
A State of Fragmentation: Enacting Sovereignty and Citizenship at the Edge of the Indonesian State

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ABSTRACT

The topic of sovereignty and citizenship helps us to understand post-authoritarian autonomy movements and resource struggle in Indonesia's borderlands. This article presents a case study of the border district of Kapuas Hulu, where increased regional autonomy gained in the decade that followed the collapse of the authoritarian regime of President Suharto in 1998 has encouraged a scramble for political influence and natural resources. As elsewhere in Indonesia, local engagement in the politics of decentralization presents marginal communities with a chance to assert publicly their role and rights as modern Indonesian citizens, and hence stake their claims to local natural resources and customary territory. Claims to citizenship and resource claims go hand in hand. Although lines of authority have been rearranged through political rupture, continuities with former alliance-building strategies continue to structure the post-authoritarian landscape of political representation and resource access. However, when long-standing informal networks are merged with new institutional arrangements, openings emerge for certain fragments of local society to gain access and control over land and resources. Ultimately, the rupture from authoritarian to post-authoritarian rule creates new possibilities for claiming citizenship at the edge of the Indonesian state.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian decentralization reforms have been portrayed as among the most radical worldwide and have reshuffled political authority and resource access throughout the archipelago. After the fall of the authoritarian regime of President Suharto in 1998, regional autonomy became the prime focus of the subsequent 'reform' governments and new legislation resulted in a series of so-called democratization reforms that provided district

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governments with increased autonomy over local political and economic matters. The rapid decentralization process and the promotion of increased district autonomy was, among other things, an attempt by the new post-Suharto governments to prevent large-scale secessionist movements by re-allocating resources and political authority to the nation's neglected and dissatisfied outer regions. Those regions had, during the Suharto era, experienced large-scale, state-controlled resource extraction regimes without the benefits of economic development and political representation (Duncan, 2007; Fox et al., 2005; Resosudarmo, 2004). The founders of the decentralization process thus hoped that increased regional autonomy would forestall acts of separatism that might culminate in the territorial collapse of Indonesia (Aspinall and Fealy, 2003). The reshuffling of authority has driven previously marginalized groups in underdeveloped districts to stake formal claims to political representation and valuable natural resources — a process most pronounced in Indonesia's resource-rich outer regions like the borderlands of West Kalimantan (Eilenberg, 2012a; McCarthy, 2004; Moeliono et al., 2009; Wadley and Eilenberg, 2005; Wollenberg et al., 2006).

For centuries, the West Kalimantan border communities have been seen as a national security threat because of their strong cross-border ties and economic transactions with the neighbouring Malaysian state of Sarawak. It is not uncommon, for example, for border residents to hold dual-citizen documents, both Indonesian and Malaysian, although this violates both Indonesian law and the country's sovereignty. Such documents are used to engage in transnational labour migration and to maintain connections with kin across the border in Malaysia (Eilenberg and Wadley, 2009).

Along the border the main currency is the Malaysian ringgit, and the majority of school children attend schools across the border in Malaysia, where curricula offer them little knowledge of Indonesian national history or politics (*Harian Berkat*, 2009).

However, since the onset of decentralization, the successive reform governments have increased their focus on the nation's lawless borderlands as regions in dire need of development and a strong state presence (Bappenas, 2004, 2006, 2010; BNPP, 2011). As the head of the provincial border development agency put it: 'The border area has not yet been properly socialized into the nation. The dominant merchant trading is carried in foreign currency and moreover, our citizens at the border are more familiar with the leaders of our neighbours compared to those of their own country' (*Equator News*, 2005).

Post-Suharto, numerous news reports touching upon the issue of national loyalty among the West Kalimantan borderland population appeared in the national press, expressed in headlines such as 'Communities Living along the Kalimantan-Sarawak Border Are Still Isolated within their Own Country' (*Kompas*, 2000). Such a depiction highlights isolation, underdevelopment and cross-border ethnicity as the main reasons for cross-border solidarity and subsequent lack of national consciousness. Another headline in the

main provincial newspaper claimed that, ‘The Border Citizens Still Rely on Malaysia’ (*Pontianak Post*, 2005). Numerous news headlines depicting the nation’s borderlands as lawless and beyond the state’s control triggered a national debate on the inability of the central government to uphold the territorial sovereignty of the nation. The resource-rich Indonesian borderlands provide an exceptionally important site for investigating these paradoxes of sovereignty and citizenship, the changing dynamics of state–periphery relations, and the kind of governance that Indonesia has experienced since decentralization. For decades, the ethnic border population has been viewed with suspicion by the central government in Jakarta because of its close historical relationship and cross-border networks. People have often been labelled as unruly citizens, if citizens at all, and thus largely excluded from the right to development.

