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Source: *South East Asia Research*, JULY 2009, Vol. 17, No. 2 (JULY 2009), pp. 201-227

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd.

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23750982>

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Negotiating autonomy at the margins of the state

The dynamics of elite politics in the borderland of West Kalimantan, Indonesia

Michael Eilenberg

Abstract: Recent processes of decentralization have dramatically changed local political configurations and access to resources throughout Indonesia. In particular, the resource-rich regions at the margins of the state have, in the name of regional autonomy, experienced new spaces for manoeuvre in their claims for a larger share of forest resources. By stressing the unfolding relationship between local ethnic elites and the state, and their different strategies in negotiating and claiming authority over forests within Indonesia's changing forest regimes, the paper examines how local-level politics has taken on its special configuration in the remote border region of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The author demonstrates this by focusing on the ongoing struggle over forest resources and by tracking the fate of a political movement for a new district in this resource-rich region. The paper further examines how current local elite strategies and networks can be related back to the period of border militarization in the 1960s and, once again, how these seem to challenge the exclusivity of the Indonesian–Malaysian border. The main argument is that central authority in the borderland has never been absolute, but waxes and wanes, and thus that state rules and laws are always up for local interpretation and negotiation, although the degree of such negotiation changes depending on the strength of the central state.

Keywords: regional autonomy; local elite; forest; borders; *pemekaran*; West Kalimantan

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South East Asia Research, 17, 2, pp 201–227

Recent debates indicate that decentralization processes in Indonesia are more complex than first imagined and do not necessarily result in heightened transparency as originally envisioned by many policy makers. Within the Indonesian context, a large body of work has focused on how these political transformations have affected the control of access to various resources in the marginal and resource-rich regions. This work has especially highlighted the role of locally entrenched elites (Morishita, 2008; Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007; Wollenberg *et al*, 2006; McCarthy, 2004). Interlinked with this has been the creation of new administrative districts, often headed by local ethnic elites and motivated by the urge to enhance their authority over valuable local resources (Duncan, 2007; Roth, 2007). Ethnic sentiments and local customs [*adat*] have here come to play an active role in such local claims of authority. *Adat* is evoked as a tool to justify ethnic claims to natural resources with respect to either other ethnic groups or the state (see Henley and Davidson, 2008; Duncan, 2007; Tanasaldy, 2007).

The overarching theme of these discussions is that decentralization has had profound effects on the configuration of local-level politics. But while decentralization has resulted in the state becoming more tightly locked into local society, and has empowered local people's participation in decision making on the one hand, it has also engendered great potential for enhanced collusion among well connected local elites, district officials and various entrepreneurs on the other. Although lines of authority have, to a certain degree, been rearranged, there are still considerable continuities with former arrangements of informal networks and alliance formation. Referring to the distinct patrimonial patterns of the former Suharto regime, Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken (2007, p 8) find it misleading to view this regime as 'an integrated set of institutions operating primarily apart from society' and argue for a critical re-evaluation of the distinctions between 'state' and 'society', 'formal' and 'informal', which are often invoked when referring to the New Order period in Indonesia.

There are numerous examples of how regional elites who colluded with the former Suharto regime have maintained their networks and are still, in the present post-Suharto period of decentralization, active players in local-level politics. They now often have enhanced authority as a result of increased local autonomy and the ability to bypass central state authorities. As noted by Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken (2007, p 2): 'Decentralisation comes into this world not as a *deus ex machina* but as a rearrangement of existing force fields'. In short, what

these studies ultimately show is the continuity of informal networks; but also how the reshuffling of authority has sharpened the struggle over resources at the local level since decentralization was introduced. This is also the case in the border region of West Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Laws regulating the decentralization of authority and the fiscal balance (Laws 22/1999 and 25/1999) between central and regional governments were passed by Indonesia's national parliament in 1999 and officially implemented in January 2001. The decentralization processes increased the state's presence locally, making it possible for local actors to control local natural resources through their influence over local governments. As a result, local communities began to exercise authority and exert influence formally and informally through a variety of forms of political engagement (McCarthy, 2007; Wollenberg *et al.*, 2006). This is especially true of the timber-rich districts at the state borders, where through enhanced autonomy, local elites in particular now had access to new spaces for manoeuvre in their claims for a larger share of the formerly state-controlled forest resources. In this paper,¹ I examine the special configuration of these relationships between state actors and local elites in the borderland of West Kalimantan. Obviously, processes of decentralization and resource conflict are general phenomena throughout Indonesia, but as I will show, the configuration of the borderland gives the phenomenon its unique shape here. I argue that the borderland provides a context in which the negotiations of authority between state actors and local society become more explicit. I show how local social practices and local elite strategies are constituted in a complementary relationship with shifting state policies.

More specifically, I focus on five ethnic Iban-dominated subdistricts within the remote district of Kapuas Hulu,² on the border of the Malaysian state of Sarawak. The 'mother' district of Kapuas Hulu consists of no less than 23 subdistricts spread over 29,842 square kilometres (20.33%

¹ This paper is based on a 17-month period of field research conducted during serial visits to the West Kalimantan borderlands, funded by grants from Aarhus University (2002–2003), Verdensnaturfonden/Aase og Ejnar Danielsens Fond (2004, 2005) and the Danish Research Council for Development Research (2007). I am grateful to Reed Wadley, Michele Ford and Keith Foulcher for their comments at various stages of the revision of this paper. Extensive and detailed comments from two anonymous referees for *South East Asia Research* were also extremely helpful.

² The five subdistricts are Batang Lupar, Embaloh Hulu, Badau, Empanang and Puring Kencana. In total, they comprise 22% of the Kapuas Hulu district (Kapuas Hulu, 2006).

of West Kalimantan) with a population of only 209,860 (Kapuas Hulu, 2006). The five subdistricts make up the largest stretch of territory along the international border out of a total of seven border subdistricts within the 'mother' district. In 2007, the population was estimated to have reached approximately 37,000 in the five border subdistricts (PPKPU, 2007). The principal ethnic groups are Iban, Maloh and Melayu, with the Iban population being by far the largest group. In 2007, the Iban population was estimated to account for more than 50% (approximately 20,000) of the total population, the Maloh 30%, and the Melayu 10%.³ The hilly, forested areas along the border as well as fertile valleys are predominantly occupied and shared by the Iban and Maloh population, while the Melayu mainly live as fishermen by the low-water lakes at the foot of the hills. Besides the three groups mentioned, the area has periodically attracted large numbers of outside migrants from other parts of the province and Indonesia. This was especially the case during the different periods of booming timber logging when the border population increased drastically.

