, between traders and manufacturers and those on the ground. Further down the chain, it has resulted in hazards for the communities and the environment where they are grown.

This paper looks into the story of coffee production: how it has been transformed from a simple agricultural product into a global commodity, and how it impacts on a community of indigenous people in the Philippines.

## A Global Commodity

The sensitive requirements of growing coffee dictate the nature of coffee production. Coffee production “necessarily flows from Global South to Global North” (Talbot, 1997). Hardly any coffee is exported from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, but they dominate in the trade and importation of coffee commodities<sup>1</sup> (Intercontinental Exchange, nd). Production and manufacture of coffee is heavily concentrated in the ‘coffee belt’ around the equator, in characteristically ‘developing’ countries, while consumption is heavily concentrated among northern regions in America and Europe (Bamber, Daly & Gereffi, 2017). Coffee-producing countries consume only about 30% of coffee worldwide.

Approximately 125 million people around the world depend on coffee for their livelihood. Smallholder farmers produce 80% of the world coffee stock (Fairtrade Foundation, n.d.). Coffee as a cash crop has become the source of farmers’ basic needs — for feeding their families, sending children to school, and housing. But because of its volatile price in the global market, it is often an unstable source for most coffee-farming communities. During times of coffee crises the majority of smallholder farmers are forced to sell their coffee beans at market-dictated prices, often much less than the cost of their production.

### Quick history:

The coffee tree is known to originate and thrive in Ethiopia in a region called Kaffa. The plant was first “exported” to Yemen through the port of Mocha. By the 14th century, the coffee trade flourished and spread throughout the Arabian peninsula and North-East Africa. The first documented coffee houses were opened in Constantinople under the Ottoman empire. With the Ottomans having the monopoly of coffee, coffee trees were smuggled into the Netherlands. The Dutch then brought seeds to their colonies in India and the Dutch East Indies in Java. The French, on the other hand, brought coffee to their colonies in the Caribbean. The height of European colonialism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was the backdrop to the commercialization of coffee. The world coffee chain, at its onset, was fuelled by slavery and land grabs.

Talbot, 2011

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<sup>1</sup> This model would bring the coffee commodity chain under European control through European importing firms (Talbot, 2011: 68). Traders were able to control prices between exporting and importing markets. By keeping prices down on the export side, they were able to maximize their earnings. Trading speculators made large profits by monopolizing information. The New York Coffee Exchange is a testament to this emerging financial set-up where capital — not the tangible product itself — would drive profit through financial dealings (2011: 76).



In 1963, the International Coffee Organization (ICO) was set up. It was established with the support of the United Nations with the goal of setting an intergovernmental organization to gather coffee exporting and importing governments to address challenges in the world coffee sector. The ICO was meant to ensure fair price for coffee farmers in exporting countries in order to address a history of trade disparity between exporting and importing countries. The goal of ICO was to achieve long-term equilibrium between production and consumption by alleviating price fluctuations and encouraging equitable prices. It was also aimed at promoting coffee consumption. The ICO set up a system of export quotas, intended to help maintain fair price, among member countries. The quotas would be consideration of the International Coffee Agreements (ICA). With lessons drawn from episodes of bumper crop,<sup>2</sup> the system was meant as a safeguard against coffee crises. Coffee-consuming economies, such as the United States (US) and European countries, however, proved to wield greater influence in determining trade flows. The US's participation in the ICO was rooted partly in geopolitical considerations to address the tensions of the Cold War — to prevent the spread of communist and anti-movements in Latin American and African countries by keeping coffee price steady (Akiyama, Baffles, Larson & Varangis, 2001; Bair, 2007).

Unlike other soft commodities such as sugar, cotton and frozen concentrated orange juice, the issue of subsidization of coffee production and exports is absent from international trade forums. This makes the global coffee trade and the stabilization of global coffee prices one of the most enduring issues in international economics.

### Intercontinental Exchange

The ICA quota system eventually collapsed in 1989 with the US seeing its geopolitical motive no longer as urgent, and other coffee-importing countries opting out of the agreement (Akiyama, et al., 2001 citing Hermann, 1896). Moreover, many producing-exporting countries faced pressure from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank structural adjustment programs to increase production and expand their exports. This led to the overplanting and overproduction of coffee. Transnational corporations, on the other hand, represented by importing countries, felt that the Agreements placed them at a disadvantage from getting their coffee supply at the cheapest possible price (Talbot, 2011). The collapse heralded the liberalization of the world coffee trade, and consequently, widespread price fluctuations (Akiyama et al., 2001). The immediate reaction to the ICA collapse was the price crash of coffee, which coupled with overplanting resulted in the what the industry refers to as the “coffee crises.” Subsequent price crashes would occur. The price fluctuations mostly affected coffee-

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<sup>2</sup> Bumper crop is a crop that yields an unusually productive harvest. A bumper crop is often a source of significant problems, such as when oversupply drastically lowers the crop's market price so that its cost of production cannot be recovered. Farmers suffer losses and in some cases fail to recover.

exporting countries and their coffee planters; all the while the retail price of manufactured coffee remained steady (Gresser & Tickell, 2002).

