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Rethinking Power Relations in Indonesia

Transforming the margins

Edited by
Michaela Haug, Martin Rössler
and Anna-Teresa Grumbliès



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Rethinking Power Relations in Indonesia

Since colonial rule, the island of Java served as Indonesia's imagined centre and prime example of development, while the Outer Islands were constructed as the state's marginalised periphery. Recent processes of democratisation and regional autonomy, however, have significantly changed the power relations that once produced the marginality of the Outer Islands.

This book explores processes of political, economic and cultural transformations in Indonesia, emphasising their implications for centre-periphery relations from the perspective of the archipelago's 'margins'. Structured along three central themes, the book first provides theoretical contributions to the understanding of marginality in Indonesia. The second part focuses on political transformation processes and their implications for the Outer Islands. The third part investigates the dynamics caused by economic changes on Indonesia's periphery.

Chapters written by experts in the field offer examples from various regions, which demonstrate how power relations between centre and periphery are being challenged, contested and reshaped. The book fills a gap in the literature by analysing the implications of the recent transformation processes for the construction of marginality on Indonesia's Outer Islands.

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Edited by *Michaela Haug, Martin Rössler and Anna-Teresa Grumblies*

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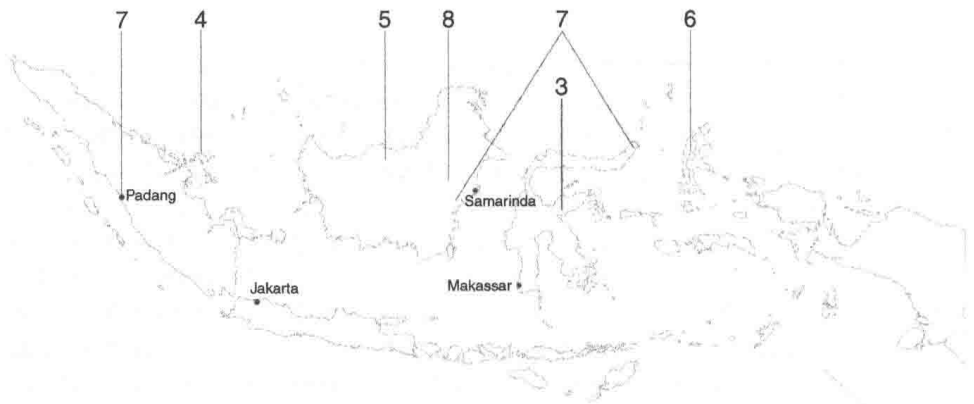
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Acknowledgements

This volume emerged out of the workshop 'Transforming the Margins: Contesting and Reformulating Centre-Periphery Relations in Post-Suharto Indonesia', which was organised by the editors at the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology at the University of Cologne, from 31 January to 2 February 2013. The interdisciplinary workshop was triggered by our common interest to explore social, political, economic and religious transformation processes in post-Suharto Indonesia from the perspective of the archipelago's peripheral regions, and to initiate a debate about how these changes have altered centre-periphery relations. For this purpose we brought together senior and junior researchers from Europe and Indonesia, with backgrounds from anthropology, history, geography and political science. All of them look back on intensive research in different locations in Indonesia's so-called 'Outer Islands', covering such diverse regions as the Riau Islands, East and West Kalimantan, South and Central Sulawesi, Sumbawa, Flores, Timor, the North Moluccas and West Papua.

We are very grateful to the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung for generously funding the workshop. Chairing the respective panels, Christoph Antweiler, Birgitt Röttger-Rössler and Judith Schlehe contributed much to stimulating discussions in the course of the workshop and simultaneously helped to formulate a useful analytical framework. Our deepest thanks go to all participants who presented papers at the workshop and thus helped to strengthen our perspective on Indonesia's 'margins'. For various reasons not all of them were able to contribute to this book, which therefore does not cover the regional breadth as originally intended. However, we believe that the case studies represented here sufficiently demonstrate the far-reaching changes of power constellations, which altered the various ways through which marginality has been constructed on the islands beyond Java, and that the book makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing effort of rethinking power relations in contemporary Indonesia.