This article explores how the creative practices of the border population in the district of Kapuas Hulu simultaneously transform, challenge and accommodate the notion of the ‘sovereign state’ and the idea of citizenship by juggling the power relations between the centre and periphery. States are often unable to make their claims stick or to assert a sense of collective identity in remote borderlands that lack infrastructure and have sparse populations, which tend to have flexible loyalties towards the two bordering nation states (Donnan and Wilson, 2010; Horstmann and Wadley, 2006; van Schendel and de Maaker, 2014). In these locations, the issue of sovereignty is a vexed question at best. Defined territorially, sovereignty is the principle of recognition of what is both internal and external to states: domestic authority and international recognition (Bartelson, 1995). Yet while the bounded sovereign state remains the foundation of the modern political system, its analytical relevance in a world in which political authority over economy and society transcends the territorial boundaries of states has been called into question (Agnew, 2005; Dunn and Cons, 2014; Ong, 2006; Wissenburg, 2008). The classical definition of sovereignty, which presupposes a strong ‘unitary’ state imposing unlimited control on a clearly defined territory, is widely questioned by scholars who have taken up the challenge of conceptualizing the state as fragmented and constituted by a disparate series of effects. As Jones argues, sovereign power ‘is better conceptualized as multifaceted, partial, and conflicted’ (Jones, 2012: 687). Here, *de facto* state sovereignty is far messier than its classical definitions suggest, and the existence of nested, overlapping and competing sovereignties within and across borders is increasingly recognized (Hansen and Stepputat, 2006; Lund, 2011; Peluso and Lund, 2011).

In the Indonesian case, the fragmented character of the archipelago state became especially obvious in the reform period after the collapse of the patrimonial regime of President Suharto. The reform period and the power vacuum in the years after Suharto instigated a fierce scramble for resources (property) and authority between government institutions, regional administrative divisions and political elites. The new political openings that emerged

out of the massive decentralization process suddenly created new possibilities for the enactment of sovereignty locally, regionally and within national politics, according active citizens the ability to define rights and privileges in the Indonesian state project — something severely restricted under the previous authoritarian regime.¹

In what follows, I shall introduce the case of Kapuas Hulu and discuss the local impact of national decentralization reforms. This is followed by an analysis of a local autonomy movement and its attempt to carve out a new administrative district from the mother district of Kapuas Hulu. The article highlights the intricate process of claim making and identity politics involved in the process of district splitting on the border. It analyses how property and political representation are negotiated by appropriating government rhetoric of national sovereignty, good citizenship and development. It concludes by considering how large political ruptures — Indonesian regime change, decentralization reforms and subsequent increased regional autonomy — have created new opportunities to claim property and citizenship on the border.

THE CASE OF KAPUAS HULU

We do not want the central government to think ‘danger’; and ‘what are the politics of the border people in creating a district?’. We are Indonesian. We continue to love Indonesia. However, what we want is change and advancement in the border area. That is our argument and motivation behind a new Border District.²

Since the onset of decentralization reforms in 1999, ethnic elites have struggled to create small zones of autonomy along the Indonesian territorial border in remote upland districts of the West Kalimantan Province, bordering the Malaysian state of Sarawak (see map of Borneo, Figure 1). The case of the Kapuas Hulu district epitomizes how political rupture — from highly centralized authoritarian rule to increased regional autonomy — has enabled elite members of local society to make new claims to citizenship and control over local natural resources and territory. However, while administrative decentralization reforms provided new opportunities for political aspiration among elite sections of local society, most inhabitants of rural communities became increasingly excluded from access to land and the benefits of the new political arrangements. As Nordholt and van Klinken (2007: 1) remind us, ‘a shift from centralized to a decentralized government is not synonymous

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1. This article is based on 30 months of field research conducted in the Kapuas Hulu district, West Kalimantan in the period 2002–16. For a fuller account, see Eilenberg (2012a). Interviews were carried out with a wide array of local and national actors ranging from state officials, politicians, NGOs, entrepreneurs and local elites (village heads and tribal heads) to local community members. Interviews and observations were triangulated with data from government and NGO reports and newspaper clippings.
 2. Interview, member of autonomy movement, Putussibau, 13 March 2007.

Figure 1. Map of Borneo



with a shift from authoritarian to democratic rule'. By analysing an ongoing claim for regional autonomy in the district of Kapuas Hulu, this contribution illustrates how local elites within the legal (but fuzzy) framework of administrative decentralization reforms attempt to create their own administrative district. The 'state' is understood creatively and national loyalties are claimed at the state edges by appropriating the state rhetoric of development and good citizenship.

The district of Kapuas Hulu encompasses 29,842 km² (20 per cent of West Kalimantan) and is divided into no fewer than 23 sub-districts, with a total population of only 236,136. It is situated in the northernmost corner of the province, more than 700 km from the provincial capital, the coastal city of Pontianak (BPS-KB, 2011; BPS-KH, 2014). To the north, the district shares an international border with Sarawak, Malaysia; to the east, it borders

the Indonesian provinces of Central Kalimantan and East Kalimantan. This article focuses specifically on the border autonomy movement headed by an organization known as the Committee for the Establishment of the North Border District (Panitia Pembentukan Kabupaten Perbatasan Utara, PPKPU), that grew out of the five sub-districts of Batang Lupar, Embaloh Hulu, Badau, Empanang and Puring Kencana in 2000. The five sub-districts (covering approximately 6,296 km² or 22 per cent of the Kapuas Hulu district) make up the largest stretch of territory along the international border with Malaysia within the 'mother' district. According to district government statistics, the population of the five border districts reached 20,500 in 2013 (BPS-KH, 2014).³

