

## **Claiming Authority at the Edges of the State**

Regional Autonomy and Local Politics in the West Kalimantan Borderlands

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# Claiming Authority at the Edges of the State: Regional Autonomy and Local Politics in the West Kalimantan Borderlands

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# Claiming Authority at the Edges of the State: Regional Autonomy and Local Politics in the West Kalimantan Borderlands<sup>1</sup>

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Laws regulating the decentralisation of authority and the fiscal balance (Laws Nos 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 new regulations circumvented provincial governments and gave district governments the authority to deal with most local affairs, including forest resource management.<sup>2</sup> Decentralisation processes have 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 have begun 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 edges of the state, where local communities now have access to new spaces for manoeuvre in their claims for a larger share of the formerly centralised control of forest resources.

In this paper I examine the special configuration of these new state-local relations in the border region of West Kalimantan. I focus on five ethnic Iban dominated subdistricts (*kecamatan*) within the remote district (*kabupaten*) of Kapuas Hulu, on the border of the Malaysian state of Sarawak.<sup>3</sup> In the province of West Kalimantan the Iban constitute a small minority, primarily residing in these five subdistricts, while across the border in Sarawak, the Iban are the single largest ethnic group.<sup>4</sup> The Kalimantan Iban reside within a contested border environment, where the Indonesian state's attempts to exercise control has revolved around the exploitation of natural resources, and the strengthening of the nation both as regards physical security and national identity.<sup>5</sup> I argue that these marginalised populations are not just passive victims of state power. Rather they are communities that have for centuries been involved in an ongoing effort to maintain control and access over their forest resources, and are now actively pursuing their own political goals and strategies in a complementary relationship with shifting state policies.

As an illustrative case I will draw on an ongoing campaign by the primarily ethnic Iban elite

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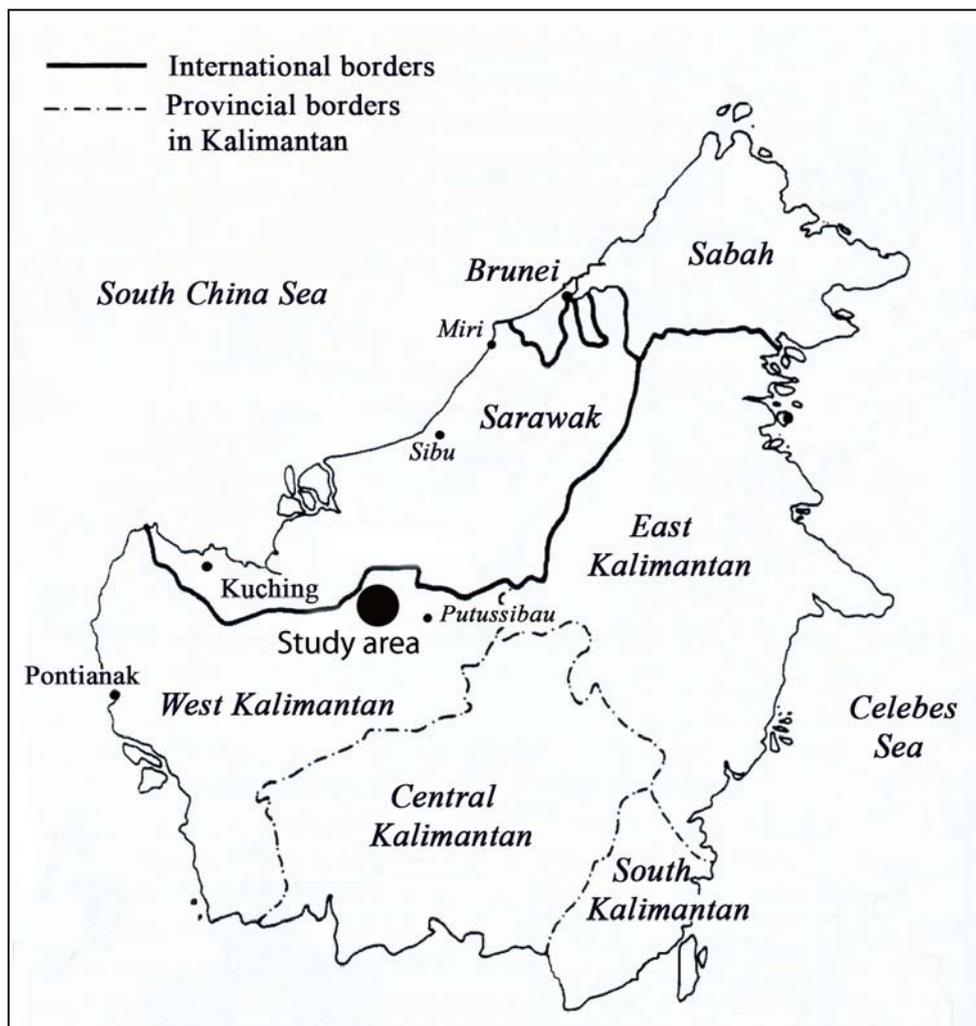
<sup>2</sup> Besides natural resource management the districts were also given authority over industry, agriculture, trade and investment, health and education.

<sup>3</sup> In the following discussion, 'the borderland' refers to these five subdistricts unless another context is specified.

<sup>4</sup> The Iban number more than 600,000 in the Malaysian state of Sarawak, where they make up slightly more than a quarter of the state's population. Smaller Iban groups live in Sabah, the Sultanate of Brunei, and along the international border in the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan (Sather 2004: 623). Approximately 14,000 Iban live in West Kalimantan (Wadley and Kuyah 2001: 723).

<sup>5</sup> Thus attempts to govern the border areas have come in waves; at times state control has been strong and hard at other times weak and loose.

in West Kalimantan to claim and negotiate authority over local forest resources.<sup>6</sup> This local elite have mediated access to resources through long term patronage relations that involve collaborations with different state agents (e.g. the military and district officials) and cross-border associates (e.g. Malaysian timber barons). Most recently, however, the struggle over access to resources has taken a new, political, turn. While earlier local attempts to claim authority over forest occurred in the twilight between legality and illegality (Wadley and Eilenberg 2005, 2006), such claims are now enacted through intricate political manoeuvring within the legal (but fuzzy) framework of recent government reform.