Map 0.1 Map of Indonesia (source: 123rf, adapted by Martin Rössler).

Note

Numbers indicate chapters addressing the respective regions.

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1 Introduction

Contesting and reformulating centre–periphery relations in Indonesia

*Michaela Haug, Martin Rössler and
Anna-Teresa Grumblies*

On 4 November 2004 hundreds of people gathered to celebrate the ceremonious inauguration of the new government building complex of West Kutai in East Kalimantan. The celebration marked the fifth birthday of the new regency, which had come into existence in November 1999 when the former regency of Kutai was split into three parts. The new government complex consisted at that time of eight¹ spacious buildings whose construction had swallowed up an entire annual budget of the regency. During the dedication ceremony, the governor of East Kalimantan could not help hinting at the extraordinary dimensions of the new building complex as he opened his speech with the comment that he felt jealous, comparing the new government buildings of Kutai Barat with the cramped and comparatively simple building of the provincial government in Samarinda. Why does a regency in the forested interior of East Kalimantan with roughly 150,000 inhabitants erect such a splendid building complex?

In many respects, the impressive buildings reflect the far-reaching changes that the reform era has brought to the regions beyond Java since the end of President Suharto's New Order regime in 1998. After 32 years of authoritarian rule, the archipelago has become one of the world's largest democracies. Regional autonomy, initiated in 2001, transferred much of central government's authority to the regions and replaced a previously highly centralistic system with one of Southeast Asia's most rigorous decentralisation reforms. Regencies (*kabupaten*) have become the main recipients of new authority, turning the institutions and procedures of the centralistic state into a highly diverse array of new regional centres. In some of them, previously marginalised ethnic minorities have become local majorities (Haug 2010), and people formerly excluded from power have (re-)turned into ruling elites (van Klinken 2007a; Vel 2008; Eilenberg 2009), while shifts in capital have brought about an extreme rise of income in some resource-rich regions beyond Java. The *era reformasi* has thereby set off processes of change all over Indonesia. However, we argue that these developments had particularly profound impacts on the state's periphery, bearing far-reaching implications for local power constellations. The government complex of Kutai Barat is an apparent manifestation of these changes. Its extraordinary dimensions mirror a new local elite's ambitions, as well as the pride and self-esteem of a previously remote area that is now brimming with enthusiasm to challenge its alleged peripheral status.

The Indonesian archipelago has a long history of emerging and declining centres. With the rise and fall of kingdoms and sultanates, some places have been temporarily constructed as centres and others as peripheries. But it was not until colonial times that a single centre, Java, was established and the surrounding islands were transformed into the state's periphery. After independence, the central position of Java and the capital Jakarta was further strengthened, a process which finally culminated in the highly centralistic organisation of Indonesia during the *Orde Baru*.²

The 'big bang' decentralisation reforms which overturned this strictly centralised system have been intensively studied (e.g. Aspinall and Fealy 2003; Erb and Sulistiyanto 2009; Hill 2014) and stimulated debates about the (in)stability of Indonesia (Kingsbury and Aveling 2003) and the prospects for democratisation (McLeod and MacIntyre 2007). With regional autonomy, scholarly interest has shifted toward 'the local' in Indonesia. Small communities, religious and ethnic organisations, local elites as well as mid-sized towns beyond Java receive new attention as important sites of regional power struggles, quests for identity and networks of patronage (Sakai 2002a; Erb *et al.* 2005; Schulte Nordholt and van Klinken 2007; Holtzappel and Ramstedt 2009; van Klinken and Berenschot 2014). This new interest in contemporary local politics has shifted attention away from predominantly grand narratives and stimulated much more nuanced accounts, which reflect the diversity of political and economic processes as well as identities on the islands beyond Java (Sakai *et al.* 2009). Research on the proliferation of new provinces and regencies (Kimura 2012) and the creation of new centres (Sakai 2009) further opens new perspectives on centre-periphery relations.

