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The Dago Elos Conflict in Bandung City (2016–2023)

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Abstract

This study explores the social dynamics experienced by the residents of Dago Elos, Bandung, in their efforts to defend land rights from 2016 to 2024. The agrarian conflict involving local communities and third parties with historical land claims has sparked various forms of resistance, community solidarity, and both legal and social advocacy practices. Employing a qualitative approach through case study methods, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation, the research reveals that Dago Elos residents exhibit strong social resilience through collective identity strengthening, mobilization of local culture, and cross-community collaboration within advocacy networks. These dynamics reflect not only a land struggle but also a broader crisis of representation within legal and urban planning systems that often marginalize indigenous and local populations. This study underscores the significance of grassroots movements in the pursuit of social justice and the defense of living spaces.

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Introduction

Agrarian conflicts in Indonesia have remained a chronic issue since the colonial era and continue to persist today. This indicates that land constitutes a fundamental component of human life, serving not only as an economic resource for meeting daily needs but also as a matter deeply intertwined with culture, identity, and sovereignty (Atong, 2025). Consequently, communities in any region whose land is taken by irresponsible and unscrupulous actors are unlikely to submit merely because they lack access to legal mechanisms for securing formal recognition of their land rights under state law.

Land is not merely a physical entity but also a living space that shapes the identity, history, and social solidarity of a community. In the context of urban communities, particularly those that have inhabited a particular area for decades, land represents a symbol of cultural attachment and existential belonging. When their long-established tenure is threatened, complex social dynamics emerge, including collective resistance, the articulation of community identity, and opposition to legal systems perceived as failing to protect their rights.

Among the many agrarian conflicts that have occurred in Indonesia, most originate from prolonged disputes over competing land ownership claims between local communities and the government or private business entities. Each party seeks formal legal recognition of its claim to the land and pursues its own interests. In this context, the government holds the highest authority in determining land ownership through its regulatory and administrative powers. Local communities seek to preserve their livelihoods, as land serves as their primary source of income and sustenance, while companies and other business entities aim to expand their operational areas to support business growth and increase the value of their corporate assets (Noor & Rusliandy, 2024).

One concrete example of this phenomenon is the agrarian conflict involving the residents of Dago Elos in Bandung City. Since 2016, the community has been engaged in a land dispute arising from a third party's ownership claim based on an eigendom verponding document, a Dutch colonial-era land ownership and property tax certificate. However, the residents have occupied the area since the 1960s, building their social, economic, and cultural lives on the land across generations. They have established homes, places of worship, informal educational facilities, and other community spaces, transforming Dago Elos into a vibrant and well-established neighborhood. The situation changed when individuals claiming to be the heirs of the former landowner filed a legal action, asserting ownership rights based on land documents dating back to the Dutch East Indies period.

On the other hand, agrarian issues in Indonesia continue to present significant legal and social paradoxes. Although the Basic Agrarian Law (Law No. 5 of 1960) stipulates that Western land rights which were not converted within the prescribed period should revert to state ownership, colonial-era documents such as eigendom verponding continue to be used by certain parties as the legal basis for ownership claims in practice. This situation has created a conflict between formal legal principles and social justice, as communities that have physically occupied and socially developed the land for decades face the risk of losing their homes due to the absence of formally recognized legal ownership (Rachmawati, 2023).

The residents of Dago Elos did not remain passive. They organized themselves by building solidarity networks, staging peaceful demonstrations, holding community festivals, and collaborating with activists and legal advocates to defend their rights. Their resistance was not merely an effort to protect their homes but also to preserve the social heritage and collective life they had built over generations. These collective actions reflect strong social dynamics, characterized by internal cohesion, collective awareness, and the construction of a shared identity as an empowered community. Faced with the threat of displacement, the residents demonstrated a renewed spirit of mutual cooperation and collective resistance rooted in their shared experiences as members of an urban neighborhood. (BandungBergerak, 2022).

The Dago Elos case reflects the complexity of agrarian conflicts in Indonesia, particularly in urban areas. It encompasses interconnected legal, social, political, and historical dimensions. Therefore, this conflict should not be viewed merely as an ordinary land ownership dispute, but rather as a manifestation of unequal power relations among local communities, the state, and the unresolved legacy of colonial land administration. When the legal system fails to fully uphold substantive justice, grassroots movements such as those initiated by the residents of Dago Elos become increasingly significant in advocating for legal reform, social justice, and the recognition of their rights (Rachmawati, 2023).