Since 2000, there has been an Iban-initiated political movement in the five subdistricts presented above, the main goal of which has been the creation of a new, independent border district. This initiative has recently gained further momentum as a result of government bans on timber logging and a more general increase in state interventions in the form of increased militarization and plantation development projects in the general border area. By creating its own district, this local elite expects to boost local autonomy and strengthen its control of local forestlands.⁴ It is further anticipated that controlling border access will become an important political and economic tool in the near future, as enhanced commercial exchange is expected to be developed between the two bordering regions (that is, West Kalimantan and Sarawak).⁵ The leading members of the movement are primarily ethnic Iban; the two other ethnic groups that live in the area, the Maloh and Melayu, also support the movement, but their minority status makes them less powerful in decision making.⁶ The core members are all part of a small but prominent elite that consists of various community leaders and

³ This is a rough estimate based on recent district population data (Kapuas Hulu, 2006) and ethnic census data (Wadley and Kuyah, 2001, pp 720–723).

⁴ *Equator* (2006), 'Perjuangkan Kabupaten Perbatasan', 22 April.

⁵ *Equator* (2005), 'Sempadan Badau-Lubuk, Pembangunan Masa Depan', October 7.

⁶ Issues of interethnic distrust, such as the Maloh and Melayu not trusting the dominant Iban group, play into the dynamics of this movement and will be discussed later.

members of the district assembly. The movement emerged as a local response or countermovement to the increase in outside involvement in what are perceived to be local matters. In line with the approach taken by Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken (2007, p 2), I will explore these local manoeuvres and new dynamics in local-level politics by focusing on the role played by local elites and their network of influence. According to Roth (2007, p 122), recent cases of administrative fragmentation (for example, re-districting) should be read as local responses to long-term processes of socio-political transformations taking place in the specific region. To understand the current situation, it is therefore necessary to examine the recent history of the borderland, from the early period of authoritarian state rule and border militarization in the 1960s to the post-authoritarian climate of today.

New Order legacies and the establishment of a local elite

The Iban elite, which has come to play a leading role in the struggle for control over forest resources in the borderland, is a 'traditional' elite in the sense that its core consists of the various ranks of traditional leaders: Iban tribal heads [*temenggong*], deputy tribal heads [*patih*] and traditional military leaders [*panglima perang*]. Due to the historical processes discussed below, members of this elite have managed to strengthen their power by gaining access to various political networks within the government administration and powerful cross-border business alliances. With the assistance of these networks, some of these traditional leaders have themselves become local business figures. Others have pursued influence through involvement in local politics as party politicians or local-level government officials. For example, a small handful of prominent local figures have become elected members of the district assembly in Putussibau, giving them a front-row position from which to influence decisions made at the district level concerning their own constituencies along the border.

Importantly, the elite configurations we see today were partly formed by the political transformations and border militarization that occurred in the early days of the New Order regime in the 1960s when the borderland was plunged into an armed conflict with the newly established Federation of Malaysia. At that time, the new Indonesian Republic, under the leadership of President Sukarno, reacted strongly to the creation of a Malaysian nation-state, which from the Indonesian side was seen as a neo-imperialistic threat to its interests in the region. In its

place, Sukarno had a vision of a united Borneo under the administration of Indonesia.

In an attempt to undermine the hatchling Malay Federation before it could develop, Sukarno's left-wing government gave its support to a leftist militant group called the TNKU (North Kalimantan National Army, *Tentara Nasional Kalimantan Utara*) by providing training and arms. The TNKU was formed from the remnants of a 1962 failed rebellion against the British-protected Sultanate of Brunei and the British Crown Colonies of Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah). The badly planned rebellion was quickly defeated and the remaining rebels retreated to the forested border area between Sarawak and Kalimantan, where they started guerrilla warfare against Malay and British soldiers (see Stockwell, 2004). Under the pretext of supporting the TNKU's armed struggle against the creation of a Malaysian Federation, Sukarno dispatched Indonesian volunteers [*sukarelawan*] and army units to help the TNKU. The volunteers were recruited from among local Indonesians supportive of the cause, especially those with sympathy for the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), many of whom were ethnic Chinese and Javanese, although Iban and other Dayaks from both sides of the border were also recruited.⁷

The main actors on the Indonesian side in this undeclared war were Indonesian volunteers, members of the TNKU and Indonesian army troops. Later in 1963, the Indonesian army, together with these volunteers and rebels, began making incursions across the 857-kilometre-long West Kalimantan–Sarawak border as part of Sukarno's 'Crush Malaysia' [*Ganjang Malaysia*] campaign. The incursions developed into what is known as the confrontation [*konfrontasi*] (Mackie, 1974). The primary Indonesian tactic during the confrontation was to carry out small raids into Sarawak, attacking villages and terrorizing Iban and other Dayak communities in an attempt to provoke a native rebellion against the new Malaysian Federation. But the tactic largely failed as a result of the almost complete lack of genuine support among most of the border population (see McKeown, 1984, pp 103–105). These low-impact cross-border attacks lasted until 1965 when General (later President) Suharto came to power after crushing a failed coup attempt by leftist troops from Sukarno's presidential guard. The new regime quickly began to establish relations with Sarawak, culminating in the signing of the 1967 Basic Agreement between Malaysia and Indonesia, which

⁷ Dayak is an umbrella term referring to the indigenous population in Kalimantan, including the Iban.

recognized the border between the two nations. The right-wing Suharto regime quickly established a firm military presence in West Kalimantan, including the remote borderland of Kapuas Hulu. After President Suharto took power, Indonesian politics altered course, resulting in the launching of an anti-communist campaign, and an uprooting of what the military labelled 'communist insurgents' along the border (see Davidson and Kammen, 2002). Subsequently, from 1965 until well into the 1970s, guerrilla warfare took place in the borderland between communist rebels (former allies of Sukarno's war against Malaysia now taking refuge along the border) and the Indonesian army. As an elderly Iban informant in one of the border towns put it, 'old allies suddenly became enemies'. This abrupt shift towards anti-communism confused many Iban, who now had difficulty in distinguishing military troops from communist rebels.

