

# **PORTRAYING POLITICAL BEHAVIORS OF THE IBAN-DAYAK IN WEST BORNEO**

By Laurel Heydir<sup>1</sup>

## **ABSTRACT**

The power of the State has significantly served as an intervening factor in the relationships between community and forest resources in Indonesia. There was [and is] competition in accessing forest resources between communities and the State which have led to lasting tensions between the two. This situation, especially when the State's authorities deny local peoples' rights over "their" traditional [forest] lands, has sometimes manifested itself as open conflicts that have produced insecurity of rights over forest lands and have led to irresponsible practices in utilizing forest resources.

Following the policy of the former Dutch administration which has oriented on the "national integrity" of the Netherlands Indies,<sup>2</sup> the Indonesian government has practically employing its powers to formalize a centralized control over the forest lands nation-wide. Therefore, the *adat* [traditional] rights of local natives over forest resources have been weakened from time to time and, through the promulgations of the Law on "Local Administration" [i.e. *Undang-Undang Pemerintahan Daerah* No. 5 of 1974] and the Law on "Village Administration" [i.e. *Undang-Undang Pemerintahan Desa* No. 5 of 1979], such local community's rights [on the paper] have finally been abolished.

Those legislations were passed to support the implementation of *Undang-Undang Penanaman Modal Asing* [Law on "Foreign Investment" No. 1 of 1967] and *Undang-Undang Pokok Kehutanan* [Basic Law on "Forestry" No. 5 of 1967], which their main function was to eliminate all sorts of *adat* claims over the forest lands that possibly put by local communities. In the field, the implementations of those legislations [in Suharto's era] have been facilitated by solid top-down civilian bureaucracies and were backed up by territorial and centralized mobile troops. Since then, the era of large scale [multi-national] concessions have been started, marginalizing local peoples and denuding natural forests – including those cleared for mining concession activities [as referred to the implementation of *Undang-Undang Pokok Pertambangan* (Basic Law on "Mining" No. 10 of 1967)].

---

<sup>1</sup> Legal Anthropologist/Independent Consultant living in Jakarta, Indonesia. Address: Jl. Raya Bogor Km 25, Komplek Bengrah A # 75 RT/RW 03/08, Cijantung, Pasar Rebo, Jakarta Timur 13770, Indonesia. Phone/Fax: (62-21) 871-4814. Mobile Phone: (62) 811-183-279. Email: LHeydir@indosat.net.id

<sup>2</sup> The Dutch's name for the Indonesian archipelago.

The local community's feeling of living under oppressions of the State of Indonesia is eligibly found in many places in Indonesia. Resistances of those of local peoples toward the domination of the State's powers have become the core themes in facing the New Order regime of the Suharto's Central Government. Local communities in some parts of Indonesia have spent efforts to defend their "authentic" identities as native peoples and to fight for a re-recognition of the State toward their indigenous rights – which actually has determined in the Indonesian Constitution of 1945.<sup>3</sup> And, the stepping down of Suharto from his Presidential power in 1998, following the public demand for *reformasi*<sup>4</sup> in Indonesia, has widely opened the gate toward revitalization activities of local communities.<sup>5</sup>

This paper discusses the dynamics of local politics of the Ibans in West Borneo on their relationships with the State of Indonesia, particularly on issues related to the forest land utilizations. The case of the Ibans in West Borneo is compared to the Malay in Riau. Both communities are living within rich forest resources, but each of them shares different socio-cultural setting (and religious orientations). This comparison is conducted to see their [different] political behaviors<sup>6</sup> in responding to the [uniformed] national forestry policies implemented by the Indonesian Government.

Furthermore, political behaviors of the Iban-Dayak in Sarawak of Malaysia are also studied as another comparison to the case of Ibans on West Borneo. This is to learn how these similar ethnic groups [i.e. the Ibans] are responding to different national political spheres, especially of those related to forestry policies that are implemented in Indonesia and Malaysia.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Article 18 on *Hak Asal Usul*.

<sup>4</sup> The Indonesian public demanded for the reformation in [national] laws, politics and economics toward the more just and democratic practices of the implementation of State's powers.

<sup>5</sup> This reformation has also produced the Autonomy Law No. 22 of 1999 [which has amended with Law No. 32 of 2004]

<sup>6</sup> The Central Government of Indonesia [in Jakarta] is commonly identified as administered under "Muslim-Javanese" political cultures and it is that Islam is a major religion and Javanese is a major ethnic group in Indonesia. Perhaps, this socio-political situation is faced differently by outer-islanders, i.e. between those of Malay in Riau [as Muslim non-Javanese society, i.e. single minority] and the Iban-Dayak in West Borneo [as neither Muslim nor Javanese society, i.e. double minority].

<sup>7</sup> The different administrative cultures in these two countries will also demonstrate the governmental heritages inherited from the past Colonial Administrations, i.e. the ex Dutch Administration to Indonesia and the ex British Administration to Malaysia.