Current global trends see big coffee roasters take the cake in the coffee market. They buy almost half of the world stocks of green coffee bean. In this set-up, transnational corporations (TNCs) emerged as powerful players in the world coffee chain, many of them integrating into former colonies as producers and manufacturers. They roast the beans and turn them into instant, soluble coffee for mass-market consumption. By the late 1980s they had established subsidiaries in coffee-producing countries (2002, p. 30) and ultimately took hold of the big global market for instant coffee.<sup>3</sup> Over time, the profit enjoyed by coffee-producing countries decreased from about 30% of the purchase price to 8% (Craves, 2006). Among the TNCs are the well-known “big four” coffee roasters: Kraft, Nestlé, Proctor & Gamble and Sara Lee (Gresser & Tickell, 2002). At the beginning of this boom, Nestlé, a Swiss company, was the first dominant player (Talbot, 2011, p. 78). Nestlé and Kraft Foods account for 75% of the coffee market. Nestlé supplies almost half of the world consumption of instant coffees.

The ICO continues to oversee the world’s coffee production but it has since lost its power to regulate supply and prices. Coffee prices are now controlled from the futures markets based in London and New York: London sets the benchmark for Robusta coffee and New York for Arabica. In reality, it is the massive number of traded contracts for coffee that determines its price in the world market. These contracts far exceed the physical amount of coffee that is produced, exported and imported (Gresser & Tickell, 2002, p. 19).

The Global Value Chain (GVC) for coffee flows from the base production (or cultivation), to processing, trading, roasting, and finally the marketing of the coffee end product. Production has the lowest value, while marketing has the highest value added. Marketing continues to be concentrated in developed countries captured by global firms that market and sell coffee products. Traders bargain their prices from producers according to market prices and their margin of profit. Hulled coffee beans are then sold to roasters for manufacturing. Most of the coffee beans will be manufactured for retail sale. For every transfer and process the coffee beans undergo, their value and the margin of profit increase.

To have greater control of the domestic coffee chain and to participate in the financial boom of the international market, domestic corporations in producing countries have moved to control as much of the coffee chain, from production, roasting, retail to trade (May, Gilberto, Mascarenhas & Potts, 2004). They have themselves taken on the role of producers, often to the detriment of local farmers. Previously having little power or say in the chain, local farmers are now at risk of being sidelined and having no say at all. Smallholder farmers, who carry

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<sup>3</sup> There is an increasing importation of green coffee from developing countries. From 2011 to 2016, Malaysia, Turkey, China and Thailand have participated in this increase (USADA, 2016). This, however, still accounts for only 10% of the global market. On the average, Asian countries have a preference for cheaper Robusta imports and thus pay below the world average (ED&F MAN-Volcafe, 2014).



the burden and risk of cultivation, often earn the least. Commercial scale plantations, which produce and sell at volume, are able to avoid loss. Commercial scale plantations that participate directly in trading coffee stand to earn the most. By trading directly and participating in future contracts, corporate plantations are able to dodge the risk of price volatility. Future contracts create space for traders and buyers to hedge the risk of unstable prices and project strategic market decisions. It is a market option that small coffee producers do not have, but which has created their dependency (Gresser & Tickell, 2002, p. 31).

Profit in the global coffee chain is dependent on who has the capacity to participate in the global market. Capital in terms of scale of production and participation in the global trade can make coffee production hugely profitable. While the coffee value chain has since evolved into something more complex now involving coffee futures, its roots in colonial trading and plantations still remain, as have the relations of power between labor and small landowners, and commercial scale plantations, traders and manufacturers. Those closest to the land have the least bargaining power in the chain, if they are not altogether excluded.

## **The Philippine Coffee Roadmap**

Coffee was first introduced in the Philippines in 1749 by a Franciscan friar (Philippine Coffee Board, n.d.). Coffee production in the Philippines followed a historical boom and bust cycle. The country was a leading exporter of Arabica coffee in the 19th century, then shifted to Robusta after disease devastated the crop in the 1890s. It would recover somewhat as coffee producers became incorporated into the supply chains of Folgers and Nestlé (Bamber et al., 2017), but would not be a leader in world production. This is something the government intends to change.