Method

The study entitled *The Dago Elos Conflict in Bandung City (2016–2023)* employs the historical research method. Historical research is a systematic, objective, and critical scientific approach used to reconstruct past events based on authentic and verifiable historical sources. This method involves identifying, collecting, evaluating, and interpreting historical evidence in order to produce a credible account of past events and explain their significance within broader social, political, and historical contexts (Kuntowijoyo, 2003). Through this method, the researcher seeks to examine the background, processes, development, and impacts of the Dago Elos conflict by analyzing the causal relationships underlying its emergence and evolution. The historical research method adopted in this study follows the framework proposed by Kuntowijoyo, which consists of four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. These stages enable the researcher to systematically collect historical evidence, assess the authenticity and credibility of sources, interpret historical facts critically, and reconstruct the sequence of events into a coherent and academically accountable historical narrative.

The first stage is heuristics, which involves the process of searching for, identifying, and collecting various sources relevant to the research topic. At this stage, the researcher gathers both primary and secondary sources that provide information related to the Dago Elos conflict, forming the empirical foundation for subsequent historical analysis (Herlina, 2020). At this stage, the researcher collected both primary and secondary sources relevant to the Dago Elos conflict during the 2016–2023 period. Primary sources were obtained through interviews with individuals who were directly involved in or had firsthand knowledge of the conflict, including Dago Elos residents, the residents' legal representatives, community leaders, activist companions, and other individuals possessing relevant information about the events. In addition, the researcher gathered official

documents, such as court decisions, land administration records, dispute-related correspondence, government archives, and news reports documenting the development of the conflict. Secondary sources consisted of books, scholarly journal articles, undergraduate theses, master's theses, dissertations, research reports, and other academic literature addressing agrarian conflicts, the history of Bandung City, social movements, and land governance in Indonesia. Collectively, these sources provided the empirical and theoretical foundation for reconstructing the Dago Elos conflict in a comprehensive and historically grounded manner.

The second stage is source criticism, which involves evaluating the collected sources to ensure the reliability and validity of the data used in the research. Source criticism is conducted through both external and internal criticism. External criticism aims to verify the authenticity of the sources by examining their origin, authorship, date of publication, publishing institution, and the authenticity of the documents themselves. Internal criticism, on the other hand, focuses on assessing the credibility of the content by evaluating the consistency of the information, the objectivity of the author, the background of the source's creator, and the possibility of particular interests or biases that may have influenced the content. This process ensures that only credible and trustworthy historical evidence is used in reconstructing the Dago Elos conflict (Heryati, 2017). The researcher also conducted cross-source comparisons to verify the consistency of the available evidence and to establish historical facts with a high degree of validity. By corroborating information from multiple sources, the study sought to produce a more objective and reliable reconstruction of the Dago Elos conflict.

The third stage is interpretation, which involves analyzing and interpreting the historical facts that have undergone the process of source criticism (Herlina, 2020). In this study, the researcher examines and relates various historical facts concerning the origins of the Dago Elos conflict, the development of the dispute from 2016 to 2023, the involvement of different actors, the forms of community resistance, the responses of the government and law enforcement authorities, and the social, legal, and political consequences resulting from the conflict. The interpretation is conducted by considering causal relationships, continuity, and the changes that occurred throughout the course of the conflict. Consequently, the historical facts are not merely presented in chronological order but are also critically analyzed to explain the dynamics of the agrarian conflict in the Dago Elos area.

The final stage is historiography, which involves writing the historical account based on the facts that have been collected, verified, and interpreted. At this stage, the findings are organized into a systematic, chronological, and analytical narrative of the Dago Elos conflict in Bandung City during the 2016–2023 period. The writing process adheres to the principles of historical methodology to produce an objective reconstruction of the conflict while explaining the relationships among its underlying causes, the course of events, the roles of the various actors involved, and the consequences that emerged. Through the historiographical stage, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the Dago Elos conflict and to contribute to the broader academic discourse on the history of agrarian conflicts in Indonesia (Heryati, 2017).