**Map of Borneo showing Kapuas Hulu**

Since 2000 there has been an Iban-initiated political movement in the border area whose main goal is 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 general border area in the form of increased militarisation and plantation development projects. By creating their own district this local elite expects to boost local autonomy

<sup>6</sup> Categorising a large group of people under one label can of course be problematic. It is not my attempt here to treat the Iban as a natural category but rather to show how ethnicity is strategically played upon in the borderland. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve further into the constructedness of ethnic categories in Kapuas Hulu. For a detailed discussion see King (2001).

and strengthen control of local forestlands (Equator Post 2006). It is further anticipated that controlling border access will become an important political and economic resource in the near future, as enhanced commercial exchange is expected to be developed between the two bordering regions (i.e. West Kalimantan and Sarawak) (Equator Post 2005a).

As I will show, this movement emerged as a local response or counter-movement towards the increase in outside encroachment on local matters. In line with the approach taken by Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken (2007: 2), I will explore these local political manoeuvres and new state–local dynamics by focusing on the role played by local elites and their network of influence. New opportunities have been created for border communities in Kapuas Hulu by the recent downward shift of authority put in motion by the decentralisation processes. These new opportunities have fed into the ongoing struggle for resources by a small politically organised ethnic elite – an elite who throughout time have managed to take advantage of and benefit from state inconsistencies and shifting forest regimes in the borderland of West Kalimantan.



### **The Badau-Lubok Antu border crossing, not yet officially opened**

According to Roth (2007: 122) the recent cases of administrative fragmentation (e.g. district splitting) 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 take a step back and examine the history of the borderland, from the period of authoritarian state rule and border militarisation in the 1960s until the post-authoritarian climate of today. The main question raised by developments during this time concerns who should control the region's vast forest resources and who should benefit most from harvesting them, local communities or the

central state. In order to situate my discussion of district splitting within the current processes of decentralisation and the overall history of forest extraction in the region, the next section will briefly introduce the main players involved and sketch the critical political transformations that have taken place in borderland since the onset of major forest extraction in the 1960s. The paper then addresses some of the wider implications of the more recent claims for border autonomy.

### **New Order legacies and the establishment of an ethnic elite**

The elite who have come to play a leading role in the struggle for control over natural resources in Kapuas Hulu is a 'traditional' elite in the sense that its core consists of the various traditional leaders of the ethnic communities inhabiting the borderland. 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 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 on 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 militarisation that occurred in the early days of the New Order regime. The foundations of the recent local elite power base and its networks of influence were in many ways laid in the early 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 leadership of President Sukarno, reacted strongly towards 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, in 1963 the Indonesian army began making incursions across the 857 kilometre-long West Kalimantan–Sarawak border. These attacks, which developed into what is known as Confrontation (*konfrontasi*) (Mackie 1974), 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 recognised the border between the two nations. The Suharto regime quickly established a presence in West Kalimantan, including the remote borderland of Kapuas Hulu. 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.<sup>7</sup>

During both *konfrontasi* and the subsequent communist insurgency 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 North Kalimantan People's Army, or PARAKU (*Pasukan Rakyat Kalimantan Utara*), as the communist insurgents were known.<sup>8</sup> Caught in the struggle, the Iban were often forced to choose to be loyal towards one party, leading to violent reprisals from the other. Some Iban men developed friendships with PARAKU insurgents 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

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<sup>7</sup> Many of these insurgents were originally volunteers trained and armed by the Indonesian army in camps along the border like Lanjak, Badau and Nanga Kantuk. As an elderly Iban informant in Lanjak put it; old allies suddenly became enemies when the communists went to the jungle in 1965 and returned as the PARAKU.

<sup>8</sup> The insurgents were mostly ethnic Chinese from Sarawak mixed with a small number of Iban and other Dayaks (Soemadi 1974).

interactions with the ‘enemy’ were severely punished.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile other Iban men were employed to track down the very same insurgents as scouts for Indonesian army patrols and as intelligence-gatherers at the village level. An example was an Iban man from the Lanjak area who worked as an intelligence-gatherer under the cover of *ngayap*, an Iban term for young men engaged in finding a wife. Such courtship pursuits often involve the bachelor visiting many different communities – a good cover for gathering intelligence. 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.

Although their shifting relationships with the fighting parties meant that Iban loyalty was often questioned by Indonesian authorities, a small handful of loyal Iban – especially those who managed to obtain good military connections – were appointed to the military rank of *Panglima Perang* (often translated as war 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. Each subdistrict had its own Panglima, who in turn appointed his own ‘intelligence assistants’ (*pembantu intelijen*) to keep him up to date with developments in his area. Some of the Panglima were later awarded forest concessions in the area in return for their help in uprooting the insurgents. Today it is these men and their followers who form the base of the Iban elite. Besides controlling their own concession many of these Iban came to play a prominent role as points of liaison between local communities and various (national and transnational) logging interests. In the process, they managed to channel some resources their way, investing in things such as schooling for their children and various small-scale businesses ventures like shops, restaurants and hotels. 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.

### Engaging shifting forest regimes

In 1967, as a direct consequence of the communist insurgency, the immediate border area was put under strict military control by the Indonesian state. The establishment of the DOM (*Daerah Operasi Militer*) set the stage for major resource exploitation along the border. In the West Kalimantan border region, Suharto allocated large tracts of forest (843,500 ha) to a foundation created by the Indonesian armed forces, named ‘*Yayasan Maju Kerja*’ (PT Yamaker). The main activity of this foundation was logging, to generate income for the armed forces.

In the early 1980s, 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 for 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 small forest concession. According to several local informants these negotiations were carried out without the knowledge of the larger non-elite community in the borderland (Interviews 2007).

During this period of resource extraction little or no compensation was awarded to the majority of non-elite inhabitants in the area for timber extracted from local forests. For local communities, the benefits were few, and even today most people recall the logging operations of the

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<sup>9</sup> In the subdistrict seat of Lanjak, there were several cases of Iban being tortured or killed for their alleged co-operation with insurgents. The dire consequences of this period of militarisation on local livelihoods have been touched upon in more detail elsewhere (Eilenberg 2006). For a more general discussion of this period in West Kalimantan history see Davidson (2003).

1980s and 1990s with indignation. As a local farmer in the Lanjak area stated:

We just received pocket money for buying sugar (*untuk gula saja*) – we got sweet-talked – the revenue from logging was not spread equally and this generated social jealousy (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. Despite 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 actions such as erecting roadblocks.<sup>10</sup> Their animosity mostly went unspoken in public as timber companies enjoyed the protection of powerful military interests and were sanctioned by central state authorities. The PT Yamaker concessions along the border were terminated in 1999 by the Habibie government (1998-1999) as a result of gross mismanagement of the concessions and handed over to the state owned PT Perhutani.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, the Iban concession was granted a continuation after its leaders emphasised the concession's crucial role in the development of the area (Harwell 2000).