A growing trend in the Asian market is instant coffee. Increasing trade among developing countries, mainly in the South East Asian region, is driving the trend (2017, p. 20). Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand were among the top six exporters in 2015. The Philippines, on the other hand, is the leading importer of instant coffee (USDA, 2016). It is the largest export destination for Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia's instant coffee manufacturers. 90% of coffee consumed in the Philippines is instant coffee. By 2021, the country is projected to become one of the top five global consumers of instant coffee (Euromonitor, 2016).

The Philippine Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) created a roadmap for the coffee industry (Coffee Industry Roadmap 2017-2022), touting it to be the Philippines' next boom. By 2022, DTI projects coffee plantations to expand from 140,552 hectares to 213,788 hectares. The target areas for coffee production are in the island of Mindanao, particularly in the regions of SOCCSKSARGEN and Davao (DTI, 2016). In 2015, these two regions were among the top coffee producing regions in the country. Along with ARMM (now BARMM), the regions collectively produced 68% of the coffee produced in the Philippines. According to the DTI, the demand for coffee has “boosted fortunes of businesses... in an effort to help domestic

producers take advantage of both the local and global markets, policymakers have engaged with the stakeholders to facilitate economic upgrading” (2016, p. 11).

Coffee Importers	
Brands	Company/Importer
Folgers	The Folgers Coffee Company/Sysu International Inc.
Coffee G7	Trung Nguyen (Vietnam)/Benby Enterprises, Inc.
Good Day	PT Santos Jaya Abadi (Indonesia)
Grandeur	Super Coffee Corp. Pte Ltd (Singapore, Thailand)
Kopiko	P.T. Maha Jaya Suksesindo (Indonesia)/ Tridharma Mktg. Corp. (Tao Group) (major)
Khao Shong	Khao Shong Industry 1979 Co. Ltd. (Thailand)
Nescafe Decaf	Nestlé Korea Ltd/Nestlé Philippines Inc.
Nescafe Gold	Nestlé Korea Ltd/Nestlé Philippines Inc.
San Mig Coffee	Super Coffee Corp. Pte Ltd (Singapore, Thailand)
Vinacafe	Vinacafe Bien Hoa Jointstock Company (Vietnam)

Source: Orzaes (2011). Selected supermarkets/stores in Metro Manila, as cited in Department of Trade and Industry Philippine Coffee Industry Roadmap 2017-2022 (2016).

Nestlé is the biggest player in the coffee industry, being the largest buyer of Robusta coffee. The corporation is estimated to purchase 70% of the coffee in the Philippines, with 80% of these sourced from Region 12 in Mindanao (Bamber et al., 2017, p. 26). As the largest purchaser of Philippine coffee, Nestlé has significant control over coffee producers. Farmers have little recourse when the company rejects their beans (2017, p. 16). Characterized as a captive relationship, small farm producers are often faced with low returns on their efforts and risks<sup>4</sup> (Abdulsamad et al., 2015 cited in Bamber et al., 2017).

Once the coffee pile is traded in bulk abroad, it becomes difficult to trace the origin of the coffee beans for accountability issues.

At the local level, traders purchase coffee, usually green coffee beans, from farmers and plantations. These are intended for sale to other traders, processors or manufacturers. Often the actual farm source is not indicated, and the beans’ actual origin is not made available. This makes the “sourcing” of coffee challenging. The trade occurs in the farm or at buying stations

<sup>4</sup> During the colonial period, the Dutch instilled a similar business model that focused on trade rather than cultivation and production (Arrighi 1994: 150-8 in Talbot 2011). The Dutch, by employing local rulers as their agents, were able to force Javanese peasants to produce coffee. The peasants were forced to sign agreements with the rulers obligating them to sell coffee for a fixed price to the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC). Thus, the Dutch were able to break the Arab monopoly (Fernando, 2003: 159; Ukers, 1935, p. 40 in Talbot, 2011).

Retail Sales of Coffee in the Philippines by Category, 2011-2015					
Category	Sales (PHP, millions)				
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Total Coffee</b>	<b>30,969.6</b>	<b>35,270.6</b>	<b>41,247.8</b>	<b>46,186.3</b>	<b>50,566.9</b>
Instant Coffee	30,847.8	35,140.1	41,111.1	46,042.8	50,415.7
Standard	30,829.7	35,121.5	41,092.1	46,023.2	50,395.4
Decaffeinated	18.1	18.7	19.0	19.6	20.3
Fresh Coffee	121.8	130.5	136.7	143.5	151.1
Beans	48.3	50.7	53.0	55.2	57.5
Ground	73.5	79.8	83.7	88.4	93.7

Source: Euromonitor International, 2016 as cited in Bamber, P., Daly, P. & G. Gereffi (2017).