In analyzing the Dago Elos conflict, this study adopts Johan Galtung's conflict theory as its primary analytical framework. Johan Galtung is widely recognized as a pioneer in

peace and conflict studies, and his work continues to serve as a fundamental reference in the fields of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. His extensive research on violence and conflict has made significant contributions to understanding the causes of conflict and the promotion of sustainable peace. As a peace activist, Galtung's ideas were also influenced by the nonviolent philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. He argued that violence should not be understood narrowly as merely physical harm, but rather as a complex phenomenon that must be examined from multiple dimensions. Galtung is best known for his conflict triangle, which conceptualizes conflict through three interrelated forms of violence: direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969).

Results

Field interviews and participatory observation conducted with residents of Dago Elos, a community that has inhabited the northern slopes of Bandung City for decades, documented a series of concrete community responses that followed the reemergence of land ownership claims based on the colonial-era eigendom verponding document in 2016. Informants consistently described experiencing escalating legal and social pressure from that point onward, alongside specific, observable actions taken in response, rather than passive worry alone. Taken together, these empirical findings, detailed below, are what this study characterizes as the community's social resilience.

The land they have occupied across generations, serving not only as their place of residence but also as the foundation of their social and cultural life, was suddenly claimed by a third party relying on legal documents inherited from the Dutch colonial period. However, the significance of the conflict extends beyond the competing legal claims; it also lies in the way the community collectively responded to the threat.

Rather than remaining passive, the residents gradually strengthened community solidarity by reinforcing social ties and revitalizing long-standing neighborhood traditions. Activities such as local religious gatherings, community clean-up initiatives, neighborhood security patrols, and cultural festivals became important expressions of their collective presence and attachment to the land. Among these, the residents also held a collective *istighosah*, an Islamic congregational supplication rooted in the Qur'anic account of seeking Allah's help in times of hardship (QS. Al-Anfal/8:9)

إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَاسْتَجَابَ لَكُمْ

("[Remember] when you sought help of your Lord, and He answered you")

which served as a spiritual expression of solidarity that reinforced patience, moral resilience, and collective awareness amid the conflict (Romadhon et al., 2025). Viewed from an Islamic Studies perspective, *istighosah* functioned as more than a devotional act: performed congregationally rather than individually, it operationalized the theological values of *sabr* (patience) and *tawakkul* (trust in God) as a shared communal resource rather than a private one, so that the practice simultaneously oriented residents toward divine help and reinforced their sense of mutual belonging and responsibility toward one another. In this sense, *istighosah* served a dual function in the conflict: a spiritual practice in its own right, and an implicit strategy of social cohesion that helped sustain the community's collective resolve without recourse to formal legal or political power. These activities functioned as powerful, albeit indirect, forms of social resistance, demonstrating that the land represented far more than an economic asset it embodied the community's identity, history, and sense of belonging. This solidarity emerged organically from shared experiences rather than external direction. Over time, these collective efforts culminated in

the establishment of the Forum Dago Melawan, a community-based movement that brought together local residents, legal advocates, academics, and social activists to defend the community's rights.

From a legal perspective, the residents found themselves in a deeply paradoxical situation. On the one hand, Indonesia's Basic Agrarian Law of 1960 stipulates that colonial land rights should have been converted under the national land administration system. On the other hand, colonial-era documents such as *eigendom verponding* continued to be recognized in judicial proceedings as evidence supporting ownership claims. This contradiction became particularly evident when the Supreme Court, through its judicial review decision (*Peninjauan Kembali*) in 2022, affirmed the evidentiary value of the colonial document. As a result, residents who had occupied, managed, and paid taxes on the land for decades were placed in a legally vulnerable position despite their long-standing physical and social connection to the area. This situation illustrates the tension between social legitimacy, rooted in continuous occupation and community life, and formal legal legitimacy, grounded in documentary evidence recognized by the legal system (N. Lestari, 2018).