### **Regional autonomy and decentralisation**

The drastic political changes that took place in the wake of the economic crisis in 1997 and Suharto's resignation in 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 programs of decentralisation. Regional autonomy became the main topic for policy makers and new legislation resulted in a series of reforms, which gave local districts increased autonomy over sectors such as forestry. The formerly all-powerful Ministry of Forestry suddenly lost most of its authority over forestry management along with the large amount of revenue this authority generated. Districts were now entitled to a much greater share of revenues produced by local timber extraction. 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 legal and illegal timber extraction became increasingly blurred as central and district authorities often interpreted the laws differently (see Fox et al. 2005). A few years later the ad hoc manner in which the decentralisation of the forestry sector was implemented initiated a fierce contest for authority between the centre and the districts.

Even though the formal implementation of regional autonomy first took place in 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 the central government. Wide scale corruption developed. Although the legal status of timber extraction during this transition period remained undecided, the district government in Kapuas Hulu and local ethnic communities nonetheless invited Malaysian timber

<sup>10</sup> There were several other logging companies operating in the area including PT Rimba Ramin and PT Mekanik (Wadley 1998).

<sup>11</sup> In 1999 the Minister of Forestry issued a decree transferring logging rights along the Malaysian-Indonesian border from the former military controlled PT Yamaker to the state-owned company PT Perhutani. Like PT Yamaker this company also largely mismanaged its concessions and generated little local support. It subsequently suspended its logging operations in the area.

barons from across the border to come and harvest what they saw as their forest, in turn receiving royalties and revenue from local timber. This arrangement boosted local district tax income (*Pendapatan Asli Daerah* or PAD) and transformed the small and sleepy border towns of Badau and Lanjak into prospering boomtowns. During this period several Malaysian-based logging companies entered the borderland. According to local timber workers interviewed, the local government and local communities had (unofficially) agreed to this arrangement in order to help boost the local economy in a time of economic crisis. Only the Malaysian companies possessed the necessary financial aid and equipment to restart logging in the area. A team of researchers from the provincial university in Pontianak (Tanjungpura University) estimated that 80 percent of the raw timber supply in the Malaysian province of Sarawak at the time came from West Kalimantan (Jakarta Post 2003). These companies' engagement in logging across the border can be seen as an outcome of the economic and political climate in the borderland and in Indonesia as a whole, together with a rise in international demand for timber and easy access to the area from across the border. Decentralisation and new fiscal arrangements further pushed the districts to become 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.<sup>12</sup>



### **The border road connecting Badau with the district seat of Putussibau**

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with timber broker, Lanjak, 2002. In 2002 central government issued a new government regulation that revoked the capacity of districts to issue logging permits and thereby the centre attempted to re-assert authority over forest. The formal argument was that district governments were mismanaging the nation's forest resources leading to an increase in illegal logging (Peraturan Pemerintah 2002). However the Kapuas Hulu district government largely ignored this regulation.

In West Kalimantan, as in many other provinces rich in natural resources, the time of uncertainty following the fall of Suharto thus provided a welcome opportunity for district governments and the local elite to take control of the formerly centralised logging business. Under the cover of the new decentralisation laws, the *bupati* (district head) of Kapuas Hulu had the legal authority to issue permits for small-scale forest concessions of 100 hectares.<sup>13</sup> As a result, new district regulations were issued and new business arrangements were established (Keputusan Kapuas Hulu 2000). The supposed aim of such co-operatives was to empower local communities by facilitating different kinds of joint development projects, but the only activity carried out under their auspices has been logging. In order to harvest as much timber as possible, the companies were involved with several co-operatives at the same time, and in this way they were able to exceed the 100 hectare limit of forest 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 New Order period. This gave them the incentive to co-operate. Although the commissions were small, considering the value of the timber, they represented a considerable sum for the cash-poor non-elite population. Furthermore, these local communities wanted to gain as much from the current situation as possible, since, as one local resident commented, ‘You never know when the situation will change, so for now we take as much as we can’ (Interview October 2003). This statement reflected a general concern about what might happen to local forest resources in a politically uncertain future.

Local rumours suggest that several of the Malaysian Chinese logging entrepreneurs, locally known as *tukei*, were using the knowledge of ethnically Chinese former PARAKU insurgents in their logging operations along the border and even directly employing PARAKU veterans. Such explanations were often used by locals to explain the *tukeis*’ intimate knowledge of the forest areas along the border. Moreover, several *tukei* logging camps were situated in the same locations as former PARAKU guerrilla camps. Although such connections might have some role in explaining the effectiveness of the *tukeis*’ operations in the area, a more significant explanation is that the Malaysian Chinese have decades of experience carrying out logging operations in Iban-dominated areas in Malaysia. A long tradition of labour migration to the timber camps across the border in Malaysia has furthermore resulted in various business relationships between Malaysian Chinese logging operators and Kalimantan Iban.

Agreements to establish the semi-legal co-operatives mentioned earlier were largely mediated by locals who had existing relationships with the *tukeis* and well-established networks at different levels of local government. Such patronage relations between local elites, district officials and Malaysian *tukeis* 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, negotiated commissions for the various communities, for which they received fees locally referred to as premiums (*mendapat premi*). In this role, the local elite controlled the flow and size of commissions and other benefits flowing towards the communities. The community’s 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 have also invested in property in both the district and provincial capitals, and have sent their children to schools and universities in Pontianak and Jakarta.

This logging was labelled as being illegal by the Indonesian state (*penebangan liar*) because it was out of the control of the central government. However, it was unofficially sanctioned by

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<sup>13</sup> See Ministry of Forestry Directive No. 05.1/Kpts-II/2000 that provided authority to all districts across Indonesia to issue licences for small-scale timber extraction on less than 100 ha (*Hak Pemungutan Hasil Hutan*, HPHH). The bupati at the time (1995-2000) was a well-educated and well-connected politician of Iban-Maloh origin from one of the border subdistricts, born across the border in Malaysia.

district heads, and to a certain degree local communities. In 2004 this type of widespread ‘illegal’ logging was designated a problem of national importance. It is important to note here that state definitions of what is deemed illegal are situational and inconsistent, depending on changes in government administrations and policies: a reality that has resulted in a large degree of confusion among local border communities and a heightened mistrust towards state laws and regulations. As one local Iban formerly employed in the booming logging business commented:

We are confused. What is legal, what is illegal? Who knows what the government plans are, central or local (Interview, June 2007).