Administrative Fragmentation

Since the early 1990s, the population of Kapuas Hulu has pushed for border development and increased local autonomy. Already during the authoritarian regime of President Suharto, ethnic border elites began to formulate ideas about how to deal with the chronic underdevelopment of the area and work towards closer economic integration — besides resource extraction — with the rest of the Indonesian nation state. After Indonesian independence from the Dutch colonial regime in 1949, the socio-economic activities of the ethnic population in the remote borderlands were directed primarily towards the neighbouring state of Sarawak in Malaysia, whose proximity was emphasized by a shared language and ethnic affiliation. Until the fall of President Suharto, this loosely organized autonomy movement remained rather inactive, as efforts to increase local autonomy were discouraged by the highly authoritarian regime (Eilenberg, 2012a). The rhetoric of this emerging movement was, therefore, mostly centred on practical questions of infrastructure development, while issues of increased political autonomy were downplayed (Kuyah, 1992). After the fall of President Suharto, however, and with the formal creation of the PPKPU, the autonomy movement gained momentum and re-emerged as a local response to increased outside involvement in what were perceived as local matters. By creating their own district, the border elite expected to boost local autonomy and strengthen their control of local natural resources and border trade. They anticipated that control of border access would become an important political and economic resource in the near future, as enhanced commercial exchange was expected to develop between the two bordering regions of West Kalimantan (Indonesia) and Sarawak (Malaysia) (Bappenas, 2010; BNPP, 2011).

After Suharto, Law No. 22/1999 on regional autonomy suddenly made it possible to split an existing district into smaller ones, a process known

3. According to the PPKPU, however, the population in the five sub-districts was estimated to have reached approximately 37,000 back in 2007 (PPKPU, 2007).

as *pemekaran*, or ‘blossoming’ (McWilliam, 2011).⁴ The 1999 law led to a general rush to create new districts in Kalimantan and all over Indonesia (Booth, 2011; Firman, 2009; Fitriani et al., 2005; Kimura, 2007; Vel, 2007). For example, in West Kalimantan in 1999 the large border district of Sambas was split into the Sambas and Bengkayang districts and, in East Kalimantan, the resource-rich border district of Bulungan was split into Bulungan, Malinau and Nunukan districts (Tanasaldy, 2007; Wollenberg et al., 2006). Later, in 2012, that district, together with the Tana Tidung and Tarakan districts, was transformed into the new province of North Kalimantan (*Jakarta Globe*, 2012).

Popularly portrayed as a bottom-up process in which citizens could gain a larger degree of empowerment and transparency in local government matters, regional proliferation became immensely popular in Indonesia. The number of districts rose dramatically from 298 in 1999 (Firman, 2013) to 415 in 2014 (KDNRI, 2014). However, Law No. 22/1999, which was drawn up hastily in the early days of decentralization, has since been revised and superseded by more restrictive laws (No. 32/2004 and No. 78/2007). Among other things, these raised the minimum number of sub-districts to be included in a new district from three to five. Tighter structural regulation was an attempt to slow down the process of district blossoming. Undoubtedly, the economic incentive of large financial transfers from central government to support new districts — and lucrative positions in the new administrations — has been an important motive for local elites who promote *pemekaran*. The decentralization laws stipulate that new districts will receive subsidies in the form of both general allocation funds and special allocation funds from the central government. In many cases, the driving force behind *pemekaran* was the urge to gain authority over various valuable resources rather than the establishment of more accountable local governments (McWilliam, 2011; Pisani, 2014; Roth, 2007).

Identity Politics and Ethnicity (Mobilizing Ethnic Sentiments)

The members of the PPKPU movement discussed in this article were primarily ethnic Iban, who are all part of a small but prominent ethnic elite group of customary leaders, village headmen, members of the district assembly and district government officials. The Iban make up the largest section of the population in the five sub-districts discussed, while the two other ethnic groups, the Maloh and Malay, make up a small minority.⁵ The Maloh and

4. *Pemekaran* refers not only to the splitting of districts but also to other levels of administrative fragmentation like the creation of new provinces, sub-districts, villages and hamlets (Kimura, 2013).

5. Compared to the Maloh and Malay, the Iban have strong cross-border ethnic ties with the Iban in Sarawak, where they make up the largest single ethnic group.

Malay support the movement, but because of their minority status, they are less influential, which creates a certain amount of inter-ethnic distrust. Sections of the Maloh and Malay communities see the PPKPU movement as primarily an Iban project with the purpose of capturing political power and natural resources in the proposed new district.⁶ However, such ethnic distrust is partly unspoken in order for the movement to appear strong and united. PPKPU members on both sides of the divide constantly promote ethnic unity and downplay ethnicity as less relevant by focusing on the chronic underdevelopment of the region and their shared 'borderland identity' (Eilenberg and Wadley, 2009). Despite this inter-ethnic rivalry, the various groups realize that, for the PPKPU to succeed with the *pemekaran* process, the five sub-districts must at least officially appear as one 'border community'. Such concerns, therefore, remain veiled, even as tension continues to build along accentuated ethnic lines.