In their efforts to defend their land, the residents of Dago Elos did not rely solely on formal legal mechanisms. They also engaged in public advocacy by organizing peaceful demonstrations, disseminating their narratives through social media, and pursuing dialogue with state institutions, including the National Land Agency (BPN) and the Bandung City Government. These initiatives demonstrate that the community was not opposed to the rule of law; rather, they sought a legal system that was responsive to the voices and lived experiences of affected communities. This approach reflects a multifaceted advocacy strategy that combined litigation with cultural and social mobilization (Rahmatullah, 2020). By integrating legal action with public campaigns and community-based initiatives, the residents sought to ensure that their struggle extended beyond the courtroom and became part of a broader public discourse on land rights, social justice, and urban citizenship. Their efforts illustrate how legal advocacy can be reinforced through collective action and public engagement, thereby increasing both social awareness and political pressure in the pursuit of equitable land governance.

The findings also reveal that the residents' struggle was not carried out in isolation. A broad network of support emerged, involving university students, artists, agrarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academics. The involvement of these actors not only strengthened the community's moral and intellectual position but also generated social and political pressure on the parties asserting ownership claims. This support took various forms, including legal assistance, coverage by alternative media outlets, and the production of digital content that amplified the Dago Elos narrative to national and even international audiences. As a result, the Dago Elos conflict evolved beyond a localized land dispute, becoming a broader symbol of resistance against urban agrarian inequality and the unequal distribution of land rights in Indonesia (Putri, 2023).

Discussion

The Origins of the Conflict

The chronology below is presented not as an end in itself, but as the evidentiary basis for the analysis that follows: the sequence of legal claims is what interview respondents themselves identified, unprompted, as the trigger for the collective responses examined in this section. Dago Elos is an urban neighborhood located in Bandung City, Indonesia. The name Elos is derived from the term *los pasar*, which refers to a long, open market hall or elongated building traditionally used for commercial activities. According to a press release issued by the Bandung Legal Aid Institute (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH) Bandung), the land in the Dago Elos area was historically registered as the property of N.V. Cement Tegel dan Perdagangan Material Simongan, a company operating during the Dutch colonial period. Geographically, Dago Elos is situated in the northern part of Bandung City. The residential area lies adjacent to Pasar Elos, near the Dago Terminal, and is administratively divided into five sections, namely Dago Elos I through Dago Elos V (Deni Rachman, 2022). The agrarian conflict that unfolded in Dago Elos was not merely a legal dispute over land ownership; it also generated dynamic and complex social configurations characterized by tension and collective reflection on the position of grassroots communities within the broader landscape of urban capitalism.

Subsequently, the Muller family filed a lawsuit naming the residents of Dago Elos, government institutions, and other parties deemed responsible as defendants. In the lawsuit, the residents were ordered to vacate the Dago Elos area and to pay litigation costs amounting to IDR 238,000,000. Believing that the ruling did not reflect substantive justice, the residents filed an appeal. However, at the appellate level, the Bandung High Court upheld the claim, ruling that the disputed land remained under the ownership of the Muller family and PT Dago Inti Graha. Rather than treating this ruling as a discrete legal event to be recounted for its own sake, interview data collected for this study indicate that it functioned as a turning point in residents' own accounts: several informants described the ruling, not the initial 2016 claim, as the moment that shifted individual anxiety into the organized collective response documented throughout this section (Syukur et al., 2022).

The residents of Dago Elos became involved in a land conflict associated with urban property development. The Muller family, consisting of Heri Hermawan Muller, Dodi Rustendi Muller, and Pipin Sandepi Muller, filed a lawsuit against 331 households, representing a portion of the approximately 1,000 residents living in Dago Elos. The family claimed to be descendants of George Hendrik Muller, who had resided and conducted business activities in Bandung during the Dutch colonial period. As the third generation of the Muller family, they asserted ownership over approximately 6.3 hectares of land in Dago Elos based on an *Eigendom Verponding* title, a form of land ownership recognized under Dutch colonial law. Historically, the disputed land had been occupied by PT Tegel Semen Handeel Simoengan, sand mining operations, and small plantations. Over time, however, the area was transformed into an urban neighborhood containing a post office, a public transportation terminal, and residential settlements, including the communities of RT 01 and RT 02 of RW 02 in Dago Elos. In the ensuing land dispute, the Muller family brought legal action against both the residents of Dago Elos and PT Dago Inti Graha. PT Dago Inti Graha is a property development company in Bandung established by businessman Jo Budi Hartanto and his son, Erwin Senjaya Hartanto (Efendi et al., 2025).