The Indonesian army initiated a series of 'counterinsurgency' operations along the border, known as 'Operation Clean Sweep' [*Operasi Sapu Bersih*] (Rachman *et al*, 1970, pp 239–301). To begin with, military operations were mainly concentrated in the lower district of the province occupied by a large ethnic Chinese population. It was in the late 1960s and early 1970s that the military focus first shifted towards the more remote and rugged inland border areas like that inhabited by the Iban. The inland district of Kapuas Hulu (together with those of Sangau and Sinang) were labelled as the 'east sector' by the military command (Soemadi, 1974, p 94). As part of the 'Clean Sweep' campaign, in 1968, the military embarked on 'Operation Destruction' [*Operasi Penghantjuran*] in the eastern sector, the purpose of which was, as the name implies, a total annihilation of rebel activities in the borderland, especially the area inhabited by the Iban (Rachman *et al*, 1970, pp 295–297).

During both *konfrontasi* and the subsequent communist uprooting carried out by the Indonesian military, the majority of local communities avoided direct involvement in the conflicts. However, a small group of locals (mostly Iban) were drawn into the conflict between ABRI (the Indonesian armed forces) and the left-wing rebels (predominantly communist). The rebels active in the Kapuas Hulu borderland were now known as the PARAKU, an acronym for the North Kalimantan Peoples' Army [*Pasukan Rakyat Kalimantan Utara*]. The PARAKU consisted of a mix of former TNKU rebels, Sarawak Chinese communists and a small number of Iban and other Dayaks (see Sulistyorini, 2004). The main goal of the PARAKU was, like that of the former

TNKU, to liberate Sarawak from the Malaysian state. Consequently, fighting was oriented towards Sarawak, but the heavy engagement of the Indonesian Army in the border area meant that the PARAKU were forced to fight them as well.

Caught in the struggle between the two conflicting parties, the Iban were often forced to choose to be loyal towards one, leading to violent reprisals from the other. Some Iban men developed friendships with the PARAKU who came to their villages asking for supplies, which were often provided in return for helping out in the rice swiddens. If detected by the Indonesian army, such interactions with the 'enemy' were severely punished. Meanwhile, other Iban men were employed as scouts for Indonesian army patrols to track down the very same people, and as intelligence gatherers at the village level. The pragmatic practice of betting on two horses at the same time in order to deal with often conflicting outside demands is a strategy often applied among the ethnic communities in the borderland. In a region where state power and cross-border involvement fluctuate over time, this approach is understandable.

Shifting relationships with the fighting parties meant that Indonesian authorities often questioned Iban national loyalty. However, a small handful of Iban, especially those who managed to make good military connections, were appointed to the military rank of *panglima perang* (often translated as 'commander', but with connotations of honour and power) – a position created especially for the situation. These officers came to represent local communities in their dealings with the military, while in return they were expected to maintain security and solve conflict situations (see McKeown, 1984, p 388, and Lumenta, 2005, p 17). Each subdistrict had its own *Panglima*, who in turn appointed his own 'intelligence assistants' [*pembantu intelijen*] to keep him abreast of developments in his area. Wearing official military uniforms and regalia, these Iban officers were given their new titles of *panglima perang* on 17 August 1970 during a public ceremony celebrating Indonesian Independence Day.

Besides the *panglima perang*, the Indonesian army also took advantage of the already existing system of tribal leaders – *temenggong* and *patih* – originally invented by the Dutch, decades earlier (see Kater, 1883). The Indonesian Army appointed certain loyal (anti-communist) Iban as *Temenggong* and *Patih* who could support the *panglima* in keeping the PARAKU at bay. Some of these *panglima*, *temenggong* and *patih* were later awarded forest concessions in the area in return for

their help in uprooting the PARAKU. Today it is these men and their followers who form the basis of the Iban elite. Besides controlling their own concession, several of these men came to play a prominent role as liaison officers between local communities and various (national and transnational) logging interests. Further, high-ranking military officers, who, after returning to Jakarta, were appointed to various strategic positions within military and government circles, became powerful allies for these Iban elites.

The PARAKU period thus became an important initiator in determining subsequent power relations along the border. The networks established during this period of militarization are crucial to understanding current loyalties and the roots of local elite authority. The paper now turns to see how these legacies of the past have affected the subsequent period of struggle over the control of resources.

Engaging shifting forest regimes

In 1967, as a direct consequence of the anti-PARAKU campaign, the immediate border area was put under strict military control by the Indonesian state and categorized as a green 'safety belt' [*sabuk pengaman*]. The establishment of the DOM [*Daerah Operasi Militer*] set the stage for major resource exploitation along the border. In the province of West Kalimantan, President Suharto divided widespread forest areas along the border into large commercial forest concessions [*Hak Pengusaha Hutan*, or HPH] that provided the concession holder with the exploitation rights for a specific area for up to 20 years. Logging licences were in many instances awarded to military officers and local elites who had served along the border during the 1960–70s. In the West Kalimantan border region, Suharto (through the Ministry of Agriculture) allocated large tracts of forest (843,500 ha) to a foundation created by the Indonesian armed forces, named 'Yayasan Maju Kerja' (PT Yamaker).⁸ Despite being the principal permit holder, Yamaker possessed little forestry experience and did not have the required knowledge and investment to carry out productive logging. Therefore, it often leased out its concessions to various timber contractors, both Indonesian and Malaysian. PT Yamaker combined economic exploitation with national security concerns, and its operations encompassed a stretch of border from Tanjung Datu, the most western tip of the province at the

⁸ Decree of the Ministry of Agriculture, 1 November 1967 (HPH No Kep/79/11/1967).

coast, to the Embaloh River (Kapuas Hulu) in the east, of approximately 400 km in length (Wadley, 2005, p 149). The main activity of the foundation was logging in order to generate income for the armed forces, although in return for the HPH concessions, the foundation was officially required to improve the socioeconomic welfare of the border communities by promoting various rural development programmes.