Nevertheless, despite attempts by the PPKPU to ignore ethnicity, the issue is an important one. For example, during local meetings, some younger Iban participants made jokes about the movement being the 'Free Iban Movement', or GIM (Gerakan Iban Merdeka), seeing it primarily as a movement for Iban revitalization and sovereignty. The reference here is to the armed guerrilla movements in Sumatra and Papua — the 'Free Aceh Movement' or GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) in North Sumatra and the 'Free Papua Movement' (Gerakan Papua Merdeka) in West Papua. Among some members, such jokes express the dream of promoting Iban Adat (traditional) authority and reclaiming sovereignty over what they perceive as their traditional territory, which is now claimed by other ethnic groups. Later in the same meetings, Iban members changed the acronym GIM to GBM (Gerakan Bersama Maju) or 'Jointly We Prosper Movement', and thus downplayed the issue of ethnicity (Eilenberg, 2012a). In other parts of Indonesia, *pemekaran* is often carried out along ethnic lines, which has, in many cases, resulted in violent conflicts (Aspinall, 2011; Duncan, 2007; Vel, 2007).

The PPKPU movement is using the experience of the split of other border districts in the province, especially the subdivision of the Sambas district into the Bengkayang and Sambas districts in 1999.⁷ The head of the PPKPU movement is a highly educated Iban (originally from the Kapuas Hulu district) who holds an influential government position as head of a district-level office in the Bengkayang district. Having a front row seat from which to observe the success of these new districts and the complicated political processes that *pemekaran* demands, he, together with a small group of other well-off men, initiated the PPKPU movement. The PPKPU further fed into a larger alliance of border communities known as the Forum for Border

6. There has been a long history of inter-ethnic confrontation and conflict over access to land and resources dating back to the colonial period, involving the Iban and, especially, the Maloh (King, 1976).

7. Law No. 10/1999.

Community Care,⁸ positioned in the provincial capital, Pontianak. This forum was created in 2004 with the purpose of lobbying for and promoting the overall development of the border regions of West Kalimantan; its members are from all the ethnic groups living along the entire length of the border. Until 2013 the head of FPMP was a prominent Iban from the district of Kapuas Hulu. The PPKPU has used the forum mainly as a meeting place for consolidating new alliances, especially with provincial government officials and politicians.

District Blossoming on the Border

In April 2006, approximately 100 people representing the five districts met with members of the district assembly in the district capital, Putussibau. The representatives were greeted positively, and the assembly subsequently issued a letter of decree supporting the formation of a new district in the border area (KepDPRD, 2006). In addition, after numerous meetings and discussions, in early March 2007 representatives and supporters from the five districts (approximately 400 people) met with the Kapuas Hulu district head at an official gathering in the district office in Putussibau. The PPKPU boldly proclaimed their proposed new district as the North Border District (Kabupaten Perbatasan Utara). At the same time, they presented a final report of several hundred pages containing the legally stipulated requirements for a new district and the signatures of all of the local (elite) supporters (*Equator News*, 2007a). This report, which emphasized the considerable potential of the border area and its current underdevelopment, was the outcome of an unofficial feasibility study carried out by the PPKPU in cooperation with a Jakarta-based NGO (PPKPU, 2007).

In the period between 2004 and 2007, the PPKPU had carried out an extensive lobbying campaign. In February 2006, it sent out its first formal letter of aspiration to the district head, presenting the plan for a new district. Then, in 2007, the PPKPU attempted to precipitate the *pemekaran* process (*Equator News*, 2007b). Mindful of failed efforts and bitter disappointment in the past, the PPKPU was eager to push this initiative through. Early in the presidency of Megawati (2001–4), the same border elite had applied to the central government to be recognized as a Special Authority Region (Otorita Daerah Khusus) and, thereby, receive favourable conditions such as free border trade and a higher degree of political autonomy. According to the PPKPU, a letter of decree that would have granted special authority to the border area was being prepared. Then, in 2004, a new president was elected, and the decree was postponed. During the Megawati presidency, the government had prepared a development strategy for the Kalimantan border region, and, according to the PPKPU, the change in central administration

8. Forum Peduli Masyarakat Perbatasan Kalimantan Barat (FPMP).

turned out to be a significant setback for the lobbying efforts of the border movement at the time, as old allies in the administration were replaced (Bappenas, 2003). Now, in a 2007 statement outlining the urgency of the current campaign, a PPKPU member said: ‘We need to push forward now and keep going. We cannot wait for official approval from the district office. Government regulations, as they look today, may be different tomorrow so we need to act while there is still an opportunity’.⁹

The huge popularity of *pemekaran* throughout Indonesia has put an immense strain on the central government’s resources and budget, while outcomes in the form of improved services for the majority of people have, so far, been meagre. Meanwhile, corruption and nepotism have reportedly increased, a development that the central government largely blames on self-interested regional elites (Bappenas and UNDP, 2008). Such accusations have fostered widespread protest from provincial and district assembly members, who accuse the central government of being arrogant and lacking commitment to the development of the outer regions and the reallocation of promised economic benefits from the centre to its margins.