Cost and Return Analysis per Hectare					
	Production cost	Processing cost	Labor	Material inputs	Profit
Arabica	PhP 55.33/kg	PhP 8.08/kg	PhP 41.01/kg	PhP 20.29/kg (modern farm)	PhP 146.56/kg (modern farm)
				PhP 1.51/kg (typical farm)	PhP 60.93/kg (typical farm)
Robusta	PhP 37.33/kg	PhP 5.50/kg	PhP 12.84/kg		PhP 34.95/kg at PhP80/kg price

Source: Department of Trade and Industry. (2016). Philippine Coffee Industry Roadmap 2017-2022.

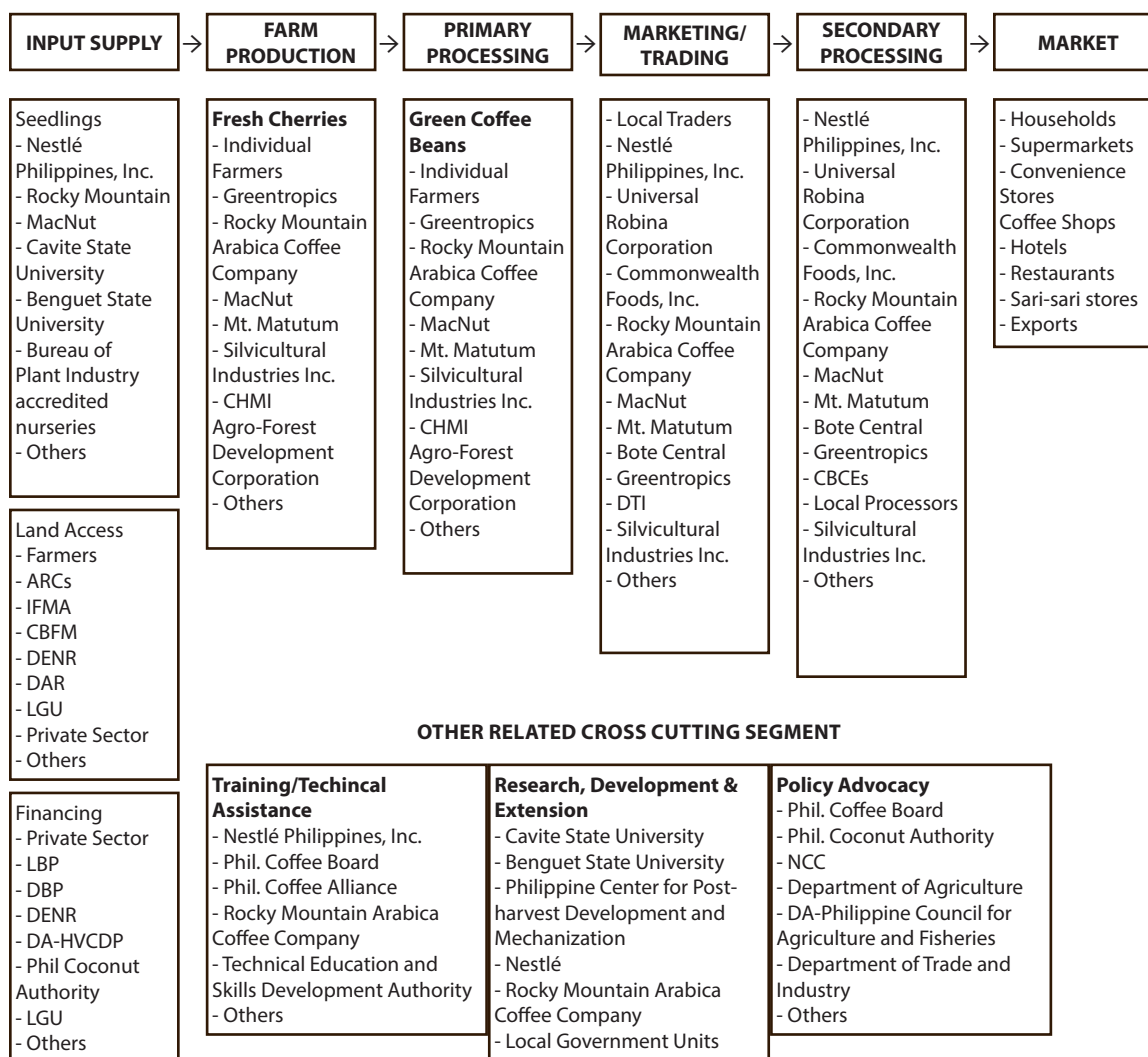
at the barangay, municipal or provincial level. Some agents or traders would consolidate their pile and resell to other traders and processors. Farmers could sell their beans either directly to buyers or to agents or traders. Large manufacturing corporations such as Nestlé have buying stations on the ground (DTI, 2016, p. 28). Commercial scale plantations tend to have various systems in place--they have their own traders and are not dependent on middlemen. Those geared for export may also employ auxiliary agents such as brokers, trading houses, agents, and shipping companies (May et al., 2004). When the pile is traded in bulk abroad, it becomes difficult to trace the origin of the coffee beans for accountability issues.