Since the *eigendom verponding* ownership claim re-emerged in 2016, the residents of Dago Elos have demonstrated that external pressure does not merely generate fear but can also foster stronger collective awareness and social solidarity. Rather than remaining passive or submitting to the claims, the community organized internally and established a collective movement rooted in the communal and cultural values they had long maintained. This phenomenon illustrates that conflict can serve as a catalyst for the formation of collective identity and the strengthening of

social cohesion. As argued by Lestari (2018), in many cases of both horizontal and vertical conflict, communities respond by reinforcing kinship ties and revitalizing the communal spaces that sustain their social relationships (R. Lestari, 2018).

The establishment of the Forum Dago Melawan marked a significant milestone in the community's struggle. The forum functioned not only as a platform for coordination but also as a space for horizontal and participatory community organizing. Its members included a diverse range of actors, such as homemakers, youth groups, agrarian activists, academics, artists, and legal advocates. This cross sector collaboration enabled the development of a multifaceted strategy of resistance that was neither exclusive nor elitist, but rather inclusive and comprehensive. Instead of relying solely on formal legal mechanisms, the forum also adopted cultural forms of advocacy, including mural art, street performances, and the dissemination of counter narratives through social media platforms and alternative news outlets. These initiatives helped amplify the residents' voices, strengthen public awareness, and broaden support for their struggle beyond the local community (Putri, 2023).

According to Angga (personal interview), "Forum Dago Melawan is not merely a formal organization. It is much more than that because we genuinely stand together with the residents, maintaining close relationships, engaging in discussions, and creating a space for dialogue and the incubation of knowledge for all of us." This statement underscores that Forum Dago Melawan functions not only as an instrument of collective action but also as a shared social space that nurtures critical consciousness, mutual learning, and solidarity across diverse social backgrounds.

Through this forum, the Dago Elos movement evolved into an organic space for civic and political education, where ideas, strategies, and lived experiences converged to strengthen collective action. Rather than serving merely as a reaction to the land dispute, the forum emerged as a new expression of participatory democracy at the grassroots level. Amid a crisis of representation and the limitations of formal legal mechanisms, Forum Dago Melawan became a driving force that demonstrated the community's collective capacity to shape its own future. The experience of Dago Elos illustrates that meaningful social power does not necessarily originate from state institutions or political elites but can instead emerge from local community spaces sustained by shared awareness, solidarity, and collective participation. In this context, the Dago Elos movement can be understood as a concrete example of hybrid activism, combining formal legal advocacy with cultural mobilization to expand the arena of resistance beyond judicial proceedings into symbolic, cultural, and discursive spheres. By integrating litigation with community organizing, artistic expression, and public engagement, the movement broadened its influence while strengthening public awareness of land rights, social justice, and democratic participation.

These dynamics demonstrate that the residents of Dago Elos were not merely passive victims of the agrarian conflict but actively developed strategies to respond to the structural pressures they faced. From the perspective of Johan Galtung's Conflict Triangle Theory, conflict is understood as the interaction of three interrelated elements: contradiction, attitude, and behaviour. This framework provides a comprehensive approach to analyzing conflicts by examining not only the underlying structural contradictions but also the perceptions and responses of the actors involved, as well as the actions they undertake throughout the conflict (Galtung, 1969). The competing positions that emerged in the Dago Elos conflict were rooted in conflicting interests between the residents, who sought to defend their right to their living space, and the parties claiming ownership of the land through formal legal procedures.

These opposing interests subsequently fostered a collective attitude among the residents, characterized by solidarity, mutual trust, and a shared belief that their neighborhood constituted a social space that deserved to be protected. This collective attitude was expressed through various forms of collective action, including community mutual assistance, neighborhood savings groups,

community security patrols, village deliberation meetings, and other social activities that reinforced social cohesion and strengthened community resilience.