In the 1970s, a small group of Iban war veterans and prominent community leaders travelled to Jakarta to address the board of the Yamaker Foundation and lobby for their part of the border region to be opened up to logging. They argued that logging would bring prosperity to local communities, but it was the vast forest resources – and to a lesser degree the need to keep external threats (communists) at bay – that quickly convinced PT Yamaker of the area's potential. Logging activities were initiated, and alongside the major role played by PT Yamaker, the Iban elite were granted licences to run their own forest concession. Consequently, these men opened up several local community-forest territories for timber logging on behalf of the broader Iban community. The concession was dubbed an 'Iban concession', although benefits ended up in the pockets of a few men (see also Harwell, 2000, pp 94–95). According to several local informants, these negotiations were carried out without the knowledge of the larger non-elite community in the borderland. As a local farmer in the Lanjak area stated:

'We just received pocket money for buying sugar – we got sweet-talked – the revenue from logging was not spread equally and this generated social jealousy.' (Personal interview, June 2007)

Traditional forest claims were largely disregarded, resulting in a certain degree of bitterness towards the timber companies and some of their partners within the local elite. Despite the initial promises of job creation implied in the company's name (*Maju Kerja*), PT Yamaker's workforce consisted largely of workers brought in from Java, and development efforts were generally half-hearted.⁹ In spite of community bitterness towards PT Yamaker's broken promises, there were only a few occasions during the 1980s when local communities showed their discontent with the timber companies through direct actions such as erecting roadblocks. Their animosity mostly went unspoken in public, as timber companies enjoyed the protection of powerful military interests

⁹ Sinar Harapan (2005), 'Dephan Tolak Bertanggung Jawab Tunggakan Yamaker', 26 March.

and were sanctioned by local elites and central state authorities. Wadley (1998, p 79), for example, has noted how, during meetings between locals and logging company agents, the Iban elite (that is, *temenggong* and *patih*) directly discouraged local communities from bringing grievances against companies.

The PT Yamaker concessions along the border were terminated in 1999 by the Habibie government in an attempt by the new government to make a political stand against Suharto's former cronies. After uncovering that Yamaker had grossly mismanaged its concessions and was involved in large-scale timber smuggling across the border, the Minister of Forestry and Plantations issued a decree transferring logging rights along the border from PT Yamaker to the state-owned company PT Perhutani.¹⁰ By contrast, the Iban concession was granted a continuation after its leaders emphasized the concession's crucial role in the development of the area.

Regional autonomy

The drastic political changes that took place in the wake of the economic crisis in 1997 and Suharto's resignation the following year quickly altered the dynamics of logging in the borderland. In an attempt to distribute political and economic power more evenly and give authority back to the districts, in the years after 1998, Indonesia's successive central governments began initiating national programmes of decentralization. Regional autonomy became the main topic for policy makers, and new legislation resulted in a series of reforms that gave local districts increased autonomy over sectors such as forestry (Perdu, 1999). The formerly all-powerful Ministry of Forestry suddenly lost part of its authority over forestry management in West Kalimantan, along with the large amount of revenue that this authority generated (Yasmi *et al*, 2006). The new legislation was often inconsistent with already existing laws, and therefore created a great deal of confusion and ambiguity in relation to the right to control forest resources. The distinction between what was considered to be legal and illegal timber extraction became increasingly blurred as central and district authorities often interpreted the laws differently (see Fox *et al*, 2005; McCarthy, 2004). A few years later, the *ad hoc* manner in which the decentralization of the forestry sector was implemented initiated a fierce contest for authority between the centre and the districts.

¹⁰ *Jakarta Post* (1999), 'Perhutani takes over Yamaker's forest areas', 27 May.

Even though the formal implementation of regional autonomy did not take place until 2001, the chaotic period of unstable and changing governments and numerous political reforms following the fall of Suharto quickly led to a kind of *de facto* regional autonomy in most of West Kalimantan. District officials grabbed the opportunities presented by the political and economic uncertainties associated with the transition period, and immediately began to implement their own reforms without the blessing of central government. Although the legal status of timber extraction during this transition period remained undecided, the district government in Kapuas Hulu and local ethnic elites nonetheless invited Malaysian timber entrepreneurs from across the border to come and harvest what they saw as their forest, in turn receiving royalties and revenue from local timber. These arrangements unfolded not only in the Kapuas Hulu district, but also in other border districts such as Sambas, Bengkayang, Sanggau and Sintang, where local populations also had long-term relationships with Chinese Malaysian timber entrepreneurs.¹¹

These arrangements boosted local district tax income [*pendapatan asli daerah*, or PAD], and transformed the small and sleepy border towns of Badau, Lanjak and Nanga Kantuk into prospering boom towns.¹² During this period, several Malaysian logging companies, such as the large Sibu-based Grand Atlantic Timber Sdn Bhd, entered the borderland.¹³ Only the Malaysian companies possessed the necessary financial aid and equipment to restart logging in the area. Decentralization and new fiscal arrangements further pushed the districts into becoming more self-reliant financially, and one way of generating much-needed local revenue was through timber harvesting carried out in the grey area between legality and illegality. A team of researchers from the provincial university in Pontianak (Tanjungpura University) estimated that 80% of the raw timber supply in the Malaysian province of Sarawak at the time came from West Kalimantan.¹⁴

Under the cover of the new decentralization laws, the *bupati* [district head] of Kapuas Hulu, Abang Tambul Husin, now had the legal authority

¹¹ For information on similar cross-border arrangements taking place in the borderland between East Kalimantan and Sabah, see, for example, Obidzinski *et al*, 2007.

¹² From being heavily dependent on central government grants prior to 1999, the Kapuas Hulu district local income PAD rose drastically in the following years. Out of the total budget, the PAD went from 0.7% in 2000 to 11.5% in 2002 (see Dermawan, 2004, p 45).