Issues of legality aside, in 2003-2004 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, nearly leading to international disputes between Indonesia and Malaysia. The Indonesian press accused Malaysia of colonising the border area by ‘eating the fruits’ (*makan buahnya*) of West Kalimantan’s natural resources (*Suara Pembaruan* 2003; 2004). Meanwhile Malaysian citizens (the *tukei*) were portrayed as gangsters who were looting national resources and threatening local communities (*Sinar Harapan* 2004). The disappearance across the border of huge quantities of timber, worth billions of rupiah, stirred national emotions (*Pontianak Post* 2003). The Indonesian president subsequently pledged ‘tough action’ against illegal loggers throughout Indonesia (*Jakarta Post* 2004). This statement was followed by a presidential decree directed at eradicating all such illegal practices throughout Indonesia (Instruksi Presiden Republik Indonesia 2005).

These events seemed to have had the desired effect. 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 raids several Malaysian Chinese citizens and local Iban were apprehended, and illegally operating sawmills and timber camps were shut down and machinery and timber confiscated (Departmen Kehutanan Republik Indonesia 2005). A month later three Malaysian Chinese formerly working for the notorious local timber boss Apheng were each sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment for engaging in illegal logging. In 2005, several others were still awaiting trial in the district capital Putussibau – while Apheng himself had escaped (*Equator Post* 2005b).<sup>14</sup>

These raids angered local communities who had come to depend economically on cross-border logging. There were several incidents of confrontation between the Kail Kalbar team and locals often led by members of the Iban elite.<sup>15</sup> Although these confrontations ended peacefully, local emotions ran high, as the government team was accused of being responsible for the loss of local jobs (*Antara* 2005). The situation deteriorated further when the provincial government initiated Operation Everlasting Forest (*Operasi Hutan Lestari*), which resulted in a total ban on the export of already cut logs across the border. In response a large group of locals travelled to the district capital Putussibau to negotiate a lifting of the ban, arguing that the timber came from community forest (*hutan adat*) and therefore was the property of local communities. 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. As of 2005, no resolution had been found (*Pontianak Post* 2005). Concern for the loss of future income opportunities was also widely

<sup>14</sup> 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 crisscrossing the hilly border. The incident is locally portrayed as ‘Apheng’s great escape’. The local people often referred to him as a brave man, a god or saviour (*dewa*) who had made the area prosper in a way the former nationally owned companies had failed to do (Interviews, July 2007). Meanwhile, in the national media, he was being portrayed as a dangerous gangster.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on these incidents see Wadley and Eilenberg (2006).

displayed as graffiti on houses and shops in the town of Lanjak. One local shop house carried the following message written in large letters: ‘If the timber business is shut down the people will be bankrupt.’



**‘If logging is shut down the people will be bankrupt’**

In June 2005, a few months after a government crackdown on illegal logging along the border, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono 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 and rubber plantations as a development possibility along the border. 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 (Jakarta Post 2005a).<sup>16</sup>

Through such large-scale development plans and an increase in military presence the Indonesian government once again accentuated the perceived importance of strengthening state presence and sovereignty along its borders with Malaysia (Jakarta Post 2005b). Among local communities such initiatives were widely understood as part of the 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. More widely these events feed into current government effort to slow down or even re-centralise parts of the decentralisation process, especially where local governments’ ability to control natural resources like forests are concerned (Wollenberg et al. 2006). The plans for large-scale development projects and subsequent attempts to strengthen border security enacted by the central government were thus linked by local

<sup>16</sup> The current status of this plan is unclear. It has received major critique from various environmental NGOs and foreign governments and is consequently being downplayed by the Indonesian authorities.

politicians to contemporary attempts to stop illegal logging and timber smuggling along the border. But rather than curbing the degradation of forest resources and opening plantations, these plans are likely to mean that more forest is cleared and more timber is provided for trade. This time, however, control will be back in the hands of central and provincial level players, as was the case in the Suharto days (Interview with District Assembly member, Putussibau, 2005).

### **Security through development**

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 and provincial governments, development and national security are closely connected. 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 provincial government seeks to strengthen the international border against so-called illegal practices like cross-border timber smuggling and undocumented labour migration (Pemerintah Kalimantan Barat 2005, 2006). Such large scale development projects are elements of what James Scott has called 'state simplification', which is above all concerned with issues of legality and ultimately, the increase of state control (Scott 1998). As such the borderland is a site of extreme anxiety for the modern Indonesian state. In the words of Abraham and Schendel (2005: 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 is currently discussing the content of a proposed Border Act Draft (*Rancangan Undang-undang Perbatasan*, RUU) that is likely to emphasise national security and a re-centralisation 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). This increase in government interest in the border region will probably intensify the competition for forest resources among local people, government and private companies.

Among other things, local communities fear that locally claimed land along the border is in danger of being forcefully converted into plantations (oil palm or rubber) (Wakker 2006). A recent Presidential Regulation states that the government can force the release of land when this is in the public interest (Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia 2005).<sup>17</sup> The justification for the current development plan for the border area in terms of the public interest (national security and development) has led to fears on the part of the local community that the government will apply this regulation in order to revoke their newly gained authority over local forestlands. As noted earlier, in the heyday of decentralisation reforms local communities experienced a degree of regional autonomy that created room for manoeuvre in dealing with local forest resources without interference from central government. But now as power relations between the centre and the districts once again seem to be changing locals are concerned about how those changes will affect the status of their land. These fears are accentuated by the fact that very few communities have actual formal (legal) ownership over their lands and therefore are vulnerable to encroachment from plantation companies backed by state power and regulations. Centuries of engagement in kinship relations and labour migration across the border into Sarawak (Eilenberg and Wadley under review) have made local communities aware of the way Iban in Sarawak have experienced major loss of customary lands as a consequence of state initiated oil palm development. Consequently a majority

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<sup>17</sup> This regulation restates the Agrarian Land Law of the Dutch, which was later incorporated into the 1960s legislation enabling the alienation of land in the national interest.

of local communities along the border have a healthy suspicion of large-scale plantation projects.<sup>18</sup>

Since the crack-down on logging activities in 2005 the borderland has been in a state of economic depression. The anger generated within local communities has been immense. The central and provincial government is perceived as 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 more autonomy. As proclaimed by an Iban customary leader:

For too many years we have been controlled and managed by others and still our lives are the same as they were 50 years ago. Nothing has changed. We intend to manage our own region (*ngurus daerah kita sendiri*). We will only get the maximum benefits if we manage things ourselves. Government promises and programs never ‘touch the ground’ (*tidak menyentuh*) as they are all top-down (Interview, March 2007).