This book explores the recent transformations in post-Suharto Indonesia from the perspective of the archipelago's peripheral regions and shows how they have provided the margins with new opportunities to challenge and alter their position vis-à-vis the centre. We argue that processes of democratisation and regional autonomy have significantly changed the power relations that produced and maintained the marginality of the so-called Outer Islands since colonial rule. The case studies presented in this volume comprise examples from various regions, demonstrating how local actors become actively and creatively engaged in creating new centres and new peripheries alike, contributing to a much more complex political landscape in which power relations between centres and peripheries are constantly challenged, contested and reshaped.

Historical dimensions of changing centre-periphery relations

A historical perspective on the rise and decline of centres and peripheries in the Indonesian archipelago over the course of time pinpoints some aspects which are of central importance for the subsequent case studies by illustrating the temporality of centre-periphery relations, the fluidity of borders between different spheres of influence, the fragility of power constellations that construct certain places as centres and others as peripheries, and the multiple links between them.

The following overview, while focusing on some of the most important historical trends on a more general level, will necessarily neglect many others.

Examining the historical development of centres and peripheries in Indonesia first of all requires one to distinguish between coastal port-states and inland agrarian states. While early examples of the latter, which in the archipelago were mainly located on the island of Java (Schutte 1994: 3), were centres of Hindu–Buddhist culture, most states which later emerged along the coasts of Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Sulawesi and eastern Indonesia were strongly shaped by Islam, which for centuries was spread along the trade routes and in many cases helped to strengthen the local rulers' legitimation (Reid 1993a: 16; Andaya 1993: 34). The rise and decline of historical centres in the archipelago, particularly during the 'golden age' of maritime commerce between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, is above all linked to the expansion of long-distance trade, which gave rise to powerful centralised states, social stratification, urbanisation, and the spread of rich scriptural traditions of which in the long run Islam should prove to be the most important one (cf. Selling 1981). While for centuries Chinese, Europeans, Arabs and Indians were competing in the trade of products such as pepper, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg, the rise and decline of various concentrations of power was crucial for the emergence of socio-economic and political patterns among the indigenous societies all over the region. The fluidity of the relations among these centres as well as between them and their peripheries was an important feature of the historical development of what is now Indonesia.

In contrast to the agrarian states on Java, in particular on Sumatra and Borneo, many power centres relied on upstream–downstream relations linking the coast with the sparsely populated hinterland. The interior provided trading goods ranging from forest products to slaves, whereas the coastal centres exercised political and economic control over the people living along the rivers (Reid 1993a: 5, 1993b: 207; Watson-Andaya 1993). On a more general level this upstream–downstream dualism, structurally equivalent to upland–lowland dichotomies, centuries ago established a social and cultural distinction which is still symptomatic for many parts of present-day Southeast Asia, namely a contrast which in the eyes of the elites is one between the primitive and the civilised (Li 1999; Scott 2009). In terms of ethnic categories this contrast, in the Borneo example, was one between the Dayak hinterland population and Malay rulers of the coastal trading centres. Malay traders from Sumatra and the Malay peninsula had long since been migrating eastwards, often establishing trading posts at strategic places along the coasts, which later developed into political centres (Ismail 1994). It should be noted that these small kingdoms never gained power equivalent to that of empires such as Majapahit on Java, and that the states along the Borneo coast, for example, exercised but limited influence on neighbouring regions (Cribb 2000: 100). Yet, around 1600, most of the substantial political centres in the archipelago – Aceh, Melaka, Johor, Banten, Mataram, Demak, Banjarmasin, Brunei, Makassar, and Ternate – had risen to power through maritime trade and were located on the coast, some of them having a population of 100,000 or more (Reid 1988: 9, 1993b: 76).