Commercial scale plantations are identified as key stakeholders in the Coffee Industry Road Map, among these Silvicultural Industries Inc. (SII) and M&S Company, Inc. (M&S). Agreements with the government enable them to convert forestland, mainly covering indigenous peoples' ancestral domains, to dual-purpose tree plantations, primarily for coffee (DTI 2016, p. 59).

In order to reach its targets, the roadmap encourages an increase in investments and the scaling up of production.



## Selected Key Players and Stakeholders in the Coffee Supply/Value Chain



Source: Department of Trade and Industry. (2016). Philippine Coffee Industry Roadmap 2017-2022.

## Scaling Production, Intensifying Landgrabs

There are two main types of coffee farms in the Philippines: smallholder farms, with an approximate area of 1.5 hectares each and often intercropped with coconut and fruit trees, which are owned by small farm owners; and commercial scale plantations, which are lease agreements between agribusiness corporations or organizations and the government covering public land, increasingly ancestral domains, through an Integrated Forest Management Agreement (IFMA) or a Community-Based Forest Management Agreement (CBFMA).

An IFMA is intended to cover industrial forest plantations, which refers to any tract of forestland planted to tree crops primarily to supply the raw material requirements of existing or proposed wood processing and energy generating plants, and related industries (DENR Administrative Order No. 99-53). A CBFMA, on the other hand, is a production sharing agreement with people's organizations (POs) to develop, utilize and manage specific portions of forest lands. (DENR Administrative Order No. 96-29). Both are for a period of 25 years and renewable for another 25 years.

Smallholder farm owners are heavily dependent on the prices pegged by traders and buying stations. They bear the brunt of global price fluctuations, and are vulnerable to climate hazards and the risk of crop diseases (Penarredonda, 2017). Their sale arrangements are not secured by contract. Instead, these are usually conducted through informal agreements (2017, p. 26).

Industrial (or commercial) scale plantations, on the other hand, are able to maximize their investment through the scale of their production. They are, however, characterized by environmental and social hazards.

Agro-industrial plantations devastate ecosystems over time. They exact a huge toll on the land and surrounding environments by destroying biodiverse habitats, disrupt food chains, and endanger public health through disease outbreaks and pesticide exposures. Intensive farming inputs and technology tend to deplete soil nutrition, change the landscape, and increase environmental hazards (Horrigan, Lawrence & Walker, 2002; Foley, Ramankutty, Brauman, Gerber et al., 2011; Diaz, Fargione, Chapin & Tilman, 2006). And by their methods, agro-industrial plantations contribute to climate warming (Tilman, 2002). The Philippines is among the first tropical countries to have critically reduced its forest area by agricultural expansion (Jurvélius, 1997). Industrial agricultural methods are inherently unsustainable (Montgomery, 2007).

Plantations are likely to provide only a tenth of the income in comparison to the livelihoods that is generated through smallholder farming (Holt-Giménez, 2007).

Commercial scale plantations are also known to disrupt communities by expropriating their land and employing armed guards to secure their area (Bacongco, 2017; Huesca, 2016). The expansion of industrial agriculture is reflected in the rapid increase in land grabs (Kremen, Iles & Bacon, 2012).