This and similar statements clearly reflect long-standing bitterness and dissatisfaction with the central government’s past lack of commitment to integrating the borderland into the broader national economy beyond extracting its natural resources. These local struggles over forest management and the shifting and overlapping spheres of authority between local elites, district and central governments form the background to contemporary political manoeuvres designed to create a new autonomous border district in West Kalimantan. It was in the wake of these events that the ideas of a new autonomous border-district were raised among the local ethnic elite – an elite that had gained strength and useful political networks through past and present engagement in the lucrative timber business.

### **Engaging with formal politics**

One early outcome of decentralisation 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 districts.<sup>19</sup> As stipulated in Government Regulation No. 129/2000 proposals for new districts must be able to demonstrate a capacity for regional autonomy.<sup>20</sup> The viability of a new district is measured in terms such as economic capacity, regional potential, population size and land area. 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). These expectations have led to a rush to create new districts all over Indonesia. Officially, the process is known as *pemekaran*, or ‘blossoming’ but in reality the pemekaran process is a complex affair involving intricate political manoeuvres.<sup>21</sup> Successful district splitting has largely been dependent on the ability to draw on a broad network ranging across all administrative levels of government and considerable financial backing. Pemekaran processes thus provide a good opportunity to study the intricate web of alliances and networks that form the basis of new and evolving relationships between the local society and the

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<sup>18</sup> Local communities are not entirely opposed to plantations as such and many are quite favourably disposed towards small-scale plantations if they can uphold control of their land and engage in co-operation with outside investors. The fear is that government will forcibly allocate their land to plantation companies and provide these companies with legally binding licences, meaning that local communities will have to work as colliers on their own land.

<sup>19</sup> The numbers of new districts have risen dramatically, from 292 in 1998 to 483 in early 2007 (International Crisis Group 2007). Law No. 22/1999 has since been revised and superseded by the more restrictive Law No. 32/2004, which, among other things, raised the minimum number of subdistricts to be included in a new district from three to five. This tightening was an attempt to slow down the process of district-splitting.

<sup>20</sup> The procedures and criteria in Regulation No. 129/2000 are currently being amended in parliament.

<sup>21</sup> Pemekaran not only refers to the splitting of districts but also to other levels of administrative fragmentation like the creation of new provinces (see Roth 2007 and Kimura 2006) subdistricts, villages and hamlets.

state. More often than not the driving force behind pemekaran has been the urge to gain authority over various resources rather than the establishment of more accountable local governments (Roth 2007: 146). The economic incentives of large financial transfers from the central government to support new districts, and lucrative positions in the new administration, have undoubtedly been an important motivator for local elites.<sup>22</sup> 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.

In 2000, in the heyday of decentralisation, the first preliminary steps in the creation of a new district were initiated by small Iban elites. A movement for the creation of a new district was instigated, but progress was disrupted by the booming timber business and consequent growth in the local economy discussed earlier. It was only several years later, after the logging adventure came to a sudden end and the region was once again plunged into economic depression, that there was renewed interest in the possible formation of a new district. The leading members of the movement in support of pemekaran are primarily ethnic Iban from five bordering subdistricts situated along the international border in the large district of Kapuas Hulu.<sup>23</sup> The two other ethnic groups that inhabit the area, the Maloh and Melayu,<sup>24</sup> also support the movement, but their minority status makes them less powerful in decision-making.<sup>25</sup> The core members are all part of a small but prominent elite that consist of various community leaders, members of the district assembly (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah* or DPRD), district government officials, university lecturers and a handful of Jakarta-based supporters. The community leaders consist of Iban, Maloh (*temenggung*) and Melayu (*punggawa*) tribal-heads, deputy tribal-heads (*patih*), traditional military leaders (*panglima*), village heads (*kepala desa*) and other customary leaders (*tokoh adat*). The movement further draws on the support of a group of young, educated but jobless men, who dream of the many new jobs to be created by a new district administration. All these major players have complex positions in relation to each other and within their own communities.

The overall goals of the movement as portrayed by its founders are to develop and ensure the common good of the border communities. As I will show, however, the movement is for now first and foremost an elite project. Although virtually everyone I interviewed in the five subdistricts in 2007 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 is created. The local elites' history of conspicuous consumption and individual enrichment, followed by collusion with various government agents, is the prime reason for these reservations. Moreover, it was the very same elite who acted as brokers between local communities, the district government and the Malaysian timber barons during the recent logging boom. 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 emphasised. Despite past efforts of the elite to monopolise 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.

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<sup>22</sup> The decentralisation laws (No. 22/1999 and No. 32/2004) stipulate that new districts will receive subsidies in form of both general allocation funds (*dana alokasi umum*) and special allocation funds (*dana alokasi khusus*) from the central government.

<sup>23</sup> The five subdistricts are Batang Lupar, Embaloh Hulu, Badau, Empanang and Puring Kencana. In total they compose approximately 22 percent of Kapuas Hulu.

<sup>24</sup> *Melayu* is the local term for the predominately Muslim population who live by fishing in the area's large lakes (compared to the predominately rice-growing Christian Iban and Maloh populations).

<sup>25</sup> Issues of interethnic distrust, i.e. the Maloh and Melayu not trusting the dominate Iban group, play into the dynamics of this movement and will be discussed below.



### **Borderlanders greet the Governor and Bupati on a visit to Lanjak in 2007**

After numerous meetings and discussions, in early March 2007 representatives and supporters from the five subdistricts (approximately 400 people) met with 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 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 (Equator 2007). This report was the outcome of an unofficial feasibility study carried out by the committee in co-operation with a Jakarta-based NGO which emphasised the considerable potential of the border area and its current underdevelopment (Panitia Pembentukan Kabupaten Perbatasan Utara 2007).

In the period between 2004 and 2007 the movement carried out an extensive lobbying campaign. In February 2006 it sent out its first formal letter of aspiration (*surat aspirasi masyarakat*) to the bupati, presenting the plan for a new district. To give the letter an extra touch of formality the name of the proposed district i.e. ‘The North Border District’ (*Kabupaten Perbatasan Utara*) was stamped on the letterhead in large black type. Then in late 2007 the committee made several attempts to precipitate the pemekaran process. It was well aware that rapid progress on the

establishment of the new district was imperative, given the looming national election and the new government Border Act (RUU) mentioned earlier. The outcome of the general elections in 2009 could mean that the movement had to begin the whole lobbying process and alliance making all over again, as old parliamentary allies might be replaced and a new president elected. Furthermore, from the middle of 2008, members of parliament would be too busy campaigning for their respective parties to push for the subdivision of the district.