¹³ *Jakarta Post* (2000), 'Illegal logging rampant along Indonesian–Malaysian border', 23 May.

to issue permits for small-scale forest concessions of 100 hectares to so-called multipurpose community cooperatives [*Koperasi Serba Usaha*, or KSU].¹⁵ Consequently, new district regulations were issued and new business arrangements were established (Skep Kapuas Hulu, 2001). The KSUs in the borderland were usually made up of several communities who worked together with an outside entrepreneur, usually Malaysian. Their supposed aim was to empower the local communities by facilitating different kinds of joint development projects, but the only activity carried out under their auspices in the borderland was logging. In order to harvest as much timber as possible, the companies were involved with several cooperatives at the same time, and in this way they were able to exceed the 100 hectare limit of forest allowed to be cut. While locals were generally aware of the large profit the companies made from harvesting their timber in comparison with their own modest share, they felt that the benefits they received were much better than those on offer during the New Order period. This gave them the incentive to cooperate. Although the commissions were small, considering the value of the timber, they represented a considerable sum for the cash-poor border communities.

In 2002, central government issued a new government regulation (effective from 2003) that revoked the capacity of districts to issue logging permits, and whereby the centre attempted to reassert authority over forests. The formal argument put forward was that district governments were mismanaging the nation's forest resources, leading to an increase in illegal logging (Perdu, 2002). However, the *bupati* of Kapuas Hulu largely ignored this new regulation, as he claimed it was in conflict with the laws of regional autonomy and would lead to more than 34,000 people losing their employment.¹⁶

Negotiation and collusion

Agreements to establish the semi-legal cooperatives were largely mediated by locals who had existing relationships with the Malaysian Chinese timber entrepreneurs and well established networks at different levels of local government. Such patronage relationships between local elites, district officials and Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs,

¹⁴ *Jakarta Post* (2003), 'West Kalimantan unable to halt illegal logging', 18 March.

¹⁵ See Ministry of Forestry Directive No 05.1/Kpts-II/2000.

¹⁶ *Pontianak Post* (2003), 'Tambul: Tak Berpihak ke Rakyat Kecil, SK HPH 100 Ha dicabut, 34 Ribu Pekerja Nganggur', 4 October.

locally known as *tukei*, have until recently played an important role in a mixed, local economic strategy along the border (Wadley and Eilenberg, 2005). The brokers, who were part of the same local elite that had cooperated with New Order logging companies such as Yamaker, negotiated commissions for the various communities, for which they received fees locally referred to as premiums [*premi*]. In this role, the local elite controlled the flow and size of commissions and other benefits flowing towards the communities. Communities' lack of knowledge of timber prices made them vulnerable to exploitation, since they had no ability to measure the benefits received. While the size of fees paid to the elite were a well kept secret, they were the cause of much local speculation and envy, as members of the local elite made little effort to disguise their new wealth. Many purchased large four-wheel-drive trucks and other luxury goods. They also invested in property in both the district and provincial capitals, and sent their children to schools and universities in Pontianak and Jakarta. Although this extravagant display of wealth created resentment among the less fortunate majority, it mostly went unspoken, as the booming economy trickled down to everybody and the importance of elite networks and ability to attract wealthy entrepreneurs overshadowed such disdain.

In order to provide a better picture of the ambiguous character of these brokers, I will briefly introduce two members of the Iban elite, both of whom have multiple positions as traditional leaders, are active in the creation of the new district, and who, in various ways, have been engaged as brokers in the timber business during and since the New Order period.

Nanang is a middle-aged man in his fifties, who holds the position of Adat elder within the Lanjak area. In the 1970s during the height of the PARAKU, Nanang was appointed as an intelligence gatherer for the Indonesian army under the direct authority of General Soemadi. In return for assisting the army, Nanang, together with several other community leaders, was given control of their own timber concession. Besides co-running this Iban-headed company, Nanang used his military contacts and worked closely together with Pontianak-based Chinese timber contractors who worked the Yamaker concessions in the border area. His involvement included the role of broker between the companies and local communities. Nanang further consolidated his authority when, in the late 1980s, he was elected as the local representative for the Golkar party in the District Assembly in Putussibau. Nanang's position among local communities is dual: on the one hand, he enjoys

respect as an Adat elder because of his ability to solve local disputes; but on the other hand, his collusion with outsiders makes him an ambiguous figure. According to local standards, Nanang is doing quite well and has managed to send both his son and daughter to university in Pontianak.

Jabak, another prominent local leader engaged in the logging business, is a man in his sixties. In the late 1960s, Jabak was hired as a scout by the Indonesian military to hunt down PARAKU rebels in the upriver forest along the border. His military deeds and outspoken anti-communist sentiments later earned him the military rank of *panglima perang*, and in the mid-1970s he was appointed the customary rank of *temenggong*, which provided him with considerable leverage in negotiating with military and timber companies on behalf of local communities. Like Nanang, Jabak also became involved with the Yamaker concessionaries, and later, post-New Order, with the Malaysian Chinese *tukeis*. Jabak's strong local position and long-term cross-border connections made him one of the key collaborators of the Malaysian *tukeis*. Jabak is currently a member of the District Assembly for Golkar and an active lobbyist for the border district movement. Both Jabak and Nanang forged their roles as brokers between local communities and the *tukeis* by continuously negotiating the opportunities brought about by their dual roles.

'Wild' logging

In the period between 2003 and 2004, the rise in cross-border logging in the remote Kapuas Hulu district and consequent loss of national resources and state revenue began reaching the provincial and national newspapers. Headlines with clear nationalistic and critical undertones emerged, almost leading to international disputes between Indonesia and Malaysia. The Indonesian press accused Malaysia of colonizing the border area by 'eating the fruits' [*makan buahnya*] of West Kalimantan's natural resources.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Malaysian citizens (the *tukei*) were portrayed as gangsters who were looting national resources and threatening local communities.¹⁸ The disappearance across the border

¹⁷ *Suara Pembaruan* (2003), 'Lika-Liku Praktik Illegal Logging di Kalbar: Malaysia Makan Buahnya, Indonesia Telan Getahnya', 8 August; *Suara Pembaruan* (2004), 'Kapan "Penjajahan" Malaysia di Perbatasan Kalbar Berakhir', 9 May.