Particularly where agro-industrial plantations impinge on indigenous peoples' lands, indigenous peoples are prevented from access to land and practicing their traditional cultivation methods. Plantations undermine communities' food sovereignty,

**The operations of large agricultural companies often result in the internal displacement and dispossession of communities. Moreover, the involuntary disappearance of environmental human rights defenders opposing large agribusiness companies have been reported.**

diminish their right to healthy and culturally appropriate food, and their right to practice their own agricultural systems. Indigenous communities' traditional crops are devastated, often replaced with a single commercial crop resulting in food insecurity, malnutrition, even hunger (Pulhin & Ramirez, 2013). The operations of large agricultural companies also often result in the internal displacement and dispossession of communities. The involuntary disappearance of environmental human rights defenders opposing large agribusiness companies has also been reported (2013, p. 9). The notion of "development aggression" rose from the experiences of communities with such projects. Often implemented with the grant, even encouragement, of the government, these projects have been aggressive in exploiting indigenous peoples' land and in displacing them and causing human rights violations (Huesca, 2016).

Large agribusiness corporations often jeopardize indigenous peoples' right to land, their ability to live their way of life, and practice indigenous cultivation, devastating their food sources.

#foodsovereignty

The absence of a clear land use policy is causing lands to be converted for other uses, threatening the ecosystem and undermining ancestral domains and agrarian reform. The determination is often left to designated government departments that have weak safeguards and are often under the sway of local elites and corporations (Pulhin & Ramirez, 2013, p. 9). Government agreements such as the IFMA and agriculture venture agreements, couched as development projects, often imperil indigenous peoples' and smallholders' rights.

Mother peels potato while children keep her company.







What used to be a dense forest....

### **A Case Study:**

#### **A Tale of a Coffee Plantation Takeover of T'boli Manobo Land**

**T**he region of SOCCSKSARGEN is a prime area for the coffee roadmap. The ancestral domain of the T'boli Manobo indigenous people is at the heart of the region. Their assertion to their way of life and right to their ancestral domains stand in the way of an expanding coffee plantation. Where the T'boli Manobo could have farmed the land and made a living, a plantation company is cultivating coffee to sate the local and global thirst for coffee.

A village in Barangay Ned, Lake Sebu, South Catabato in southern Philippines was home to 67 indigenous families, or around 300 individuals, mostly belonging to the T'boli-Ubo and Taboli-Manobo tribes before the place was converted into a coffee plantation through an IFMA (No. 22) between the government and Silvicultural Industries Inc. (SII).

For almost three decades, the T'boli-Manobo S'daf Claimants Organization (TAMASCO) has been locked in a bitter struggle to reclaim their land from the Dawang Coffee Plantation,



A mother and child inside their house.

which is run by SII. SII, owned by one of the country's richest oligarchs, the Consunji family, is "a part of the vast agribusiness, mining and construction conglomerate built by David M. Consunji, a former minister during the Marcos dictatorship," (Watts, 2018). Resolution No. 1550 filed in the House of Representatives states that Dawang supplies coffee to beverage giant, Nestlé.<sup>5</sup>

The initial area covered by the IFMA had more than 300 hectares encroaching into T'boli Manobo land. When Silvicultural's corporate existence ended, M&S company was granted the right to operate the plantation. The Consunjis have many companies for their various types of businesses, M&S Company is their agricultural arm and now is the holder of the contentious IFMA.<sup>6</sup> M&S Company seeks to expand its area, which is now estimated to cover 29,085 hectares.

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<sup>5</sup> See House resolution No:1550, Philippines House of Representatives, [www.congress.gov.ph](http://www.congress.gov.ph) › legisdocs › basic\_17. Nestlé has, however, denied any dealings with Dawang Coffee Plantation and SII.

<sup>6</sup> While DMCI has denied involvement with M&S, Consunji family members are identified as incorporators, directors and stockholders of M&S. See <https://quotes.wsj.com/PH/DMC/company-people>.





(L corner) Brothers Victor Jr. and Artemio were killed along with their father Datu Victor in what the military claims to be a 'clash' with rebels. Photo taken in 2006.

When the IFMA was first imposed in their ancestral domains, the villagers were displaced, forced to the sidelines of the plantation to eke out a meager living. In 1998, some fifteen families, led by Datu Victor Danyan, their leader, returned to the village to reclaim their ancestral land. Company guards, who villagers report were members of the military-trained Special Civilian Active Auxiliary (SCAA)<sup>7</sup> unit, prevented them from putting up huts and clearing patches of land. TAMASCO's persistence to stand their ground and resist harassment from company guards finally bore fruit when after eight years, they managed to resettle in their ancestral territory. They then applied for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT), together with other T'boli-Ubo and Taboli-Manobo communities, with the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP). On Sept. 19, 2006, the Taboli-Manobo S'daf Claimants Organization (TAMASCO) was formally established.

<sup>7</sup> The SCAA was created by the government to "complement and support the regular forces of the Armed Forces of the Philippines in dealing with internal and external security threats". See Executive Order No. 69, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/downloads/2018/1204-EO-69-RRD>.



