FARMERS' EVICTION IN PERAK, MALAYSIA: LINKING SOCIAL THEORIES WITH FOOD SECURITY

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Abstract: *The paper examines the eviction of traditional farmers in Perak, Malaysia in the case occurs in the end of 2023 and ongoing early 2024, through the lens of social theories and their implications for human and food security. Traditional farmers, who rely on agricultural methods passed down through generations, are being unjustly evicted in the name of development without appropriate measures or consideration by the law or the government. To observe this, concepts like biopower, and how governments exercise it, with the clashes of conflict theory, systems theory, and human rights theory to contextualize the complex dynamics at play. The authors argue that integrating social theories with human and food security offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the availability, access, and utilization of food in society, on top of highlighting the traditional farmer's stand on their way of life for generations. They highlight how structural inequalities, and power dynamics and compare it with the current global and existing situations contribute to food insecurity, as seen in examples like the situation in other parts of the world mainly observed in Congo, Philippines and Palestine. The paper emphasizes the importance of the mentioned above social theories in ensuring problems like outdated land law and transparency in the land law Malaysia as the problem could actually help the empowerment of the local producers and sustainability as key dimensions of food security and human security in Malaysia. In the context of communication and media warfare, the authors link social theories to the representation of the farmers' eviction, underscoring how media narratives and mainstream information about laws can amplify or marginalize voices and influence public opinion and policy responses. The paper concludes by stressing the need for policies and communication strategies that uphold the rights and dignity of vulnerable populations like the evicted farmers, fostering an equitable dialogue that supports human security principles.*

Keywords*: Farmer's eviction, Malaysia, Social Theories, Food Security*

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Introduction

This paper highlights the problem of traditional farmers being evicted under outdated land reform policies in Malaysia, along with the lack of recognition for their role as key food producers who steward the land. State governments have overlooked these farmers, such as those in Perak, who base their historical entitlement on a government initiative from the 1970s aimed at utilizing undeveloped land for food cultivation. The initiative's goal was to enhance food security by encouraging land use by local food producers, irrespective of ownership status. This historical context underscores the longstanding relationship and significant contributions these farmers have made to local agriculture and food security. However, the outdated laws fail to recognize the importance of traditional farmers as vital local food producers. Law reforms in Malaysia lack updates in consideration for social theories that support and sustain these communities. Instead, the focus has been on rapid development, which often conflicts with the traditional farmers' way of life and the community surrounding it. These farmers have maintained the local ecosystem for over 50 years, and the reforms overlook their deep-rooted connection to the land and the sustainable practices they have upheld for generations.

According to Coleman (1986), social theory comprises frameworks and ideas that help us understand, analyse, and interpret the complex social structures, behaviors, and relationships that shape human society. It encompasses a broad range of perspectives, from examining the functioning of institutions and power dynamics to understanding individual and collective behaviors. Theories like structural functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, system theory, ecological structuralism theory and others provide diverse lenses through which we can explore societal phenomena. They allow us to dissect the layers of social reality, providing insights into how and why societies function as they do and how social change occurs.

By applying social theories, we can move beyond superficial observations and delve into the underlying mechanisms that drive the system in the country. For instance, understanding the role of power and inequality through conflict theory helps explain why certain groups may have limited access to resources and opportunities (Simon, 2016). These insights are crucial for supporting the legitimacy of the traditional farmers that slowly forgotten its value each day. By contextualizing these dynamics within theoretical frameworks, we gain a clearer understanding of how societal structures and relationships evolve and impact individuals and communities.

Moreover, Lister et al. (2024) stated that the application of social theory is critical for informing policy and practice. It provides a foundation for developing policies that address social inequalities, enhance social cohesion, and promote overall well-being. In this paper, the authors aim to integrate human rights theory and other relevant theories to support human and food security. They underscore the importance of these theories in shaping policies and balance it with other concepts widely used to lean-on food security, one of them is biopower. The objective is to ensure fair access to justice for farmers by advocating for their rights and scrutinizing existing policies and practices. This approach seeks to cultivate more just, equitable, and resilient societies capable of addressing current social challenges, specifically the eviction of traditional farmers by local state governments for alternative land uses. This is important for emphasizing human rights in food security and human security as pillars that guide policy and the way of life of traditional people, in contrast to hyper-capitalism and overdevelopment that undermine human dignity.