¹⁸ *Sinar Harapan* (2004), 'Gangster Bersenjata Malaysia Dilarporkan Kuasai Perbatasan', 22 April.

of huge quantities of timber, worth billions of rupiah, stirred national emotions.¹⁹ In late 2004, the Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (or SBY) subsequently designated this widespread ‘illegal’ logging as a problem of national importance and pledged ‘tough action’ against illegal loggers throughout Indonesia.²⁰ This statement was later followed by a presidential decree directed at eradicating all such ‘wild logging’ [*penebangan liar*] (Inpres, 2005).

These events seem to have had the desired effect. In December 2004, a team of provincial and district police and military officers, together with representatives of other government institutions, known as the West Kalimantan Consortium on Illegal Logging [Konsorsium Anti-Illegal Logging Kalimantan Barat, Kail Kalbar], initiated several coordinated raids on illegal logging operations along the border, including timber camps and sawmills in the study area. During these and subsequent raids, several Malaysian Chinese citizens and local Iban were apprehended, illegally operating sawmills and timber camps were shut down and machinery and timber confiscated (Dephut, 2005). Several months later, in July 2005, three Malaysian Chinese formerly working for the notorious Malaysian timber boss Apheng, operating in the borderland, were each sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment and fined up to Rp500 million by the district court in Putussibau for engaging in illegal logging.²¹ Several others are still awaiting trial – although Apheng himself escaped. According to local inhabitants interviewed, the story goes that Apheng was playing badminton in his upriver logging camp during these raids and was not arrested as he enjoyed the protection of local (well armed) communities. He consequently escaped into Malaysia, following the old PARAKU trails that criss-cross the hilly border.²²

These raids angered local communities, who had come to depend economically on cross-border logging. There were several incidents of confrontation between government anti-logging teams and locals led by members of the Iban elite, like Nanang and Jabak. Although these confrontations ended peacefully, local emotions ran high, as the govern-

¹⁹ *Pontianak Post*, ‘Sepekan, Ratusan Truk Kayu Keluar Masuk Badau’, 16 September.

²⁰ *Jakarta Post* (2004), ‘Susilo pledges stern action against illegal logging’, 12 December.

²¹ *Putusan-putusan Pengadilan Negeri Putussibau*, No 10/PID.B/2005/PN.PTSB, 18 Juli.

²² See also *Pontianak Post* (2005), ‘Jika Terkena Air, Tak Mau Basah Sendiri. Pengakuan Apeng; Buron Polda Kalbar Terkait Illegal Logging’, 11 October.

ment team was accused of being responsible for the loss of local jobs.²³ The situation deteriorated further when the provincial government initiated Operation Forest Conservation [Operasi Hutan Lestari] in March 2005, which resulted in a total ban on the export of already cut logs across the border. In response, a large group of locals, headed by *temenggong* Jabak, travelled to the district capital Putussibau to negotiate a lifting of the ban, arguing that the timber had not been illegally cut. It came from the community forest [*hutan adat*] and therefore was the property of local communities.²⁴ The group's efforts were fruitless, with the Forestry Minister, M.S. Kaban, declaring that local communities had no legal right to permit commercial timber harvesting.²⁵

In June 2005, a few months after the large-scale government crack-down on illegal logging, President SBY visited the province and made a helicopter inspection tour along the border (making the sudden crack-down on illegal logging seem more than a pure coincidence). Later, back in the provincial capital, the president praised the large development potential of the province, accentuating oil palm plantations as a development possibility along the border.²⁶ This, he said, was in line with a newly introduced government development plan, whose main goal was the creation of large-scale plantations, to run along the entire length of the Kalimantan–Malaysian border.²⁷

Through such large-scale development plans and an increase in military presence, the Indonesian government once again accentuated the perceived importance of strengthening the state presence and sovereignty along its borders with Malaysia. It was envisaged that the 'lawless' border region should once again be controlled by a strong army presence, and plantation 'development' should be the new green buffer zone with an expanding neighbour. In 2007, a large permanent military camp to house one army battalion was erected outside the district capital, Putussibau, and several smaller camps – each manned by one company of soldiers – were placed at strategic points along

²³ *Antara* (2005), 'Kail Sesali Pembiaran Perampasan Mobil Bukti Illegal Logging', 15 January.

²⁴ *Kompas* (2005), 'Warga protes Operasi Hutan Lestari', 23 March.

²⁵ *Pontianak Post* (2005), 'Masyarakat Perbatasan Minta Solusi Illegal Logging', 4 April.

²⁶ *Pontianak Post* (2005), 'Buka Lahan Sawit Sepanjang Perbatasan: Strategi Baru Amankan Batas Malaysia–Kalimantan', 10 May.

²⁷ *Jakarta Post* (2005), 'Government plans world's largest oil palm plantation', 18 June. The current status of this plan is unclear and has been met with major opposition by various environmental NGOs. Consequently the Indonesian authorities are currently downplaying the plan.

the border.²⁸ Underdevelopment and poor infrastructure along the border with Malaysia, together with the rise in cross-border logging, have long been seen by the central state as a national security problem. In the view of the central government, development and national security are closely connected (Bappenas, 2004). This focus on border development has been a continuous and dominant discourse since the 1960s. By creating jobs through plantation development, the government hopes that the locals will become less dependent on wage labour in Malaysia and become more attached to their own nation-state. Furthermore, by developing infrastructure such as roads in the border area, the government seeks to strengthen the international border against so-called illegal practices such as cross-border timber smuggling and undocumented labour migration.²⁹ Such large-scale development projects are elements of what James Scott (1998) has called 'state simplification', which is above all concerned with issues of legality and, ultimately, the increase of state control. As such, the borderland is a site of extreme anxiety for the modern Indonesian state. In the words of Abraham and van Schendel (2005, p 14):

'Social groups that systematically contest and bypass state control do not simply flout the letter of the law; with repeated transgressions over time, they bring into question the legitimacy of the state itself by questioning the state's ability to control its own territory.'

As a consequence, the Indonesian parliament has for a long time discussed the content of an upcoming Border Act Draft³⁰ that is likely to emphasize national security and a re-centralization of power by determining the levels of government and the departments that will be responsible for the future management of Indonesia's border regions and its natural resources (Rachmadi, 2006).