Water is harder to source. We need to walk for hours to get around the company boundary to fetch water.

Bes, T'boli Manobo mother

I plant rice in a small plot of land. It is risky. I can be shot. But what choice do I have.

Lando, T'boli Manobo farmer

They cut our trees, uprooted our abaca and other crops. Crops we've toiled hard to plant for food for our families. Where will we source our food? We have been forbidden from our own land.

Danny, Teduray farmer

The community is characterized as a Geographically Isolated and Disadvantaged Area (GIDA). They did not have much by way of material possessions, but took pride in their collective strength and capacity to defend what was left of their ancestral land. Datu Victor, assisted by the elders and members of the tribal council, led their resettlement in the area. In spite of this, they still faced constant threats from company guards. "Visits" would occur, intended to scare and harass the villagers.

By the 2000s, parts of the area were covered under coal-related contracts between the Government of the Philippines (represented by the Department of Energy or DOE) and various entities including David M. Consunji Construction Equipment Resources Inc. (DMCI), which was again without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of the T'boli-Manobo community members. FPIC is mandated by law, under the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA), prior to any projects within indigenous peoples' land. In 2013, the struggles of TAMASCO were reported to the United Nations Special Rapporteur for Indigenous Peoples

(UNSRIP) (LRC-KsK/FoEPhil, 2013). The report focused particularly on the threats and harassment of the community by plantation guards, the destruction of houses owned by community members, the military harassment of the community, and the threats on the life of Datu Victor, which forced him to leave the community and his family to seek safety.

In 2016, the IFMA was supposed to have expired. Through bureaucratic sleight of hand, it was renewed in 2015 by Silvicultural Industries Inc. and approved by the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR). This was done by combining the IFMA that covered TAMASCO ancestral domain with another IFMA awarded to M&S Company. M&S Company now has the merged IFMA, and persists to operate in the area. TAMASCO asserts this was without their consent. M&S refuses to return to TAMASCO their rightful ancestral domain. M&S controls some 11,862 hectares of land in the area, totalling about 29,085 hectares combined with all the IFMAs under its control. All combined, the merged IFMAs not only cover TAMASCO's land but the ancestral domains of Manobo-Dulangan and Teduray indigenous peoples, spanning from South Cotabato to the provinces of Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao.

Believing the IFMA had expired, Datu Victor cut down coffee trees in an area that formed part of TAMASCO's ancestral domain. He then marched to the coffee plantation and ordered the company guards to leave. As a result of his actions, arrest warrants were issued for Datu Victor and several other members of the community. In a bid to divide the community, T'boli members who were employed by the company harassed community members; Datu Victor and fellow defenders received death threats. Of this urgency, Datu Dande remembers his uncle, Datu Victor, insisting to the members of the local office of DENR, "If you let this drag on, we will all be killed" (La Vina & Mercado, 2018).

On December 4, 2017, before the tensions could escalate, support NGOs arranged a meeting with the DENR and TAMASCO. It would be a day too late, the military opened fire on the village on December 3. Datu Victor and seven other members of TAMASCO were killed, casualties of what the military reported as a military operation against rebels.

Community members assert the men were not rebels, but rather their leaders and kin defending and asserting their right to their land. After the massacre, the community had to evacuate once again, their surviving leaders forced to find refuge elsewhere.

Marivic Danyan, the daughter of Datu Victor, recounts her experience in the aftermath of the massacre, "I had to put part of my husband's brain back inside his skull so he was fit for burial. I tried to change the clothes of my dead brothers, but their wounds were too bad" (Watts, 2018). She is steadfast that the sacrifice of her father

The guards forbid us from planting our corn and vegetables claiming that the company owns the land. They would fire their guns as warning.

Roberto, T'boli Manobo farmer

As a young boy, I witnessed how the company humiliated my father, sending their guards to threaten him for planting and gathering wood to use for cooking.

Elias, Dulangan Manobo farmer

If you let this drag on, we will all be killed.

Slain TAMASCO chief Victor Danyan.



There is a strong likelihood that similar incidents of IP killings will recur in the disputed lands not only in the provinces of South Cotabato and Sultan Kudarat but also in the nearby municipalities and provinces where mining firms and big corporations operate.

Commission on Human Rights,  
Region 12

We will stand by the land as our elders have. Justice has to be served soon, how many more of us need die.

Datu Dante Dinyan,  
TAMASCO Chairperson

Those who cannot plant are forced to become laborers. They earn 120 pesos\* for their labor. This is not enough to support a family.