Mimicking State Rhetoric of Citizenship and Sovereignty

The first step in the *pemekaran* process, as stipulated in the government laws and regulations, is a demonstration of the viability of a proposed new district and a justification of the need for its creation. As indicated by the name, the North Border District, the PPKPU clearly specified the common ground and key resources of the five districts involved. Despite its vast natural resources, the border area, after more than 60 years of Indonesian independence, is still categorized as a region of extreme poverty and isolation (*daerah tertinggal*) with insufficient infrastructure, health services and education facilities (Agustiar, 2008; BNPP, 2011; KNPDT, 2007). As proclaimed by PPKPU participants during an August 2006 borderland ‘awareness-raising’ meeting held to discuss the local advantages of splitting the district: ‘It has now been 63 years since we became an independent nation, but our roads are still yellow [dirt] and at night, our lamps are still dark. Is this the result of independence?’ A chorus of voices from the crowd replied, ‘We still live in misery and poverty. Development has left us behind’ (PPKPU, 2007: 206).

The main argument put forward for splitting the Kapuas Hulu district was its sheer size and lack of capacity to develop its outer districts. The PPKPU stressed that the ‘mother’ district of Kapuas Hulu was too large, and past and current district administrations had not succeeded in developing the border area compared to other areas in the district and thus providing the rewards of citizenship to the local population. As a result, they said, the border people were forced to act by themselves if any changes were to take

9. Interview, Badau, 20 March 2007.

place: 'Until now the border communities have just been a tool of central government in extracting natural resources, that is why the community wants their own autonomy, to take control by themselves, and at least have their own district'.¹⁰

Other strategies adopted by the PPKPU for cultivating central government goodwill and support for their cause included applying the central government rhetoric of sovereignty and development, and emphasizing the role of border inhabitants as loyal citizens. The members constantly presented the creation of a new border district as a local effort to preserve the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia (Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia). They announced that enhanced political and economic autonomy would prevent acts of separatism among the border communities and nurture good citizens. Furthermore, the border district would become the new, bright, outward face of Indonesia towards Malaysia and, most importantly, would improve national defence, guarantee security and prevent illegal activities (*Equator News*, 2006).

Throughout the *pemekaran* process, the PPKPU were quick to disavow past public so-called 'illegal' activities in the border area and to depict such activities as the last resort of desperate people, solely in response to a long-standing economic disparity along the border (*Equator News*, 2011). For example, in the period 2000–05, the five districts were the scene of large-scale timber smuggling across the border to Malaysia, drawing immense national and international attention (Wadley and Eilenberg, 2005). Local press estimated that every month timber worth US\$ 1 million was smuggled across the border to Malaysia by timber barons in cooperation with border communities (*Media Indonesia*, 2004; *Sinar Harapan*, 2004; *Suara Pembaruan*, 2004). During that time, state presence in the borderland was largely neutralized by large-scale political instability and administrative rupture within central government. Local border elites were quick to take advantage of this political vacuum and began extracting local forest resources with assistance from their Malaysian cross-border connections, circumventing central government institutions. This short period of semi-autonomy sustained by cross-border timber smuggling allowed the local economy to flourish and reinforced the local dictum that the border communities were better off taking matters into their own hands. However, the timber boom ended abruptly in 2005 when a strengthened central government reasserted its authority through military force in the border region (Eilenberg, 2012b). According to the PPKPU, the only way to prevent further illegal activities and enhance national loyalty was to involve border communities in developing the area through engagement in local-level politics and economic affairs.

10. Interview, Lanjak, 1 March 2007.

Autonomy and Secessionist Aspirations

Officially, the PPKPU may have proclaimed their strong national loyalty in local news media, but during the heated debates in closed local meetings, becoming part of Malaysia was often mentioned as a final option. The Iban border population generally accepted their status as Indonesian citizens, and everybody knew that secession was impossible. However, the threat clearly indicated the preparedness of the PPKPU to play the ‘border card’ in political negotiations with the district and central governments. Fear of local separatism has often been expressed by central government as a possible future outcome of the special borderland circumstances of underdevelopment and cross-border connections (*Harian Berkas*, 2009; *Kompas*, 2001; *Kompas*, 2003). As an excited Iban supporter of district splitting announced: ‘We will just join Malaysia. We will organize training over there and rebel. We will still try the nice way first but if official procedures turn out to be unworkable, well, what can we do?’¹¹

During the Dutch colonial period in what is known today as Indonesian West Kalimantan, the ruler of Sarawak (Malaysia) at the time — the British Raja Brooke offered the Iban border population the opportunity to secede to Sarawak, although such offers never resulted in concrete action. Throughout the Dutch colonial presence in the border area, the border communities were seen as unreliable and rebellious citizens. One major contributing factor was a long history of movement, applicable particularly to trade and warfare, that did not recognize arbitrary state borders. The border population strategically took advantage of the artificial line dividing the Dutch and British territories. One legacy of Dutch attempts to subdue these recalcitrant subjects and extend colonial administrative discipline to the unruly border areas is a pronounced local suspicion towards state authority among the majority of the border population (Wadley, 2004). A British colonial administrator, referring to the border-dwelling Iban, was of the view that ‘Persons who find it politic to hurriedly shift from one side of the border to the other can hardly be considered as valuable citizens of either State’.¹² Furthermore, in the last days of Dutch colonialism and just after Indonesian independence, ideas of a Pan-Dayak identity were emerging in Kalimantan (Dayak is an umbrella term for all the indigenous populations on the island of Borneo). For example, in 1945 leaders from both sides of the border met to discuss ideas of separatism and the possible role the Iban might play in an independent Pan-Dayak state (Wadley, 1998). The Iban, like many border people, have long considered themselves as extrinsic to any large national entity; for them, central government often materializes as a confining authority that restricts their everyday practices and spatial mobility. They often reason that the