Methodology

In this paper, researchers utilise a qualitative approach to explore the case study of traditional farmers and the social theories that underpin the need for policy and legal reforms. Through thematic analysis and observation, the study underscores the importance of revising outdated in addition of more humane in social theories. The qualitative method allows for an understanding of the cases of traditional farmers' eviction and the socio-political structures affecting them. Additionally, the paper discusses the concept of biopower in government development practices and examines how media and communication can integrate more social theories to address local issues, such as the plight of traditional farmers.

Background of Theories

Paul-Michel Foucault's Concept Of Biopower

According to Alım (2019), the concept of biopower, as developed by Paul-Michel Foucault, refers to the exercise of power over populations via the control and regulation of their biological and social processes. Foucault argued that power affects every facet of society, cultivating complicated relationships that have a universal influence on people. Individuals are continuously interconnected with these power networks and cannot live apart from them.

Erlenbusch-Anderson (2020) the history of biopower, as discussed by Foucault in his lectures, identifies the emergence of biopower in the late 17th and 18th centuries as a shift from traditional sovereign power to a new form of power that operates on life itself. This period saw the development of mechanisms and techniques aimed at controlling and optimising the biological processes of populations. Foucault distinguishes between disciplinary power, which focuses on individual bodies, and biopower, which targets populations and their biological life processes. Biopower is described as a form of power that intervenes in the biological and environmental aspects of populations, shaping their existence at a collective level.

According to Foucault, biopower is closely connected to the concepts of 'government' and 'governmentality.' The term 'government' originates from the French word 'gouverner,' which encompasses the actions of directing, guiding, imposing regulations, commanding, and controlling. It pertains to the manner in which a government controls individuals, processes, and even personal conduct, including self-care and ethical considerations. In basic terms, governance involves the act of moulding or exerting influence on individuals' conduct. Governmentality is a concept that combines the ideas of 'government' with 'rationality' and pertains to the process of influencing individuals to voluntarily adhere to regulations in order to shape their behaviour. The desire to engage in self-governance is fostered by institutions, processes, and strategies that actively support it. In Malaysia, phrases such as 'Kita Jaga Kita' (We Take Care of Ourselves) illustrate this concept. The objective of governmentality is to influence and regulate individuals' conduct. The focus is on governing or controlling activities. Governmentality refers to the use of power by the government to regulate and influence individual behaviours. The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a modern illustration of biopower in Malaysia. For example, Malaysia's primary actions in reaction to the pandemic included five areas: (i) adopting a comprehensive strategy including both the government and society as a whole, (ii) implementing a lockdown, (iii) ensuring equal access to facilities and assistance, (iv) establishing quarantine and isolation systems, and (v) enacting laws and enforcing it. This displays the state's ability to govern the biological well-being of its people in order to safeguard public health.

Connecting Social Theories To Real-World Dynamics On Food Security

Connecting social theories with human and food security involves examining the ways in which societal structures, behaviors, and policies influence the availability, access, and utilisation of food. Integrating social theories with human and food security offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the complexities of food availability, access, and utilization in society. Structural functionalism emphasises the importance of interdependent institutions such as governments, NGOs, and international bodies in ensuring food security by providing regulations, resources, and support. It posits that a stable food system is essential for maintaining social order, as food insecurity can lead to instability, conflict, and unrest. Wide range of theories is observed, and in this paper, the theories related to human and food security can be found in several theories from the western world. However, this paper will also compare the Islamic principles in relating it with the current Madani government to slowly emphasise on the human and food security in a more just way.

Conflict theory, the famous theory in highlighting the oppression and injustice in society, highlights the role of power dynamics and inequality in creating disparities. For example in food access situations for example the situation in Palestine where hunger and severe malnutrition are widespread in the Gaza Strip, where about 2.2 million Palestinians are facing severe shortages resulting from Israel destroying food supplies and severely restricting the flow of food, medicines and other humanitarian supplies (Lakhani, 2024). It underscores how resource control by elites and systemic economic inequalities contribute to widespread food insecurity, reflecting deeper issues of social and economic injustice. The historical development of conflict theory can be traced back to the mid-19th century with the contributions of German philosopher Karl Marx. He argued that the social structures and relationships are largely shaped by distribution of economic power and resources (Main, 2023).

Systems theory provides a holistic perspective by examining the interconnected components of food systems, from production to consumption, and how various factors like climate change, policies, and social norms impact food security (Liebig et al., 2022). It advocates for building resilient food systems that can withstand disruptions such as economic crises or natural disasters that can be observed in the Middle-east and African countries (Fan et al., 2021). Postcolonial theory explores how historical colonial practices have disrupted indigenous food systems, creating persistent dependencies and inequalities that affect current food sovereignty and security (Ujuaje & Chang, 2020). It highlights the ongoing exploitation of resources in developing countries and the need to address global inequalities that contribute to food insecurity.

