
COLONIZING BORNEO: STATE-BUILDING AND ETHNICITY IN CENTRAL KALIMANTAN

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Provinces are curious things. They are administrative arrangements that allow the state to reach deeper into the countryside. Provincial bureaucracy is hardly an exciting business, except perhaps for bureaucrats. But provinces can also be vehicles for an identity. Then they become charged with a powerful, if ambiguous, sentiment, the provincial community's feeling that it at once belongs to the greater nation yet remains separate from it. The contrast between the two sides of this provincial phenomenon has a parallel in the nation-state. Though usually mentioned in one breath, the nation and the state in the phrase nation-state also live in different worlds. The nation is the human community that belongs to an envisaged territory. The state is the set of institutions by which that territory is ruled. Modern nationalism has persuaded us that the fused entity is more real than its separate parts, but it was not always so.

Many new provinces were created in Indonesia in the late 1950s, Central Kalimantan among them. It was affected by and contributed to the dramatic tension that enveloped the regions beyond Jakarta. These were still the heady years of nationalism. All those who helped create Central Kalimantan in 1957 spoke of it in terms of the "nation"—that is, they perceived its establishment as an identity issue.

¹ Thanks to staff at the Nationaal Archief in The Hague, who gave permission to quote from the archives of the Nederlands Commissariaat at Banjarmasin of the 1950s; to Henk Schulte Nordholt, Antonius Made Tony Supriatma, and T. T. Suan for helpful discussions; to Remco Raben and Sita van Bemmelen for their careful scrutiny of several versions; and to Marko Mahin for information from interviews he conducted in Banjarmasin and Palangkaraya in November and December 2003 with relatives of Hausmann Baboe and Ch. Simbar.

Naturally the view from Jakarta differed from that in Kalimantan. The metropolitan media portrayed the event as bringing diverse parts into the one nation. Locals who had fought for the province described it with quiet satisfaction as a revolt against Jakarta, mounted on behalf of their own separate identity within the nation. The ambiguity of belonging and separateness was itself delicious and has always defined the Indonesian nation. If everyone at the time agreed to keep the "state" out of the discussion, that should be no surprise. The term "nation" better satisfied the desire for heroic, if ambiguous, togetherness than did any reference to some administrative arrangement. The Indonesian discourse concerning provincial identity in the late 1950s emphasized the voluntary, popular character of this provincial community.

However, this discourse was a kind of smoke-screen. Behind it, a power play was being carried out that involved a much smaller number of actors. This article argues that the creation of Central Kalimantan was less an act of nation-building than of state-building. It was the solution to a problem of the state, namely its vulnerability in the remote regions of the archipelago after the ravages of war and revolution. The problem of state-building under conditions of weakness at the center is of general interest. It recurs in twentieth-century Indonesian history at various moments. A study of the way it was resolved in one place will help us to understand better why the process of state-building has been described in such ethnic terms at moments when the center is weak. The contradiction between the national and provincial readings of the creation of this province vanishes when we trace the dynamics to this more fundamental level.

The importance of this story lies in the insight it gives us into the relationship between state formation and ethnicity. Earlier formulations by Clifford Geertz and Bill Liddle remain influential, but they do not capture this story perfectly.² In Geertz's classic statement, the state represents modernity, but it must struggle to impose its will on local communities still locked in pre-state, "primordial" loyalties. Liddle, through a detailed study in North Sumatra, modified this position by noting that locals actually harbor a range of loyalties, simultaneously toward the nation and toward less inclusive communities of various kinds. But still, even in Liddle's analysis, the state is presented as a modern creature, which faced the problem of exerting its will over these fractious locals and their narrow loyalties. It had only the unsatisfactory choice between responding democratically, and thereby risking government paralysis (as occurred in the 1950s before Guided Democracy), or being authoritarian in order to get things done (the New Order solution). Benedict Anderson, writing at the height of the New Order, identified a kind of see-saw movement, in which now the nation (post-revolutionary 1950s), now the state (New Order), enjoyed dominance over the other.³ Yet even this

² Clifford Geertz, "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in *Old Societies and New States*, ed. Clifford Geertz (New York, NY: Free Press, 1963), pp. 105-57; R. William Liddle, *Ethnicity, Party, and National Integration* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1970), esp. pp. 211-14.

³ Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "Old State, New Society: Indonesia's New Order in Comparative Historical Perspective," *Journal of Asian Studies* 42,3 (May 1983): 477-496. The image of an unassailably strong state during the New Order referred back to the late-colonial bureaucratic state. See Harry J. Benda, "The Pattern of Administrative Reforms in the Closing Years of Dutch Rule in Indonesia," *Journal of Asian Studies* 25,4 (1966): 589-605; Ruth T. McVey, "The Beamtenstaat in Indonesia," in *Interpreting Indonesian Politics: Thirteen Contributions to the Debate*, ed. B. R. O'G. Anderson and A. Kahin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1982), pp. 84-91.

sophisticated solution assumed a kind of zero sum game between two entities whose interests differed so fundamentally that they were unable to change each other.