11. Interview, Lanjak, 21 March 2007.

12. British colonial administrator quoted in ‘Report from Assistant Resident A.A. Burgdorffer, 2 December 1914, Verbaal 20 Augustus 1915 No. 41, Ministerie van Koloniën’.

distant provincial and national centres do not comprehend the special and shifting circumstances of life in the borderland that are expressed in a high degree of spatial flexibility.

The historic cross-border relations and ongoing, mostly rhetorical support from small segments of the Iban population in Sarawak, Malaysia, boosted local confidence. As one PPKPU member commented during a local meeting, ‘We can make things very difficult for them [district and provincial officials]’ — referring to former acts of vigilantism and to the existence of close ties to similar ethnic groups in Sarawak. The border populations are notorious for acting on their own when they feel that the government system is unjust and not operating in accordance with the special circumstances of life along the border (Eilenberg, 2011). Despite such statements, the PPKPU always stressed that everything they did would have to conform to the law, and that they should not attempt to win independence through armed struggle like Aceh in North Sumatra or the independence movement in West Papua. No attempt should be made to disturb the stability of the border. However, on the question of what might happen if the border communities were not given increased autonomy and their own district, a customary leader answered:

If the border area is not allowed to emerge as a new district by the central or local government, I am afraid that many of the communities would lose their faith in the unity of the nation and want to separate themselves or break away to Malaysia. If you ask the community, 99 per cent would prefer to be under the political control of Malaysia, and that would put the unity of the nation in danger. Well, older people like us try to protect the unity of the Indonesian nation by suggesting the creation of a new district instead of separatism.¹³

As Kimura argues, regional proliferation in Indonesia is often ‘less about a region seeking to isolate itself from the state and more about new and different kinds of access and relationships between center and region’ (Kimura, 2013: 86). The PPKPU was constantly walking a fine line in seeking to enhance the region’s autonomy without detaching it from national membership. In 2012, the PPKPU decided to change the name of the proposed new district from the more contested and politicized North Border District to Banua Landjak District (*Tribun Pontianak*, 2013a, 2013b). This was done in order to send a message of national loyalty to the central government and indicate their deep territorial and emotional attachment to the region. ‘Banua’ could be translated as ‘My homeland/fatherland’ and ‘Landjak’ is the name of the major trading town in the five sub-districts (*Sinar Harapan*, 2013). The PPKPU were acutely aware of central government plans to increase its authority in the unruly borderlands through a military build-up, and did not want the proposed district to appear recalcitrant by overplaying the separatist card. However, the issue of separatism, with its orientation towards Malaysia, is frequently flagged by communities along the Kalimantan–Malaysia border (approximately 2,000 km long) in order to attract central government and

13. Interview, Embaloh Hulu, 13 June 2007.

public attention to chronic underdevelopment (*Berita Satu*, 2014; *Harian Berkat*, 2009). The name change to Banua Landjak was thus a complex attempt to emphasize their historical claims to customary lands and simultaneously their loyalty to the nation.¹⁴ History plays an important role in ethnic consolidation in the border area and Iban committee members constantly highlighted the importance of origin and ancestry in authorizing claims to land and territory.

Claiming Territory and Natural Resources

The district head of Kapuas Hulu initially appeared to be supportive of the idea of a new district, attending meetings and personally donating funds to the PPKPU (*Akcaya*, 2007). Nevertheless, he also seemed to be deliberately stalling the process. Like the district heads of other resource-rich districts, he has, since the onset of decentralization, consolidated his power and support through income from natural resources. Informal interviews with district government officials in Putussibau produce a picture of a general, although not publicly expressed, worry within the district office that the mother district risks losing major income from strategic resources, such as timber, minerals, plantation development, and the future lucrative border trade, if it is split. The decentralization laws further require the mother district to support the new district economically for the first few years before the new district receives its own fiscal transfers from the central government. The creation of the new border district could further isolate the mother district, which is already the most remote district in the province. If the new district is created, the mother district will be geographically (and possibly economically) isolated in the northernmost corner of the province. The sheer distance to the provincial capital, more than 700 km, makes border access highly important for the local economy; Sarawak economic centres across the border are much closer than the provincial capital and road access is easy (Wadley, 2000). According to a PPKPU member, the main reason for the district head to stall the district-splitting process was to maintain and consolidate his control of the resource-rich border region:

Now we are actually able to fulfil the requirements for creating a new district put forward by central government, but the mother district seems to be hesitant about letting us go. It keeps holding on to our tail. There is too much potential so they cannot let go and let the new district emerge. I think if Putussibau lets the border area become a district, Putussibau will die.¹⁵