Ecological modernisation theory underscores the potential of technology and innovation in addressing environmental and social challenges related to food security, promoting sustainable practices, and developing new solutions like vertical farming and alternative proteins (Alpha et al., 2022). Social capital theory emphasises the value of social networks and community relationships in enhancing food security through support systems such as community farms and local food cooperatives. Finally, human rights theory stresses the right to adequate food as a fundamental human right, advocating for policies that ensure equitable access to safe and nutritious food for all (Godrich et al., 2021). By applying these theories to real-world issues, policymakers and communities can develop more effective strategies for promoting food security and fostering social justice.

Human Security

According to Howard-Hassmann (2012), human security, in general, refers to the protection and empowerment of individuals from various threats that undermine their dignity and well-being. It encompasses a broad spectrum of concerns beyond traditional notions of security, such as military defense, to include economic, social, health, and environmental dimensions. Economically, human security involves ensuring livelihoods, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable development that benefits all members of society. Socially, it focuses on fostering inclusive societies, protecting human rights, and promoting social cohesion and cultural diversity to mitigate conflicts and promote stability.

Human security in Malaysia encompasses various aspects that are crucial for the well-being and dignity of individuals across the nation. It addresses not only traditional security concerns like military defense but also broader dimensions such as economic opportunities, social inclusion, health, and environmental sustainability. Malaysia, as a multi-ethnic and diverse country, faces unique challenges and opportunities in ensuring comprehensive human security for its population.

Economically, Malaysia has experienced significant growth and development over the decades, lifting many out of poverty and improving living standards (Overview, April 2024). However, economic disparities persist, particularly between urban and rural areas and among different ethnic groups. Ensuring economic security involves addressing issues such as income inequality, access to education and job opportunities, and sustainable economic growth that benefits all segments of society. Socially, Malaysia grapples with issues related to social cohesion, cultural diversity, and inclusivity (Mandal k., 2004). In this paper, it refers to communities of farmers and other traditional food-producing sectors in Malaysia that are facing challenges in adapting to modern times. Human security in Malaysia necessitates policies and initiatives that enhance social cohesion between traditional food-producers and modern capitalist entities. These measures should protect indigenous farmers, while also fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect among governments and all communities involved.

Environmental sustainability is increasingly recognised as integral to human security in Malaysia. Malaysia has launched initiatives such as Green Initiative SDG, 2024 (Green Initiatives (SDG) in Malaysia: A Holistic Perspective, 2024). The country faces environmental challenges such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, and climate change impacts. Addressing these challenges involves sustainable management of natural resources, promoting renewable energy sources, and mitigating environmental degradation to safeguard the well-being of current and future generations.

In conclusion, achieving comprehensive human security in Malaysia requires a multifaceted approach that addresses economic, social, health, and environmental dimensions. In this paper, the author highlights fostering inclusive growth, promoting social cohesion and cultural diversity, ensuring accessible food for all, and adopting sustainable environmental practices. By prioritizing these aspects, Malaysia can enhance resilience, promote equity, and improve the overall quality of life for its diverse population.

Linking Social Theory And Human Security In Communication And Media Warfare

Linking social theory with human security in communication and media warfare, especially in the context of the eviction of farmers in Perak, Malaysia, highlights the intricate interplay between societal structures, communication dynamics, and the protection of human rights. Social theories such as conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism provide lenses through which we can understand the power dynamics and socio-cultural implications at play in media representations and communication strategies surrounding the eviction.

Florea et al. (2022) found that conflict theory sheds light on the unequal distribution of power and resources that influence media narratives and public discourse related to the eviction. It underscores how media representations can either amplify or marginalise the voices of affected farmers, influencing public opinion and policy responses. Symbolic interactionism, on the other hand, emphasizes the meanings and symbols attached to media messages and communication strategies (Dennis & Martin, 2005). It explores how cultural norms, values, and social interactions shape perceptions of the eviction among different stakeholders, including the government, local communities, and the farmers themselves.

In addressing human security concerns, these social theories advocate for policies and communication strategies that uphold the rights and dignity of farmers. They underscore the importance of inclusive and transparent communication processes that empower affected communities to voice their concerns and participate in decision-making. By integrating these theories into media and communication practices, stakeholders can foster a more equitable dialogue that supports human security principles and ensures the protection of vulnerable populations like the evicted farmers in Perak, Malaysia.