Among local communities, such initiatives were widely understood as part of central government's efforts to regain control of the border region, and especially of the lucrative forestry sector, which was partly lost with the official implementation of regional autonomy in 2001. Since the crackdown on logging activities in 2005, the borderland has

²⁸ *Jakarta Post* (2005), 'Military wants battalions in border areas', 8 August; *Pontianak Post* (2006), 'TNI Tempatkan 600 Personil: Jaga Sepanjang Perbatasan Kalbar', 2 August.

²⁹ *Pemerintah Kalimantan Barat* (2005), 'Presiden SBY: Kalbar Sangat Potensial untuk Maju', 23 June.

³⁰ *Equator* (2008), 'DPRI RI Sahkan RUU Perbatasan', 29 October.

been in a state of economic depression. The anger generated within local communities has been immense, and central government is perceived to be the catalyst and direct cause of this recent economic hardship. This feeds into a more general local disillusionment with the slow pace of border development that seems to nurture a local sense of borderland solidarity and a drive for greater autonomy (*Kalimantan Review*, 2005). It was in the wake of the above-mentioned events that the idea of a new autonomous border district was raised among the Iban elite.

Promoting a ‘north border district’

One unintended outcome of the early decentralization laws was the sudden rise of many new districts throughout the nation after Law No 22/1999 on Regional Autonomy opened up the possibility of dividing existing districts into new and smaller ones. The government’s justification for creating new districts assumes that such processes reflect the genuine aspirations of the people, and that the smaller administrative units will bring the government closer to the people and create new economic opportunities (Fitriani *et al*, 2005). Since 1999, several large Kalimantan districts bordering Malaysia have been subdivided, and the establishment of these new (often Dayak-dominated) districts has largely been dictated by ethnic politics and greater access to local resources. For example, in 1999 in West Kalimantan, the large district of Sambas was split into Sambas and Bengkayang districts; and in East Kalimantan, the resource-rich district of Bulungan was split into the districts of Bulungan, Malinau and Nunukan (see Tanasaldy, 2007; Wollenberg *et al*, 2006).

Officially, the process is known as *pemekaran*, or ‘blossoming’, but in reality the *pemekaran* process is a complex affair involving intricate political manoeuvrings. More often than not, the driving force behind *pemekaran* is the urge to gain authority over various resources rather than the establishment of more accountable local governments (Roth, 2007, p 146). The economic incentives of large financial transfers from central government to support new districts, and lucrative positions in the new administration, have undoubtedly been an important motivator for local elites. In the case discussed here, it has primarily been the struggle for a larger share of the benefits from forest resources and future border trade that has been the prime motivator.

Already in 2000, in the heyday of decentralization, the first preliminary steps in the creation of a new district were initiated by the Iban

elite. The overall goal has been to develop and ensure the common good of the border communities. As I will show, however, the movement for a new district is for now first and foremost an elite project. Although virtually everyone I interviewed in the five subdistricts in 2007 (passively) supported the idea of a new district, there was also widely expressed concern about the question of whether the local elite would deliver to all levels of society if and when a new district was created. The local elites' history of conspicuous consumption and individual enrichment, coupled with collusion with various government agents, is the prime reason for these reservations. This is not to say that all members among the local elite necessarily approach the *pemekaran* process and its future possible benefits solely with their own enrichment in mind. Since the major crackdown on logging activities, which has plunged the area into economic depression affecting all layers of local society, the importance of a genuine bottom-up process and local unity in the interests of full development of the area has continually been emphasized. Despite the past efforts of the elite to monopolize access to resources, the overall benefits of a new district would certainly trickle down and affect the life of ordinary people; and without the personal networks and political expertise of the elite, it would be impossible to bring the new district into existence.

After numerous meetings and discussions, in early March 2007, representatives and supporters from the five subdistricts (approximately 400 people) met the district head at an official gathering in the district office in Putussibau. A committee known as the 'Committee for the Establishment of the North Border District' [Panitia Pembentukan Kabupaten Perbatasan Utara, or PPKPU], the main body pursuing the formation of the new district, boldly proclaimed the new district name as 'The North Border District' [Kabupaten Perbatasan Utara]³¹ and presented a final report of several hundred pages containing the legally stipulated requirements for a new district and signatures of all local (elite) supporters (PPKPU, 2007). As indicated by the name, 'The North Border District', the PPKPU committee clearly specified the common ground and key resources of the five subdistricts 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 with insufficient infrastructure, health and education facilities (KNPDT, 2007). Members of the border committee stressed the fact

³¹ *Equator* (2007), 'Masyarakat Sepakati Nama Kabupaten Perbatasan Utara', 10 March.

that past and current district administrations had not succeeded in developing the border area compared with other areas in the district. As a result, they said, the (border) people were forced to act by themselves if any changes were to take place. During the heated debates in local meetings, becoming part of Malaysia was often mentioned as a final option, although the Iban generally accept their status as Indonesian citizens. Everybody knew that secession was an impossibility, but the threat clearly indicated the preparedness of the committee to play the 'border card' in political negotiations with the government. As an excited Iban supporter from Badau 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? We'll get help from smart people in Malaysia, [from the] Iban people there.' (Personal interview, March 2007)

The promotion of a common border identity, as a medium for the popular mobilization of the local communities, is clearly an attempt to downplay the question of ethnicity, which could end up becoming a major source of conflict in the future and split the movement. In other parts of Indonesia, *pemekaran* is often carried out along ethnic lines, which in many cases has resulted in violent conflicts (Duncan, 2007). Yet despite these attempts to ignore ethnicity, the issue is an important one. For example, during local meetings some Iban members made jokes about the movement being called the Free Iban Movement (Gerakan Iban Merdeka, or GIM), seeing it primarily as a movement for Iban revitalization.³² Although they do not express their concerns openly within the movement, the much smaller groups of Maloh and Melayu certainly have their reservations about these aspirations on the part of the Iban. The prospect of a large local Iban majority has serious implications for them, especially with regard to competition over political power and resources. In fact, there is a long history of confrontation between Maloh and Iban communities, going back to pre-colonial times of tribal warfare (King, 1976). Today Maloh communities have become isolated in small pockets surrounded by the much larger Iban communities, usually with little way of expanding. Furthermore, since independence, in contrast to the Iban, the Maloh have embraced formal