With the disappointments of failed efforts of the past in mind, the border movement has been eager to push on. Early in the presidency of Megawati (2001-2004), the same local elite had applied to the central government to be recognised 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 (in line with Batam). According to leading movement members a letter of decree (*surat keputusan*) that would have granted special authority to the border area (*otorita perbatasan*) was under preparation, but then in 2004 a new president was elected and the decree was supposedly postponed.<sup>26</sup> During the Megawati presidency the government prepared a development strategy for the Kalimantan border region and according to the members of the movement the change in the central administration turned out to be a big set back for the lobbying efforts of the border movement at the time (see BAPPENAS 2003). In a statement outlining the urgency of the current campaign, a Badau based committee 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 (Interview, March 2007).

However the most crucial task is to forestall the possible government suspension of all district splitting that is currently being discussed in parliament. This moratorium was proposed by the president in 2007, and was based on his strong criticism of the general lack of fiscal capacity of new regions to look after themselves (Jakarta Post 2007a). The huge popularity of pemekaran throughout Indonesia has put immense strain on central government resources and budget while outcomes, in form of improved services for the majority of people, have so far been meagre. Meanwhile, corruption and nepotism have reportedly increased – a development which the central government is largely blaming on self-interested regional elites.<sup>27</sup>

### **Justifying a new border district and the significance of identity politics**

The first step in the pemekaran process as stipulated in the government laws and regulations is to demonstrate the viability of a possible new district and justify the need for its creation. As indicated in the name ‘The North Border District’, the PPKPU committee has clearly specified the common ground and key resources of the five subdistricts involved. The main argument of the committee has been the fact that despite its vast natural resources, the border area – after more than 60 years of Indonesian independence – is still categorised as a region of extreme poverty (*daerah tertinggal*) with insufficient infrastructure, health and education facilities (Kementerian Negara Pembangunan Daerah Tertinggal 2007). As suggested by participants during an August 2006 borderland ‘awareness-raising’ meeting (*rapat sosialisasi perbatasan*) in Badau that was held to discuss the advantages of district splitting, ‘It has now been 63 years since we became an

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<sup>26</sup> A few days before President Megawati left office in October 2004 she signed the revised decentralisation Law No. 32/2004 which replaced the former law from 1999. This new law states the requirements for creating a special administrative zone (*kawasan khusus*) in an area (within a district or province) of special importance for national interest. This autonomous zone among other things would enjoy the status of a free trade zone (Law No. 32/2004, chapter II, part 2, article 9).

<sup>27</sup> Such proclamations have since fostered widespread protest from provincial and district assembly members who accuse the central government of being arrogant and not committed to the development of the outer regions and the relocation of promised economic benefits from the centre to its margins (Pontianak Post 2007).

independent nation but our roads are still yellow [dirt] and at night our lamps are still dark. Is this the results of independence?' A chorus of voices from the crowd replied, 'We still live in misery and poverty. Development has left us behind' (Panitia Pembentukan Kabupaten Perbatasan Utara 2007).

The main argument put forward for splitting the present Kapuas Hulu district was its sheer size and lack of capacity to develop its outer subdistricts. The 'mother' district (*kabupaten induk*) consists of no less than 23 subdistricts spread over 29,842 square kilometres (20.33 percent of West Kalimantan) with a population of only 209,860 (Kabupaten Kapuas Hulu 2006).<sup>28</sup> As an ex-DPRD member and spokesman of the committee stated:

Geographically the district is too large. It is like a piece of bread we break here and there (*kita pecah sana, pecah sana*). In the end each subdistrict only gets a little piece. Eventually it will starve (Interview, April 2007)

Members of the border committee stressed the fact that past and current district administrations had not succeeded in developing the border area compared to 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. As leading members of the committee announced to a local newspaper, a new border district would reflect the true aspirations of local communities (Akcaya 2007a).

During the heated debates in local meetings, becoming part of Malaysia was often mentioned as a final option. Although everybody knew that secession was an impossibility, the threat clearly indicated the preparedness of the committee to play the 'border card' in political negotiations with the district and provincial governments. As an excited Iban entrepreneur and supporter from Badau announced:

We will just join Malaysia. We will organise training over there and rebel. We will still try the nice way first (*cara-cara bagus*) 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 (Interview, March 2007).

During the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia, Raja Brooke, the ruler of Sarawak, offered the Iban border population the opportunity to join the much larger Iban population across the border.<sup>29</sup> 'We are all related (*Kami semoa kaban*)' is a common statement made when talking about their 'Iban cousins' on the other side of the border (Eilenberg 2006). The historical cross-border relations and ongoing support (mostly rhetorical) from small sections of the Iban population in Sarawak definitely boost local Iban confidence. As one committee member commented during a local meeting, 'We can make things very difficult for them (district and provincial officials)', referring to former acts of vigilantism<sup>30</sup> and close ethnic ties to the Iban in Sarawak (Wadley and Eilenberg 2006).<sup>31</sup>

The promotion of a common border identity as a medium for popular mobilisation of the local communities is clearly an attempt to downplay the question of ethnicity, which could end up becoming a major source of conflict and split the movement. In other parts of Indonesia pemekaran

<sup>28</sup> The five subdistricts (covering approximately 6296 square kilometres) that wish to split make up the largest stretch of territory along the international border out of a total of seven border subdistricts within the 'mother' district. According to the border committee the population reached approximately 37,000 in 2007 (PPKPU 2007).

<sup>29</sup> By promoting district autonomy the founders of the decentralisation process hoped to prevent acts of separatism that eventually could break up the country (Aspinall and Fealy 2003: 4).

<sup>30</sup> The Iban 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 (Wadley and Eilenberg 2006).

<sup>31</sup> Despite these statements the speakers always stressed that everything they did would have to conform to the law (Law No. 32/2004), and that they should not attempt to win some sort of independence like Aceh. No attempt should be made to disturb the stability of the border (*stabilitas perbatasan*).

is often carried out along ethnic lines, which in many cases has resulted in violent conflicts (Duncan 2007; International Crisis Group 2005). Yet despite these attempts to ignore ethnicity, the issue is definitely 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 revitalisation.<sup>32</sup> Among some members such jokes express the dreams of promoting Iban *adat* (traditional) authority and reclaiming control of what they perceive as their traditional territory, now claimed by other ethnic groups.