Lando, Dulangan Manobo farmer  
\*2.30 US per day

would not be in vain, “The land is ours and that of our children. We live by it. We know no other place to call home. It is home.”

Datu Victor had told new TAMASCO chief Datu Dande Dinyan, “I will die, so you can reclaim our land.” Community members say Datu Victor had probably known that cutting down coffee trees in the company plantation would put a target on his back, but found no other recourse to assert what is theirs, land where they’ve always tilled and raised their children.

Regarding the killing of TAMASCO members, the Philippines’ Commission on Human Rights stated that the likelihood of similar incidents of killings of indigenous peoples will recur in disputed lands where big corporations also have interests, recognizing the precarious conditions of indigenous peoples in the face of corporate interests in their lands.

Justice remains elusive for the T’boli-Manobo people, as it is for other indigenous peoples whose lands have been taken and occupied for corporate interests. Even as indigenous peoples’ resistance has resulted in deaths, it is business as usual in the plantation, growing, trading and selling bloodied coffee.<sup>8</sup>

The Integrated Forest Management Program (IFMP), which covers IFMAs has lofty objectives: the attainment of a “balanced, productive, and efficiently functioning forest ecosystem through the

sustainable management of forests and the rehabilitation of degraded forestlands” (Sec. 3 a.); and the improvement of the “economic well-being of upland people and communities

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<sup>8</sup> According to field report, M&S cultivates Arabica for export to Singapore. Singapore is one of the centers of Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) for Asia-Pacific, a processor of Coffee Futures.



dependent on forest resources by ensuring equitable opportunities and access to forest resources” (Sec. 3 c). But, it has only fulfilled its objective of pushing for industrial forest plantations (Sec. 3 b) in the interest of big business. The IFMP has been liberally construed to accommodate agro-industrial monocrop production. Ultimately, it has, in the instance of the T’boli-Ubo and Taboli-Manobo ancestral domains, become a tool to legitimize land grab.

## Reflections

The operation in the global coffee market is negatively impacting local communities. Driven by global demand and conditioned by liberal trade mechanisms that favor big business, local communities suffer the burden of producing coffee. The past decades have seen the expansion of plantation economy and increase in large-scale agricultural land investments. These have led to the increasing encroachment on indigenous peoples’ lands and upland areas. Particularly for indigenous peoples who are in usually isolated areas, their lands have become sites for the schemes of big business and prime area for development programs, programs that are often heavily dependent on massive agro-industrial and extractive projects. Despite promises of development these projects have failed to curb the poverty in affected communities, and instead have worsen their insecure condition and intensified their vulnerability.

Many indigenous communities continue to resist. They recognize these development projects as threats to their natural environment and way of life — to their cultural values, traditional structures and economy.

In the case of the T’boli Manobo communities, the government and its representative institutions have yet to make

We have always sourced our food and livelihood from the land. Our elders remember when there was no hunger. Now, there is nowhere to plant. Our children go hungry.

Ben, T’boli Manobo farmer

The land is ours and that of our children. We live by it. We know no other place to call home. It is home.

Marivin Danyan, the daughter of slain chief Victor Danyan.



definitive steps to rightfully institute the communities safely in their ancestral domains. Neither have the deaths of Datu Victor and the men of TAMASCO been vindicated. Instead, it has become common practice to criminalize the assertions of indigenous peoples even as law formally recognizes their rights. Their assertions are regarded as insurgency, masking blatant violence as defense of the State. Community members are not only prevented from planting in their own ancestral domains, they are driven out. What continues to oppress TAMASCO is the increasing commercialization of ancestral domains. Instead of recognition and equitable consideration for indigenous peoples, a bias for large development projects with private interests continue to characterize the government's development framework.

In Brgy. Ned, what was once lush forests that provided communities with sources of food and medicine have been logged and flattened to make way for a coffee plantation. The scale of land development has put the environment and the people in great hazard. TAMASCO's experiences call attention to the urgent need to ensure that indigenous peoples' right to food sovereignty and self-determination are recognized, respected and protected.

Now the leader of a beleaguered community, Datu Dante Dinyan said, "We will stand by the land as our elders have. Justice has to be served soon, how many more of us need to die." Regulations for accountability and for just production processes need to be instituted at the global level. Corporations have to be accountable for their impacts in communities. Government is duty-bound to ensure that communities and their way of life are protected. Ancestral domains are the last bastions that preserve and protect the country's natural reserves. Many have died to protect these. The loss of lives is too much to pay for a cup of coffee.

Uncertain future.



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