During the campaign for the 2005 district election (*Pilkada*), the district head was re-elected by promising the five border sub-districts greater

14. Interviews, Lanjak, Badau, and Pontianak, December 2013.

15. Interview, Badau, 19 March 2007.

autonomy on local economic issues and general infrastructure development.¹⁶ Since the revision of the law on regional autonomy in 2004, district heads have been voted into office by direct popular elections and not, as before, by the district legislative assembly. District heads are therefore more dependent on popular support than before when it comes to re-election (Buehler, 2007). Outright rejection of a new border district could make dealings along the border more difficult and possibly mean loss of support from the border population on whom the district head is partly dependent in upholding a minimal amount of authority in this remote part of Kapuas Hulu. During this period, the district office has managed to keep the most critical voices at bay by contributing minor funding for the border movement while at the same time prolonging the bureaucratic process involved in the split.

Transnational networks add to the complexity of this case. During the many local meetings about the new border district, the PPKPU invited several Malaysian ‘investors’ from across the border. It was envisaged that a possible new district should cooperate closely with private business partners within the oil palm and rubber industry across the border in Sarawak, and develop large plantations along the border under the control of local communities. Many of these ‘investors’ were closely connected with individual PPKPU members through kinship ties and were deeply involved in the logging boom that ended in 2005. Economic support from wealthy Malaysians could end up being a key factor in realizing the establishment of the new district. Even more importantly, cross-border resources make the new district more autonomous and, thus, less dependent on central government politics and financial support (Eilenberg, 2012a). As indicated by a local executive, ‘If we already had a new district here, many smart people from Malaysia would come and invest their money in plantations and so on. There are plenty of them waiting across the border. But for now, they do not want to come, as they do not trust the government’.¹⁷ Several members of the PPKPU announced that they would not allow any outside companies to enter local forestlands without prior agreements with local communities. As stipulated by a customary leader in a 2007 interview: ‘Many companies want to enter the area and open oil palm plantations, but we have not yet given our consent. We will wait until we have gained official authority over the area’.¹⁸

These comments are symptomatic of the widespread mistrust of government authorities and of the conviction of the border communities that they would be better off handling things themselves. However, these local cross-border negotiations were placed under strain in 2007 when the district

16. Several Iban and Maloh inhabitants interviewed in the border sub-districts expressed their lack of confidence in the district head; being a Malayu, they believed he was more accommodating towards the needs of the Malayu than those of the Iban and Maloh border population in the district.

17. Interview, Lanjak, 1 August 2007.

18. Interview, Lanjak, 28 March 2007.

government (with support from central government and the military) allocated large tracts of land for plantation development within the five border sub-districts to the Sinar Mas Group, Indonesia's largest palm oil producer (Yuliani et al., 2010). Until that time the Kapuas Hulu district had not been directly affected by agrarian change taking place in the lower parts of the province. However, in 2005–6 the district government — encouraged by central government and with a view to providing an alternative to timber extraction — began negotiating with private palm oil companies to open up the district for large-scale plantation development. After the fall of Suharto the reform government loosened its grip on the plantation sector and introduced more market-oriented agribusiness arrangements, facilitating private investment. This central state withdrawal of direct involvement, and the cession to local governments of greater authority to take control of the issuing of plantation permits, has dramatically increased the expansion of oil palm plantations in West Kalimantan (Potter, 2011).

Internally, within the PPKPU, this move by the district government to develop the border region was seen as an attempt to strengthen district authority over the rebellious sub-districts by claiming authority over land and resources.¹⁹ Despite large-scale protests by the PPKPU and local customary leaders, Sinar Mas quickly began converting large tracts of land into oil palm plantations maintained by imported migrant workers from outside the province (*Kompas*, 2011). In 2007 alone, the district government issued no fewer than 21 plantation licences for the conversion of approximately 360,000 hectares of land. However, because of poor spatial planning and a lack of clear regulation, these plantation concessions often overlapped with locally claimed customary forestlands, triggering company–community conflicts. Weak law enforcement led to communities pushing forward with complaints, encouraging acts of vigilantism against the oil palm companies. The non-transparent and intricate process of gaining permits made it extremely difficult for local communities with customary claims on forests to appraise the legality of permits issued to companies. Among the border population, very few have formal legal titles to their land and they are therefore vulnerable to encroachment from plantation companies (*Borneo Tribune*, 2008).²⁰

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

During a field visit in May to June 2016, the PPKPU was still awaiting a formal response to their request for a new district. The outcome seemed as uncertain as ever and was highly dependent on rapid political changes

19. Interview, Pontianak, 3 March 2011.

20. Most local land falls under various forms of customary land ownership, and over centuries has been passed from generation to generation through intricate systems of rights (Wadley, 1997).

taking place locally and nationally. The future of the *pemekaran* process very much depended on the goodwill of key politicians in Jakarta and of local government administrative heads, like the district head and governor, who have their own, often divergent, political agendas for the border area. As remarked by a customary leader in a 2016 interview: 'Before and during elections they [the president, governor and district head] are enthusiastic about supporting our movement for a new district, but when votes are cast they lose interest and continue to prolong the process. It seems like the political (national and local) elite are using our cause for vote fishing'.²¹