Although they do not express their concerns openly within the movement, the much smaller groups of Maloh and Melayu in the region certainly have their reservations about these aspirations on the part of the Iban. The prospect of a large local Iban majority has severe 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.<sup>33</sup> As both groups have moved around extensively in the last several hundred years, community boundaries have blurred and are continually being renegotiated (Wadley 2002). But generally today Maloh communities have become isolated in small pockets surrounded by the much larger Iban communities, usually with little way of expanding. Furthermore, in contrast to the Iban, the Maloh have embraced formal education on a much larger scale since independence, resulting in 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 traditional rights of access and that channels benefits towards their own kin and communities.

Despite this inter-ethnic rivalry the various groups realise that for the movement to succeed the five subdistricts must appear as one community. Therefore such concerns remain veiled, even as tension continues to build. During my fieldwork in 2007 there were several cases of conflict and disagreement between mainly Iban and Maloh communities over control of access to land, especially disputes over land ownership. 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 if, as indicated by numerous government statements, the area becomes a centre of official cross-border commerce between the two countries.

After popular mobilisation, the next step in the pemekaran process is to secure the approval of all government administrative levels. Approval is needed from the district assembly, the bupati, the provincial assembly, the governor, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Indonesian national parliament and finally the president. This part of the process can be extremely expensive and time-consuming, and extensive lobbying is required.<sup>34</sup> It is therefore a process that demands the ability to draw on multiple networks at all levels of government. The movement first experienced problems when approaching the district office, despite the initial go-ahead from the district assembly following a successful lobbying campaign in April 2006.<sup>35</sup> On the surface the bupati of Kapuas Hulu initially appeared supportive, attending meetings and personally donating funds to the border

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<sup>32</sup> The reference here is to the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) in North Sumatra (Reed Wadley, personal communication 12 June 2006).

<sup>33</sup> In Kapuas Hulu the hilly forested area along the border and fertile valleys are predominantly occupied and shared by Iban and Maloh communities, while the Melayu communities mostly consist of fishermen in the low-water lakes at the foot of the hills.

<sup>34</sup> During an interview a member of the border committee emphasised that large bribes have to be paid in order to gain the support from provincial and central parliamentarians. Currently one of the main activities among committee members has been raising the needed cash for lobbying and transport back and forth between the different levels of government administration. Committee members have used their own savings to keep the process running.

<sup>35</sup> On 20 April 2006, approximately 100 people representing the five subdistricts met with members of district assembly in 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 (Keputusan Kapuas Hulu 2006). Prior to issuing this decree a handful of district assembly members originating from the border area, had carried out intensive lobbying within the assembly.

committee. But he also seemed to be deliberately stalling the next step in the process.<sup>36</sup> Like the bupati in other resource rich districts he has 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 spoken, worry within the bupati’s office that the existing district risks losing major income from strategic resources like timber and the future lucrative border trade if it is split.<sup>37</sup> The creation of ‘The North Border District’ could further end up isolating the mother district, which is already the most remote district in the province.<sup>38</sup> 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’s 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:<sup>39</sup>

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 on holding on to our tail (*ekor dipegang*). There is too much potential so they cannot let go and let the new district emerge. For example within the territorial boundary of the five subdistricts there is still plenty of valuable timber, as well as two large national parks (Betung Kerihun and Danau Sentarum) and the northern bound national highway (*Jalan Lintas Utara*, which connects the district to the border post in Badau). It will be difficult for the mother district to let the five subdistricts go. It needs our rich natural resources to cover its expenses. I think if Putussibau lets the border area become a district, Putussibau will die. If the head of the district refuses to give his recommendation then the Governor won’t either, and that’s it (Interview, March 2007).

However, during the campaign for the 2005 district election (*Pilkada*), the current bupati (2005-2010) was re-elected by promising the five border subdistricts larger autonomy on local forest issues and general infrastructure development.<sup>40</sup> An outright rejection of a new border district could make dealings along the border more difficult and possibly mean loss of support from the large Iban population on whom the bupati is partly dependent in upholding a minimal amount of authority in this remote part of the district. Until now however the bupati’s 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. In short, the district government’s own political and economic agendas concerning the border area and its resources have seriously affected the pemekaran process.

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<sup>36</sup> During a previous gathering the bupati personally donated Rp20 million to the border committee (Akcaya 2007b).

<sup>37</sup> The law further commits the mother district to support the new district economically for the first few years before the new district receives its own fiscal transfers from central government.

<sup>38</sup> Besides the five border subdistricts studied, an additional nine subdistricts in Kapuas Hulu are planning to make their own district, to be known as *Kabupaten Sentarum*. If these two new districts are realised the mother district will be geographically and possibly economically isolated in the most northern corner of the province.

<sup>39</sup> The current bupati has several allegations of corruption hanging over his head. During the recent logging boom the Provincial Forestry Agency accused the bupati of withholding Forest Resource Provision funds (*Provisi Sumber Daya Hutan*, PSDH) and Reforestation Funds (*Dana Reboisasi*, DR) amounting to IDR 150 billion. Until now district courts have not found convincing evidence of these allegations to push the issue further, despite charges filed by the provincial prosecutor’s office as far back as 2004. Allegedly he did not deposit income from PSDH/DR fees from logging to the Minister of Forestry’s account but directly transferred the fees to regional accounts and later to a personal account (Rinaldi et al. 2007).

<sup>40</sup> 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 sentiment in getting re-elected than before (Buehler 2007).

## National and transnational networks of influence

In her research on pemekaran in West Sumba, Jacqueline Vel shows how multiple networks link the regions with the centre and demonstrates the importance of these networks in local elite projects (2007: 93).<sup>41</sup> These often very personalised networks, link the border movement to regional networks at the district and province level, appear stronger than those with the centre in Jakarta. For example the district office is required to carry out an official feasibility study of the border area, which is to be handed over to the governor's office before the pemekaran process can proceed to the Ministry of Home Affairs in Jakarta. In the Kalimantan borderlands, the finalising of this study has been postponed several times. The slow progress on the study has made the border movement impatient, and has led them to present their own feasibility report directly to members of parliament without the blessing of the district or the province. By circumventing the lower levels of government and lobbying directly with national parliamentarians they hope to speed up the entire process.

Such acts of defiance have only been possible with the help of a small group of supporters in Jakarta (academics, former military officers and NGOs) who in the preceding years had established contacts with various national parliament members. But several committee members were somewhat sceptical about the prospects for success of such an endeavour because they saw these Jakarta networks as the weakest link in the campaign. None of the Jakarta supporters possessed the necessary power or capital for effective lobbying. In fact, one leading member of the movement proclaimed that a more effective step would be to send a delegation of border community leaders to Jakarta in order to present their cause directly to the national parliament and the president and to display their military decorations as proof of their loyal service to the Republic.<sup>42</sup> An Iban member of the border movement commented:

We fought during the communist era to defend the new republic. Many people suffered and died. But now we are left behind, forgotten (*ditinggalkan, dilupakan*) just like that. That is how we feel (Interview, June 2007).