From Galtung's perspective, these forms of collective behaviour function not only to maintain social order but also as mechanisms of conflict transformation aimed at preserving the community's existence in the face of structural pressures (Galtung, 1969). Thus, the struggle of the Dago Elos residents was not solely directed toward protecting their homes but also toward preserving their social identity, community solidarity, and the collective values that form the foundation of life within their neighborhood.

Furthermore, these social dynamics demonstrate the emergence of a form of counter hegemony, in which the community challenged the dominance of formal power exercised through the language and legal framework inherited from the colonial period. The residents of Dago Elos resisted the prevailing legal formal discourse by advancing an alternative narrative that viewed their neighborhood as a living cultural heritage, one that could not be displaced solely on the basis of legal documents dating back more than a century. The strength of their movement lay in their ability to transform their position from being regarded merely as objects of legal proceedings into active and strategic agents capable of asserting and defending their rights.

Agrarian Law and the Dilemma of Defending Land Rights

Two distinct threads run through this section and are kept separate here: the legal-doctrinal analysis of how colonial-era land documents continue to be judicially recognized, which draws on statutes and court decisions rather than field data, and the empirical findings, drawn from interviews and observation, on how residents experienced and responded to that legal ambiguity in practice. The agrarian dispute in Dago Elos illustrates the complexity of Indonesia's land law system, where the law has not functioned solely as an instrument of substantive justice but has instead become a contested arena shaped by the competing influences of the colonial legal legacy and the public's demand for justice. One of the most significant legal paradoxes highlighted by this case is the continued use of *eigendom verponding*, a Dutch colonial land ownership and property tax document, as the legal basis for ownership claims by private parties. This practice persists despite the enactment of Indonesia's Basic Agrarian Law (Law No. 5 of 1960), which abolished colonial land rights and required their conversion into rights recognized under the national land law system (Susantri, 2017). As the cornerstone of post independence agrarian reform, the Basic Agrarian Law was intended to serve as the foundation for restructuring land ownership under a unified national legal system. In practice, however, its implementation has fallen short of its original objectives, particularly when judicial institutions continue to recognize colonial land documents as valid legal evidence. This contradiction is evident in Supreme Court Decision No. 109 PK/Pdt/2022, in which a colonial land document was affirmed as admissible evidence in determining ownership rights (MA,2022).

The decision, which recognized the legal validity of **eigendom verponding**, a Dutch colonial land ownership and property tax document, generated profound uncertainty among the residents of Dago Elos. On the one hand, the court acknowledged that the disputed land constituted state land. On the other hand, by recognizing ownership claims based on a colonial era document, the ruling placed the residents in a precarious legal position. Although they had occupied and managed the land for decades, they were neither fully recognized as lawful possessors nor acknowledged as legal owners under the formal legal system. This situation illustrates a form of legal dualism, characterized by the tension between legality derived from formal legal norms and legitimacy grounded in long standing social practice and continuous occupation of the land (Rachmawati, 2023).

The residents of Dago Elos have occupied the disputed land for generations, paid Land and Building Tax (*Pajak Bumi dan Bangunan* or PBB), and managed it as an active living space.

However, these longstanding practices proved insufficient when confronted with colonial archives that continue to receive legal recognition within Indonesia's judicial system. In this context, it can be argued that the substantive principles of the Basic Agrarian Law (UUPA) have been weakened, as the original spirit of agrarian reform has gradually been replaced by rigid and formalistic legal interpretations. The UUPA was originally intended to establish a national agrarian legal system founded upon social justice and the principle that land should be controlled and utilized for the greatest prosperity of the people (D. Lestari, 2018). In practice, however, Indonesia's agrarian legal system has often become an arena of contestation between elites who possess access to formal legal documents and local communities whose claims are grounded primarily in social evidence and a long history of land occupation. This situation has generated tensions that extend beyond legal disputes to encompass broader political and ideological dimensions.

The state's limited commitment to reaffirming the conversion of colonial land rights into rights recognized under the national legal system remains one of the principal causes of agrarian conflicts such as the one in Dago Elos. The government has frequently been absent or has adopted an ambiguous position regarding lands whose legal status remains overshadowed by this dual legal framework. In many instances, rather than acting as a protector of citizens' rights, the state has functioned as a facilitator for parties possessing the resources to exploit legal loopholes. As a consequence, agrarian conflicts have become increasingly persistent in many major Indonesian cities, particularly in areas experiencing rapid urban development and capitalist expansion.