Food Security

According to Menga (2023), the concept of "food security" was introduced at the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome, convened by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) following a severe famine in Bangladesh. The conference led to the Universal Declaration on the Eradication of Hunger and Malnutrition, which asserts the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger and malnutrition. Initially, food security was seen as the constant availability of enough nutritious food to support global consumption and stabilize production and prices. However, the understanding of food security evolved to include not just supply but also demand and access. In 1983, FAO redefined food security as ensuring that everyone has access to the food they need at all times. Conversely, food insecurity refers to an inconsistent or uncertain supply of safe and nutritious food, or the inability to obtain food in a socially acceptable manner, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 1996, the World Food Summit in Rome adopted the Rome Declaration on World Food Security, where countries committed to achieving food security for all and ending hunger. The summit defined food security as the ability of all people to have access to enough safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life. This definition is still widely accepted today.

According to Gunaratne et al. (2021), the four main dimensions of food security:
1. Physical availability of food: Food availability addresses the "supply side" of food security and is determined by the level of food production, stock levels and net trade.
2. Economic and physical access to food: An adequate supply of food at the national or international level does not in itself guarantee household level food security. Concerns

about insufficient food access have resulted in a greater policy focus on incomes, expenditure, markets and prices in achieving food security objectives.

3. Food utilization: Utilization is commonly understood as the way the body makes the most of various nutrients in the food. Sufficient energy and nutrient intake by individuals are the result of good care and feeding practices, food preparation, diversity of the diet and intra-household distribution of food. Combined with good biological utilization of food consumed, this determines the nutritional status of individuals.

4. Stability of the other three dimensions over time: Even if your food intake is adequate today, you are still considered to be food insecure if you have inadequate access to food on a periodic basis, risking a deterioration of your nutritional status. Adverse weather conditions, political instability, or economic factors (unemployment, rising food prices) may have an impact on your food security status.

According to Igini (2024), The United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) defines food security as the state in which every individual has consistent and unrestricted physical, social, and economic means to get enough, safe, and nourishing food that aligns with their dietary choices and requirements for a healthy and active lifestyle. Having adequate access to food is one of the most basic and important human rights, and yet, hundreds of millions of people around the world suffer from starvation, with approximately 25,000 succumbing to hunger every day. An estimated 854 million people are also undernourished. The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily compromised food security globally, increasing hunger levels by an estimated 118 million people worldwide in 2020, the most since 2006. Hunger kills more people than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined, the vast majority of which live in developing countries. And it is these countries that are now experiencing the worst consequences of the current food crisis.

Meanwhile in Malaysia, according to Nor (2023), the current need for food security arises from the increased demand for food and the disruptions caused by climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and political conflicts. The cost of food is increasing, particularly affecting low-income households, particularly those who are already experiencing food insecurity. The B40 group in Malaysia has significant impact, allocating as much as 32% of their income on necessary food products. To begin with, the Agriculture and Food Industry Ministry has been rebranded as the Agriculture and Food Security Ministry, highlighting the government's vision to tackle food security in Malaysia. Interventions such as price controls on selected food items and cash aids have been a lifeline for the B40 households. Recently, the Government also launched Menu Rahmah, an initiative that provides meals (RM5/plate) for the B40 community. While these may be short-term interventions directed at cushioning the impact of food inflation on the poor, the government understands the need and urgency to transform the agricultural sector.

Interconnecting Social Theories With Human And Food Security

The Case Study Evictions Of Farmers In Perak

More than 200 farmers cultivate the Kanthan farmland, including families who have been working on the land and making it fruitful for three generations, going back to the period before the Second World War. These farmers, like with others in the state of Perak, base their historical entitlement on a government initiative launched in the 1970s to make use of undeveloped lands for food cultivation. The objective of this initiative was to promote food security by promoting the cultivation of land, regardless of ownership status. In 2012, the local government extended

land leasing offers to the farmers, but these offers eventually did not come to realisation. Despite this obstacle, an agreement was achieved that permits the farmers to continue in their agricultural pursuits, with the condition that substitute lands would be made available in the scenario of their displacement. The historical setting emphasises the longstanding relationship and important contribution that these farmers have made to local agriculture and food security (PANAP, 2023).

According to Bunyan (2023), on 24 October 2024, In Kanthan, near Tambun, Perak, a forced removal operation led to major clashes between indigenous farmers, activists, and law enforcement. The Perak Land and Mines Department (PTG), along with various government agencies and police, carried out the eviction to expand the Silver Valley Technology Park. Bulldozers and excavators caused significant damage to the farmland. During the eviction, four people were arrested, including three Socialist Party of Malaysia (PSM) members and a farmer, for obstructing authorities. Activist Chong Yee Shan suffered a fractured tooth after being pushed by a law enforcement officer.