Early centres

As early as in the eighth century, three major centres of political and economic power emerged in the archipelago: the Melaka strait, which was of crucial significance for the trade route between India and China, the Buddhist kingdom of Srivijaya in Sumatra, with its capital near present-day Palembang, and the empire of the Sailendra dynasty in Java. While the latter's dominance may be regarded as a starting point of Javanese cultural dominance for the following centuries, it was above all the Javanese empire of Majapahit which later exerted considerable Javanese influence on Sumatra.

In the fifteenth century the most powerful centre in the region was Melaka, at that time a new type of state, which due to its strategic location owed its rise largely to long-distance trade across the whole Indian Ocean, and hence became the 'port-state par excellence' (Reid 1993b: 208; cf. Thomaz 1993: 71). After Melaka was conquered by the Portuguese in 1511 – one of the most prominent incidents in Southeast Asian history – many of the local traders migrated to Aceh, which, however, lost power in the seventeenth century because the southern kingdoms of Jambi and Palembang, both strongly involved in the pepper trade, had regained new strength through their alliance with the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie [VOC]) that had meanwhile entered the scene.

Partly due to ecological and demographic factors, the development on the island of Borneo took a different course. Sparsely populated and largely covered by rainforest, the interior never saw the emergence of empires such as arose in Sumatra or Java. Instead, the island's political centres, such as Banjarmasin and the Malay kingdom of Kutai, were confined to the coasts. On the southwestern peninsula of Sulawesi, the centralised states of Luwu and Soppeng appear to have been formed in the fourteenth century. After the power of both began to vanish in the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries, the Buginese kingdom of Bone and the Makassarese kingdom of Gowa began to emerge as the new major empires on the peninsula. Alongside with the rise of Gowa, the port town of Makassar became the most important centre of trade in the region, reaching its peak in the seventeenth century. The empire of Gowa extended its influence to much of eastern Indonesia and became the most significant centre in the eastern archipelago until its defeat by the Dutch in 1669 (Rössler 1987: 24f.).

In the Moluccas (Maluku), the archipelago's most important centre of clove trade, the kingdoms of Ternate and Tidore rose to power in the fifteenth/sixteenth century (Cribb 2000: 103). The expansion of their sphere of influence was the result of an increase in the trade of cloves because of rising European demand. Another important factor was their role in the import and redistribution of Indian cloth and – above all – iron, most of which originated from southeast Sulawesi and 'became a crucial element in forging links between the centre and the periphery' (Andaya 1993: 33). Yet it has also been argued that the Moluccas remained a loosely structured alliance of communities (Andaya 1993: 40). In the middle of the seventeenth century, Ternate and Tidore lost their status as trade

centres when the VOC by military means enforced their claim for a monopoly of the clove trade. The shift of the centre of clove trade to Ambon contributed not only to the decline of Ternate and Tidore, but also to the absolute dominance of the VOC as the major commercial power in Southeast Asia. On a more general level, the monopoly of the VOC at the same time weakened not only indigenous commerce but, with the exception of Makassar, also the political stability of many maritime states in the archipelago (Reid 1993a: 18, 1993b: 278, 319).

The formation of a single centre

It has been mentioned above that the Portuguese conquest of Melaka in 1511 was one of the most crucial incidents in Southeast Asian history. Another decisive event, 100 years later, was the foundation of Batavia in 1619. With the expansion of the spice trade all over the archipelago, the VOC decided to replace their base on Ambon with a headquarters in a more central location. In fact, this was the starting point of a far-reaching political and economic transformation process. It comprised increasing commercialisation, urbanisation and, above all, centralisation focusing on Java, which was going to be characteristic for Indonesia until the twenty-first century (cf. Reid 1993b: 327; Vickers 2005: 10).