³² The reference here is to the Free Aceh Movement [Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM] in North Sumatra.

education on a much larger scale, resulting in a generally higher level of education and greater access to jobs in government administration. This makes both sides fearful of each other. The Maloh are afraid that the Iban majority will outmanoeuvre them by force of numbers, while the Iban fear that being less educated and holding fewer government positions, they will be subject to Maloh encroachment on land where they claim customary rights of access and channel benefits towards their own kin and communities. Despite this interethnic rivalry, the various groups realize that for the movement to succeed, the five subdistricts must at least officially appear as one 'border community'. Therefore such concerns remain veiled, even as tension continues to build along accentuated ethnic lines. During fieldwork in 2007, there were several cases of land disputes, mainly between the Iban and the Maloh. These cases were largely triggered by the current climate of uncertainty regarding central government plans for the border area and the potential lucrative outcomes of land ownership in the immediate border area, were it to become a centre of official cross-border commerce between the two countries.

On the surface, the *bupati* of Kapuas Hulu, Abang Tambul Husin, initially appeared supportive of the idea of a new district, attending meetings and personally donating funds to the border committee. But he also seemed to be deliberately stalling the process. Like the *bupati* in other resource-rich districts, he has, since the outset of regional autonomy, become a 'small king' [*raja kecil*] who has consolidated his power and support through income from natural resources. Informal interviews with district government officials in Putussibau build a picture of a general, although not publicly expressed, worry within the *bupati* office that the existing district risks losing major income from strategic resources such as timber and the future lucrative border trade if it is split. The creation of the 'North Border District' could further end up isolating the mother district, which is already the most remote in the province. The sheer distance to the provincial capital, more than 700 km away, makes border access highly important for the local economy, as Sarawak economic centres across the border are much closer than the provincial capital.

There are numerous reasons why the *bupati* office may seek to stall the *pemekaran* process. However, the core issue, according to an Iban committee member from Lanjak, is to maintain control of the resource-rich border region:

'The mother district seems to be hesitant about letting us go. It keeps on holding on to our tail [*ekor dipegang*]. It needs our rich natural resources to cover its expenses. I think if Putussibau lets the border area become a district, Putussibau will die.' (Personal interview, March 2007)

In late November 2007, a new governor was elected in West Kalimantan. Before the election, and as part of his campaign, the governor attended meetings in Pontianak and showed his support for the border movement, in return expecting that the border population would cast their votes his way.³³ This strong new ally in the highest administrative post in the province may put the required pressure on the district head in Kapuas Hulu to take the *pemekaran* process to the next level. But also, the central government has been especially hesitant and vague in relation to the border regions. As indicated in reports in several news media, the central government's plan to introduce a border law will not necessarily involve an increase in local autonomy, but more likely a reclaiming of central authority over these resource-rich outer regions of the state. This is a discussion that further feeds into current government efforts to slow down or even re-centralize parts of the decentralization process, especially where local governments' abilities to control natural resources are concerned (see Morishita, 2008; Wollenberg *et al*, 2006)). In recent years, the central government has expressed reservations about the high pace of transfer of authority and funds to the districts, arguing that the outcomes are mixed and often lead to rampant rent-seeking among political elites, while the benefits to local livelihoods are less obvious.³⁴ As indicated in this paper, this reclaiming of authority has been most obvious in the borderland studied through an increase in militarization and strict control over the utilization of the border's extensive natural resources.

Conclusion

The borderland can be seen as a critical site for exemplifying the changing dynamics of local-level politics that Indonesia is experiencing in the

³³ The new governor Cornelis-Christiandy Sanjaya, former *bupati* of Landak, is himself a Dayak or 'son of the soil' [*putra daerah*], as he often proclaimed during his campaigning for governor. Cornelis is the second Dayak governor to take office since 1960.

³⁴ *Jakarta Post* (2007), 'SBY slams self-interested new regions', 24 August; *Suara Karya* (2007), 'Mendagri: Pemekaran Belum Sejahterakan Rakyat', 19 September; *Pontianak Post* (2007), 'Kalla Desak Hentikan Pemekaran Daerah', 14 November.

wake of decentralization. In its role as key symbol of state sovereignty and maker of statehood, the borderland has become a place where the state is often most eager to govern and exercise its power. But, as illustrated throughout this paper, the borderland is also a place where state authority is most likely to be challenged, questioned and manipulated, as ethnic (border) communities often have multiple loyalties that transcend state borders and contradict state imaginations of sovereignty, territory and citizenship (Wilson and Donnan, 1998). The paper has shown how local ethnic elites in the remote district of Kapuas Hulu have responded to political transformations, and has illustrated their fraught relations with the state. The cases of illegal logging and *pemekaran* discussed demonstrate the complexity of relations between local elites and the state. Furthermore, the paper has argued that such negotiations are carried out by, on the one hand, appropriating the state rhetoric of development for local purposes and (personal) interests, while on the other using cross-border connections and trade to resist its authority, thus challenging state sovereignty and power.

The example of Kapuas Hulu also shows that the decentralization processes in Indonesia have created mass incentives for some segments of local society to capitalize on their new found authority, especially those with networks of influence reaching beyond the immediate local level. As pointed out by Schulte Nordholdt and van Klinken, the rise of localism or regionalism set off by decentralization ‘made certain hidden aspects of the state more explicit as it revealed the extent to which local actors used the state for their own interests’ (2007, p 24). Genuine attempts are made by certain resourceful segments of the local border population to attract the attention of highly placed politicians to the chronic underdevelopment experienced by the majority of the inhabitants of the immediate border area. But despite such good intentions, behind the scenes a mounting struggle for access to resources is exposing old sentiments and alliances often consolidated along ethnic lines. As this case demonstrates, the reshuffling of authority since decentralization has sharpened the (interethnic) struggle over resources at the local level. However, the benefits of this new political era of ‘regionalism’, enacted for nearly a decade in the Kapuas Hulu borderland, for now at least, continue to benefit only a small, politically adept, ethnic elite. How the larger, non-elite community in the borderland stands to gain from these recent political manoeuvres of *pemekaran* remains unclear.

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