However, transnational networks add to the complexity of this case. During the many local meetings on the new border district several Malaysian 'investors' from across the border attended, along with some Malaysian Chinese and Iban. Many of these 'investors' were also involved in the logging that ended in 2005. Economic support from wealthy Malaysians could end up being a key factor in realising the establishment of the new district.

Even more importantly, cross-border resources may make the new district less dependent on central government politics and financial support. As indicated by an Iban businessman from Lanjak:

If we already had a new district here many smart [Iban] 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 don't want to come, as they don't trust the government (Interview, August 2007).

These comments are symptomatic of widespread mistrust towards government authorities and the idea that they (the border communities) would be better off handling things themselves. During fieldwork I was often confronted with the assumption that the distant provincial and national

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<sup>41</sup> See also Ehito Kimura and his discussion of elite politics within *pemekaran* processes in Sulawesi, where what he refers to as vertical coalitions, or elite alliances, span different administrative levels and connect centre and periphery (Kimura 2006).

<sup>42</sup> They were inspired by the strategy and success of the Papuans who appeared before the parliament and openly proclaimed their demands for regional autonomy (Interview, Pontianak, 2007).

centres do not comprehend the special circumstances of life in the borderland. This sense of separateness and otherness seem to pervade the lives of the majority of the border communities, for whom the state often emerges as a confining entity that restricts their everyday practices and spatial mobility.

By the very act of inviting Malaysian businessmen to their meetings the movement put slightly concealed pressure on the central government to reveal central plans for the border area and its forest resources. Negotiating directly with cross-border business connections, as they had done in the past, local communities once again showed their ability to take things into their own hands. The current uncertainty about central government plans has made outside investors (Indonesian and Malaysian) hesitant about investing in the area, accentuating the economic depression since the logging stopped. Local communities and elites are therefore eager to get the economy up and going. One way of venting their frustration over the lack of clear commitment from the centre, is to push forward independently by summoning their own long-term connections to Malaysian entrepreneurs.

At the time of writing the border movement was still awaiting a formal response to their request for a new district. When I left the borderland in August 2007 the outcomes seemed as uncertain as ever and highly dependent on the rapid political changes taking place locally and nationally and the readiness of higher-level authorities to take action. The outcomes of the pemekaran process very much depend on the goodwill of key politicians in Jakarta and local government administrative heads like the bupati and governor, who all have their own and often divergent agendas for the border area.<sup>43</sup> Although it is still too early to draw conclusions I envisage several possible outcomes of the pemekaran process and the more general struggle over forest resources discussed in this paper. Firstly, 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 send their votes his way.<sup>44</sup> This strong new ally in the highest administrative post in the province may put the needed pressure on the district head in Kapuas Hulu to take the pemekaran process to the next level. But such strong support from the governor might have come too late, given the proposed national moratorium on district splitting.<sup>45</sup>

In the heated debate about the viability of many new districts in recent years, some commentators have suggested that the central government should prioritise the establishment of new districts in regions with special needs, like underdeveloped and sensitive state border areas. This, they argue, would be in line with one of the original ideas behind decentralisation, namely that of facilitating and ensuring national unity (Jakarta Post 2007b). But 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 the ongoing power struggle between central and regional level governments over the process of pemekaran and regional autonomy in general. 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

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<sup>43</sup> The bupati of Kapuas Hulu together with four other district heads is currently 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. What possible effects this may have on the realisation of the Border District is still too early to say, but currently all available district resources seem directed towards realising the grand plan for a new province (Kalimantan Review 2008).

<sup>44</sup> The new governor is himself a Dayak or 'son of the soil' (*putra daerah*) as he often proclaimed during his campaigning for governor. (The term Dayak is an umbrella term referring to the indigenous population of Kalimantan including the Iban.)

<sup>45</sup> During an interview in late 2007 the head of the provincial legislative assembly (Ketua Komisi A, DPRD) in Pontianak expressed strong doubts as to whether a new border district would have any chance of being accepted at the central level. According to him, one of the major hurdles is the low population density. With only about 30,000 inhabitants the proposed border district would be too sparsely populated to survive on its own. He estimated that it might take another 5-10 years before the border population was ready to manage their own district.

mixed and often lead to rampant rent-seeking among political elites and communal conflict while the benefits to local livelihoods are less obvious. As indicated in this paper this reclaiming of authority has been most obvious in the borderland studied through an increase in militarisation and strict control over the utilisation of the border's extensive natural resources.

## Conclusion

The borderlands can be seen as a critical site for exemplifying the changing dynamics of state-local interactions that Indonesia is experiencing in the wake of decentralisation. In their role as key symbols of state sovereignty and makers of statehood, borderlands become places where states often are most eager to govern and exercise their power. But as illustrated throughout this paper borderlands are also places where state authority is most likely to be challenged, questioned and manipulated as local (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 tried to show how local communities in the remote district of Kapuas Hulu have responded to recent political transformations and has illustrated their fraught relations with the state. The pemekaran case discussed demonstrates the complexity of relations between local communities and the state, and it can be seen as an example of how local elites over time have attempted to negotiate authority over resources along the border. 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 at the same time using cross-border connections and trade to resist its authority, thus challenging state sovereignty and power.

The example of Kapuas Hulu also shows that decentralisation processes have created strong incentives for some segments of local society to capitalise on their newfound authority, especially those with large network of influences reaching beyond the immediate local level. As pointed out by Schulte Norholdt and van Klinken, the rise of localism or regionalism set off by decentralisation '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: 24). Genuine attempts are being made by certain resourceful segments of the local community 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.

The insights to be drawn from this study suggest that although lines of authority have to a certain degree been rearranged during the decentralisation processes there are still considerable continuities with former arrangements of informal networks and alliance making. Local elites that colluded with the Suharto regime have largely maintained their networks and remain active players in local politics in the post-Suharto period, now often with enhanced authority as a result of the increased regional autonomy and the ability to bypass central state authorities. In short, what this study ultimately shows is the continuity in informal networks. As this case demonstrates, the reshuffling of authority since decentralisation has sharpened the struggle over resources on 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 elite. How the larger non-elite community in the borderland stands to gain from these new political manoeuvres of pemekaran is still unclear.

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