In 1974, farmers in Baling, Kedah, Malaysia staged mass demonstrations to protest the declining rubber prices and rising inflation that was causing great hardship for the rural poor (Noel Wong @ FMT Lifestyle, 2023). The farmers' demands included raising the price of rubber and lowering the prices of basic necessities. The protests began on November 19, 1974 with over 1,000 farmers demonstrating. The numbers grew to 12,000 protesters by November 21, with farmers from surrounding areas joining the demonstrations (thevibes.com, 2022). The government initially tried to calm the situation by sending the primary industries minister to address the protesters, but no satisfactory resolution was reached. On November 21, the protesters were tear-gassed by police, leading to outrage among university students nationwide who began gathering to show solidarity with the farmers. On December 3, thousands of students gathered in Kuala Lumpur to reassert the farmers' demands and call for action against corrupt politicians. The government responded by raiding universities and arresting student leaders and lecturers. Anwar Ibrahim, a noted orator at the time, was detained under the Internal Security Act for nearly two years for his involvement in the protests (The Student Movement in Malaysia,1967-74). The 1971 Universities and University Colleges Act was also amended to restrict student activism (The Star Online, 2019).

The Baling Incident highlighted the suffering of the rural poor due to poverty and economic hardship (Dawood & Khoo, 2017). It marked a significant moment in Malaysian student activism, with university students joining forces with farmers to fight for the rights of the underprivileged. The event left a lasting impact on Anwar Ibrahim, who later reflected on its importance in shaping his political views and commitment to fighting for the poor.

Findings
1. Biopower Manifests in Food Security: Governments use food policies to control the availability, cost, and quality of food. These rules help ensure everyone has enough safe food to eat. However, they can also be used to control people. While these policies aim to provide a stable food supply, they also give governments a lot of power over the food system. The eviction of farmers in Perak shows how government food policies can affect individuals. While the goal might be to stabilize the food supply or use the land differently, these actions give the government significant control over the food system and farmers' lives. This highlights the dual nature of food policies: they can benefit the public but also exert control over people.

2. Implications For Local Food Production And Security: According to Sarji (2023), the Tambun area, occupied by around 200 farmers who cultivate 2,000 hectares of land and produce over 80 tonnes of vegetables and fruits each day, faces severe threats. The area is a fundamental part of the local food supply, providing the people with fruits, vegetables, and fish. The eviction of these farmers has the potential to disrupt the crucial food supply cycle, resulting in shortages and price fluctuation in local markets. Additionally, it led to a greater dependence on imported food, which might have an adverse effect on food security and the region's ability to satisfy its nutritional requirements independently.

3. Connecting social theories with biopower in the context of human and food security involves examining how power dynamics and social structures impact the distribution of resources and the regulation of populations. Structural functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and postcolonial theory each offer different perspectives on these dynamics. Structural functionalism looks at how institutions maintain social stability through food and health regulations, while conflict theory focuses on the power disparities that affect access to resources. While symbolic interactionism explores the social meanings of food and health policies.

4. Biopower, a concept introduced by Michel Foucault, plays a significant role in human security by governing life processes such as health, living conditions, and overall well-being. Through the regulation of health, governments control public health measures and the distribution of healthcare resources, managing risks to human life. This control extends to resource distribution, where biopower influences who has access to essential resources like food and healthcare, highlighting the role of power in ensuring or undermining human security

5. In the realm of food security, biopower is evident in agricultural policies, food regulation, and access to food resources. Governmental policies control food production, distribution, and safety, affecting who has access to nutritious and affordable food.

6. Finally, applying these social theories to the concept of biopower helps to identify power relations that shape access to resources and influence public health and its role on food and human security. It highlights the need for more inclusive and equitable policies that address power inequities and ensure that communities retain control over their food systems and health practices. Promoting transparency and accountability in how biopower is exercised is essential for developing policies that are fair and beneficial for all.

Conclusion

This exercise of biopower can either support food security by ensuring equitable access or exacerbate inequalities through policies that benefit certain groups over others. By regulating food markets and influencing public behaviour, biopower plays a crucial role in shaping food security outcomes and human security. Balancing this with social theories in the human rights lens would impact the policymaking and the practical and scientific research and means to develop future technology without compromising the traditional and local food or farm producers, as they are the key stakeholders in producing, maintaining generational practices and food security in Malaysia.

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