Except for the political control which the Dutch effectively exercised on Java and some scattered spots in the archipelago by the late eighteenth century, most indigenous states (e.g. the powerful sultanates of Aceh, Banjarmasin and Gowa) at that time were still largely independent. It was beyond Dutch political concerns to conquer such polities in the Outer Islands. But after the VOC had been dissolved in 1799 and other nations exerted increasing imperialist pressure, the Dutch during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries accelerated their conquests and strived harder to strengthen their hegemony and to establish an integrated empire (Locher-Scholten 1994; Cribb 2000: 114). Rising demand for colonial products in industrialising Europe required more effective control of both economic and political affairs. The most important strategy to achieve this aim was the creation of a rigid, hierarchical administrative structure the centre of which was located in Batavia. It was an arduous process, because for long periods in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Dutch presence in places such as the Sumatran west coast, Borneo or South Sulawesi had basically been limited to some fortified trade offices situated on the coast, while they had almost no access to the interior of the islands (Rössler 1987: 26; Cribb 2000: 115). During this period resistance movements arose in the indigenous states on most of the Outer Islands, and it was only through military force that the Dutch were able to subdue them in the end. North Sumatra was conquered by the end of the nineteenth century, and Gowa as late as in 1906.

These military efforts came along with changes within the administrative system, which became increasingly centralised. In the Outer Islands, the prevailing governmental principle was often one of indirect rule, owing to the fact that the indigenous population would rather follow their traditional elites than colonial officials. But by and large, continuous modifications resulted in a very

complicated and heterogeneous administrative structure, within which territorial boundaries (between *afdelingen* and *onderafdelingen* for example) were repeatedly redrawn, increasingly less corresponding to the boundaries of the former indigenous states and principalities (cf. Cribb 2000: 124ff.).

On a general level, it is obvious that Indonesian history consisted of an ever-changing pattern of emerging and declining centres, accompanied by continuous shifts in economic dominance and political power across the archipelago. Indigenous rulers as well as multiple external powers played important parts in the development of highly complex economic and political networks, which over the centuries always created disparities between different regions. These disparities appeared within a constantly changing seesaw of centres and peripheries, with one notable exception in colonial history. The emergence of Java as the archipelago's heartland, surrounded by islands of somewhat minor importance (as mirrored in the term *Buitengewesten*, i.e. Outer Areas) and reflected in the implementation of a centralised administrative structure focusing entirely on Batavia, was doubtless a product of colonial policy. With respect to the economic realm, the pivotal role of Batavia was further fostered when in the 1920s its harbour Tanjung Priok became the central nucleus of a network of ports set up by the royal shipping company Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij (KPM). Through its focus on Batavia, the KPM, founded in 1888, contributed much to the integration of the Dutch colonial empire. After independence the status of a commercial network's core was passed over to Jakarta, as the capital was renamed in 1950 (Vickers 2005: 20). Nevertheless it must also be emphasised that, besides Batavia, various regions in the Outer Islands have repeatedly acquired the status of prosperous centres even in the late colonial era. Striking examples are provided by the plantation areas in eastern Sumatra or southeastern Borneo (Lindblad 1988) – regions which for centuries had been typical representatives of the 'periphery'.

Yet the focus on Java was going to shape the archipelago's political history well until the end of Dutch rule and the emergence of the Indonesian nation, which brought about a new dimension of centrality. Concerning the concept of the political centre as emphasised in the last paragraphs, it has to be underlined that the attributes of 'centres' may vary considerably. This holds in particular if we compare the early states (kingdoms, sultanates) in the archipelago with the features of a modern nation state such as Indonesia. Both agrarian and coastal port-states in the archipelago shared, to varying degrees, typical features of the early state (cf. Claessen and Skalník 1978), particularly in that they revealed a more or less centralised structure. In some instances, and most notably in Java, this implied a focus on sacred centres occupied by divine rulers, while in the case of coastal port-states, and particularly after the rise of Islam, kings and sultans tracing their descent back to the Prophet were considered the hub of the universe. Although few of these polities in the Outer Islands were as complex as the great Javanese empires, many of them exercised considerable power that rivalled European countries for economic and political control, and aimed at territorial expansion. Another important feature shared by all of these states was that they were to a great extent ethnically homogeneous, regardless of the Arab,