In 2023 alone, Indonesia recorded 241 agrarian conflicts involving approximately 638,188 hectares of land, including agricultural land, customary territories, fishing grounds, and residential areas inhabited by approximately 135,608 households. These conflicts significantly disrupted the rights of affected communities to occupy, use, and benefit from land as both a source of livelihood and a place of residence. The Dago Elos case represents one such example. Based on the author's field observations and analysis, the conflict was exacerbated by the lack of concern demonstrated by the Bandung City Government, while government authorities and law enforcement agencies appeared to collaborate in maintaining existing power structures rather than effectively addressing the land dispute.

On 14 August 2023, the residents of Dago Elos filed a report against the Muller siblings with the Bandung Metropolitan Police (*Polrestabes Bandung*). The community alleged that the Muller family had provided false testimony before the court by claiming that their ancestor, George Hendrik Willem Muller (GHW Muller), had been assigned to the Dutch East Indies by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands. To support their complaint, the residents submitted several documents, including historical records indicating that GHW Muller had arrived in Indonesia solely as an administrative employee on a plantation rather than as an official representative appointed by the Dutch monarch. Despite the submission of this evidence, the police declined to process the report concerning the alleged false testimony. The stated reason for the rejection was that only individuals holding formal certificates of home ownership were eligible to file such a complaint, a requirement that the residents regarded as lacking a valid legal basis.

Ultimately, the residents of Dago Elos found themselves confronting not only a legal dispute but also a deeper structural dilemma: how to defend their living space within a legal system that fails to recognize long standing social practices as a legitimate basis for legal rights. Their experience symbolizes the state's failure to comprehensively and equitably restructure postcolonial land ownership. It further demonstrates that legal reform cannot be achieved solely through legislative change but also requires a transformation in legal paradigms and a stronger institutional commitment to protecting the rights of marginalized communities. The Dago Elos case is therefore more than a land dispute; it represents a broader crisis in the commitment of Indonesia's contemporary agrarian legal system to substantive justice and social equity.

Dago Elos: A Reflection of Sustained Urban Agrarian Conflict

The Dago Elos case is not merely a land dispute, but a complete picture of the systemic failure to restructure agrarian relations in postcolonial urban areas. It represents how colonial legacy, development policy, and weak legal protection for marginalized communities are intertwined in a single, chronic knot of conflict. Compared with earlier studies of Dago Elos, which have generally examined the case through a single lens — legal-doctrinal critique, social-movement framing, or everyday-resistance narratives, respectively — the novelty of this study lies in reading these dimensions together through Galtung's conflict triangle while foregrounding a dimension largely absent from prior accounts of the case: the role of Islamic devotional practice, particularly *istighosah*, as a spiritual-communal strategy of resilience. Dago Elos has become a kind of “social microscope” that reveals the structural inequality between residents who have long lived in the area and the formal legal power that often fails to side with social reality (Yasmin, 2021).

The use of the eigendom verponding document as the basis of the claim in this case shows that agrarian decolonization in Indonesia has not been fully completed. Although the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law (UUPA) was intended to replace the colonial agrarian legal system with a socially just national legal framework, in practice remnants of colonial law are still used to evict residents from their own living spaces (D. Lestari, 2018).

This has not only created a crisis of legality but has also bred public distrust of the state legal system that is supposed to protect them. Dago Elos shows that urban agrarian conflict cannot be understood merely as a legal conflict over land ownership; it must be read as a conflict of citizenship a conflict between rights as citizens and state practices that ignore basic rights to housing (Dewi, 2020).

Since the conflict emerged in 2016, the residents of Dago Elos have experienced various forms of structural pressure—ranging from intimidation and land-status uncertainty to the threat of eviction. Yet instead of giving up, they have shown remarkable resilience. By harnessing socio-cultural strength and cross-sector solidarity, residents have transformed the struggle to defend their neighborhood into a collective movement. Support from activists, academics, students, journalists, and artists has made Dago Elos a symbol of urban agrarian struggle that is not confined to legalistic aspects alone (Putri, 2023). The success in building a narrative of struggle through social media, neighborhood festivals, and public discussion forums also shows how civil society can claim space in producing counter-narratives to the dominant state narrative.