Since 2005, the district head of Kapuas Hulu, together with four other district heads, has been involved in yet another *pemekaran* process. These five district heads wish to split from the current province of West Kalimantan and create a new province, Kapuas Raya, and all available district resources seemed directed towards carrying out this grand plan for a new province (*Jakarta Post*, 2013; *Kalimantan Review*, 2008). Further, during an interview in late 2007, the head of the provincial legislative assembly in the provincial capital, Pontianak, expressed strong doubts as to whether a new border district would have any chance of being approved at the central level. According to him, one of the major hurdles was the low population density. With only about 20–30,000 inhabitants, the proposed border district would be too sparsely populated to survive on its own. He estimated that it might take another five to ten years before the border population could be ready to manage its own district. This observation was contested vigorously by PPKPU members and local academics, who argued that in the past the border population had shown their ability to manage local affairs and cross-border trade, and that taxes from the large palm oil companies and future mining operations (bauxite and coal) would provide plenty of income to support the proposed district. The argument of the PPKPU that a new district would be viable was later supported by an assessment study carried out by the Research Institute of the University of Tanjungpura in Pontianak (*Borneo Tribune*, 2012).

In the heated debate about the viability of the many new districts in Indonesia, national and regional commentators have suggested that the central government should prioritize the establishment of new districts and provinces in regions with special needs such as underdeveloped and sensitive state border areas (*Haluan Kepri*, 2013; *Media Indonesia*, 2014; *Tempo*, 2012). This, they argue, would be in line with one of the original ideas behind decentralization, namely that of facilitating and ensuring national unity and preventing separatism (*Kompas*, 2007). However, the central government has been hesitant and vague regarding the possibility for new districts in the border regions. Its plans for the borderlands will not necessarily involve an increase in local autonomy, but are more likely to foster the reclaiming

21. Interview, Lanjak, 26 May 2016.

of central authority over these resource-rich peripheral regions (Eilenberg, 2014). Between 2009 and 2012, a moratorium was imposed on regional expansion through *pemekaran*, although on several occasions the House of Representatives (DPR) has ceded to local pressure to open new administrative regions (Aspinall, 2013). For example, in October 2013 the Provincial Legislative Council (DPRD) in West Kalimantan approved the creation of the proposed border district of Banua Landjak (*Sinar Harapan*, 2013) and, in March 2014, the border district was endorsed by the Regional Representative Council (DPD-RI) in Jakarta (DPD-RI, 2014; *Sinar Harapan*, 2014b).

However, such approvals and endorsements do not necessarily reflect the views of the central government in Jakarta, which has not ceased to express reservations about the rapidity with which authority and funds are being transferred to the districts. The centre argues that the local results are mixed and often lead to communal conflict, while the benefits for ordinary citizens are less obvious. Critics claim that the uncontrolled formation of new districts creates jurisdictional fragmentation, encouraging rampant rent seeking among political elites (Bappenas and UNDP, 2008; *Jakarta Post*, 2012; *Tempo*, 2013). Since early 2014 the central government has agreed to engage in discussions with the House of Representatives concerning an overall draft proposal for the creation of 65 new autonomous regions (*Daerah Otonomi Baru* or DOB) — the border district discussed in this article is mentioned as one of two new proposed districts in West Kalimantan (*Sinar Harapan*, 2014a, 2014b).²² However, at the same time as negotiations over possible new autonomous regions are taking place, central government is drafting a bill that will grant it the authority to take back power from corrupt regional leaders and closely regulate the process of establishing new autonomous regions (*Jakarta Post*, 2014).

Whatever the future success or failure of the PPKPU movement in creating a new district, the border communities will continue to exploit the openings presented by the decentralization reforms and the duality of life along the border in order to negotiate political authority, take control of local natural resources and claim the rights of national membership. As McWilliam (2011: 165) argues, ‘For all its stumbling inefficiencies, administrative proliferation provides multiple new avenues for integrating and enclosing the scattered and still loosely-governed peripheries into the regulatory ambit of the unitary state’.

This article has set out to explain how border communities in Kapuas Hulu, like many other marginal populations in post-independence Indonesia, have struggled for recognition and membership (citizenship) in the Indonesian nation state. Such struggles have more often than not centred on claims to rights over natural resources (property) — a campaign by peripheral citizens who during the authoritarian regime of Suharto had been

22. The draft proposal or bill is referred to as the 65 RUU-DOB (65 Rancangan Undang-Undang Daerah Otonomi Baru).

discouraged, restricted and subdued. Overall, the *pemekaran* case demonstrates how the immense political rupture and administrative fragmentation following the fall of Suharto created new opportunities for local claim making over matters of property and citizenship at the edge of the Indonesian state. It suggests a complex relationship between state authority and regional autonomy that helps shed light on the often ambivalent relationship between citizenship and state sovereignty. This article demonstrates the complexity of relations between local communities, local elites and the various levels of government in negotiating authority over natural resources and customary territory in a period of rupture and fragmentation. These observations help remind us of the fractured character of state sovereignty in these marginal regions comprising multiple and overlapping cores of autonomy, and of how competing loyalties and identities (ethnic, national, regional, cross-border) are negotiated on a daily basis.

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