The agrarian conflict in Dago Elos represents the face of contemporary urban Indonesia, which is under mounting pressure from the commercialization of space. The city is no longer merely a place to live but has become a field for investment and capital accumulation. In this context, urban neighborhoods (*kampung*) such as Dago Elos face a growing threat of gentrification, in which land value is prioritized over historical and human value. Development projects and property investments often set aside social, cultural, and ecological considerations, leaving urban communities vulnerable to eviction and structural impoverishment.

For this reason, the Dago Elos case demands a new approach to resolving urban agrarian conflict. A holistic and participatory approach is essential, one in which the state, academics, civil society organizations, and residents engage in dialogue on equal terms. Resolving the conflict is not enough through formal legal channels alone; it must also be integrated with recognition of the history of land tenure, community identity, and residents' socio-economic rights. Dago Elos is a reminder that fair and sustainable urban development cannot be carried out while ignoring those who have become part of the city itself. The presence of residents is not an obstacle to development, but rather that of legitimate and sovereign subjects of their own living space.

Amid intense legal pressure and eviction attempts, residents' spirit to keep holding on has never faded. The sense of togetherness built through the struggle to defend their living space is reflected in the many expressions of solidarity that have emerged from the community. This can

be seen, among other things, in the statement of Ade Suherman, a resident and community organizer at the Balai Warga Dago Elos, who described how the flame of struggle remains alive to this day: “thank you to all elements the community, students, alliances, and fellow collective friends who remain aware, who remain united in the face of today's reality, and who still stand on the side of what is true; may the flame of our struggle, defending our living space, remain kept and cared for... 'dago elos never lose'” (Efendi et al., 2025) This statement reflects the collective spirit that continues to live and burn in the struggle of the residents of Dago Elos.

In an atmosphere full of pressure and legal uncertainty, voices like this not only affirm the community's moral position but also assert that the struggle to defend a living space is an act that is politically and culturally meaningful. Behind the legal complexity and social dynamics surrounding the agrarian conflict lies a narrative of courage, hope, and love for one's home village that transcends formal legal logic. The voice of Ade Suherman from Balai Warga Dago Elos bears witness that this struggle is not merely about land, but about the ecosystem of survival, dignity, and existence as legitimate urban citizens.

Conclusion

The agrarian conflict in Dago Elos reflects the complexity of land issues in Indonesia, particularly within an urban context. It extends beyond questions of legal ownership and illustrates deeper structural inequalities shaped by unequal power relations among grassroots communities, the state, and the enduring legacy of colonial land laws. The social dynamics that emerged amid the threat of eviction demonstrate the remarkable resilience of the community, as residents strengthened internal solidarity and built cross sector networks to defend their living space. Collective community activities and the establishment of Forum Dago Melawan represent forms of civic and political engagement through which residents sought to reclaim their social and existential space from a legal system that they perceived as insufficiently responsive to their rights.

From a legal perspective, the case highlights the limitations of the implementation of Indonesia's Basic Agrarian Law of 1960 in ensuring substantive justice. The continued recognition of colonial land documents such as eigendom verponding within judicial proceedings suggests that the decolonization of Indonesia's agrarian legal framework remains incomplete. When communities that have occupied, managed, and developed land for decades are denied legal recognition, the legal system falls short of fulfilling its function as an instrument of social justice. In this context, the state has yet to play an effective role in resolving agrarian disputes in a manner that adequately protects the rights and interests of marginalized communities.

More broadly, Dago Elos has become a symbol of the continuing urban agrarian crisis in Indonesia. The case demonstrates that urban development should not be driven solely by investment and economic growth but must also take into account spatial justice, the historical attachment of communities to their land, and the long term sustainability of urban social life. The experience of the Dago Elos residents illustrates that addressing urban agrarian conflicts requires a holistic approach that integrates legal advocacy, the production of counter narratives, cultural mobilization, and solidarity across diverse social groups. Consequently, the Dago Elos conflict should be understood not merely as a local land dispute but as a national reflection of persistent shortcomings in agrarian governance, while also offering an example of the transformative potential of collective community action.

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