Is it not possible, however, to imagine a more transformative relationship between state and society in which each continually reshapes the other, so that the two become a single political constellation? Joel Migdal began developing a non-zero sum concept of “the state-in-society” in the early 1990s as a response to the failures of modernization theory and dependency theory, but with a greater acknowledgment of the role of “society” in his theory than one found in the “bringing-the-state-back-in” approach much discussed at that time. He pictured the state as permanently locked in a struggle to dominate social forces, and added another dimension by disaggregating the battle into a series of arenas ranging from the “commanding heights” to “the trenches” within local communities. A spectrum of polities emerged from this analysis, ranging from the state that is able to transform society totally, at one end, to the state that completely fails to penetrate society, at the other end. A later book modified the analysis by also allowing the state—and not only society—to be transformed. This revised theory defined the state simply as “a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence,” and focused on the “actual practices of [the state’s] multiple parts.”⁴

Rather than speak of the state as a whole as either “weak” or “strong,” it is therefore more helpful to describe the constellation, state-in-society, at different levels of the polity. Here we distinguish between those polities in which power is mainly exercised from a single center and those where it is exercised mainly from multiple centers. State-building in Indonesia has always taken place in one of two modes—the centralized or the decentralized. The years under discussion here—especially the late 1940s and the late 1950s—were characterized by the prevalence of the decentralized mode. This article is part of a growing literature fueled by increased academic interest in studying the contours of the decentralized mode of state-building in Indonesia’s outer islands.⁵ These two modes have remained an enduring feature of Indonesia’s political landscape to the present day. During certain periods the decentralized mode has predominated (the nineteenth century, the era characterized by the federal territories 1946–49, 1956–58, 1999–2001), while at other times the centralized has been more evident (1900 to about 1927, 1959–98).

When the decentralized mode is dominant, the main problem for the central power intent on maintaining order is to build relations with numerous local elites in the regions, while ensuring that these do not align together in resistance against the center. This dynamic tends to narrow the negotiating idiom so that it focuses on place-of-origin ethnicity and to restrict the permissible range of local partners to individuals who can exert their will locally. Decentralized state-building therefore relies to a great extent on tradition, ethnicity, and hierarchy—or, if necessary, invented versions of these elements. Under these conditions, the center often acts in ways that contradict its

⁴ Joel S. Migdal, “The State in Society: An Approach to Struggles for Domination,” in *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, ed. Joel S. Migdal, Aful Kohl, and Vivienne Shue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 7–34; Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*, Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 15–16.

⁵ See, for example, Edward Aspinall and Greg Fealy, eds., *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralisation and Democratisation* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003); Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken, eds. *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV, in press).

ostensible modernizing mission. The centralized mode, by contrast, emphasizes modernity and nationalism. This is not to deny that modern nationalism can appeal at the local level, and that an interest in tradition may influence the center, but these elements were less decisive for state-building at the critical moments in the 1950s. Building relations with local partners is a form of indirect rule, which results in a “cultural” kind of governance that is asymmetric but does not wholly eviscerate autonomous local agencies. Liddle did not consider this possibility—it is neither democratic nor authoritarian in the centralist New Order sense.

A study of indirect rule highlights the Janus-faced character of the modern state. Scholars have tended to portray indirect rule as a system that provides local communities protective exclusion from an oppressive political process, but Mahmood Mamdani in his work on sub-Saharan Africa depicts it persuasively as a hegemonic exercise that, in fact, incorporates the colonized “natives” into a system of power. It produces local despotism.⁶ The state coopts, or creates, local despots, loyal partners at the local level, whose authority rests less on democratic legitimacy than on demagoguery and violence. For why should the local necessarily be more democratic than the national? Society, meanwhile, is itself transformed by the indirect rule process. Ethnicity becomes concretized in shapes it did not previously possess. This form of governance sometimes even becomes an idiom for protest against the state. More often it is the idiom of choice for local aspirants to office within the state. Indirect rule has been repeatedly deployed in Indonesia, particularly at times when the center is weak. The history of Central Kalimantan provides an example.

The climax in the nation-oriented narrative of Central Kalimantan occurred on Wednesday, July 17, 1957. On that day, President Sukarno traveled up the mighty Kahayan River of Central Borneo with a convoy of boats to lay the first stone for Palangkaraya, capital of the new province of Central Kalimantan. Until then, this jungle-clad interior region had been part of South Kalimantan province, ruled from the rivermouth capital, Banjarmasin. For thirty-six hours, all along the river, according to a serialized report in a major Jakarta daily, villagers came out in their canoes to greet the president and shout “Merdeka!” “Freedom!” They had only seen the president before in pictures sold on the riverboats. When on the previous day Sukarno had approached the gateway of the Dayak interior at Kuala Kapuas, the sound of drums had reached the party’s ears even before it rounded the last bend. Fabulously dressed warriors circled their canoes in front of the president’s craft. When he stepped ashore, the people invited him to mount a magnificent chair borne on poles. He refused, placed the red and white flag on the chair instead, then joined his people in hoisting it aloft. Sukarno told the crowd that the spirit of the Proclamation of ‘45 still lived in Kalimantan, and that “foreigners” who said Kalimantan wanted to separate from Indonesia had been proven wrong. A similar scene was enacted the next day in newly christened Palangkaraya, which up until this day had been a small village of five hundred inhabitants called Pahandut. “One can imagine,” wrote an impressed metropolitan journalist who accompanied the president’s party, “how extraordinary these original customs of the Dayak tribe are, which reflect an authenticity, a clarity, as

⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, “Historicizing Power and Responses to Power: Indirect Rule and Its Reform,” *Social Research* 66,3 (Fall 1999): 859-86. See also his earlier publication, Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

well as an innocence of all the bad things that threaten the large cities of Indonesia ... [Yet] even in this remote and lonely place, Bung Karno as the head of a state of eighty million Indonesians has found his people."⁷

Like a provincial Brasilia meant to be created *ex nihilo* from the jungle, Palangkaraya thus became Sukarno's stage for a theatre of the nation. Later he suggested its central location in the archipelago made it the capital of choice for "Maphilindo," a proposed entity created from the union of Indonesia with Malaya and the Philippines. He even persuaded the Russians to build a road there. It ran into the jungle from Palangkaraya for a few kilometers, then petered out. Central Kalimantan thus became both a powerful symbol of the united non-ethnic Indonesian nation-state and (because the discourse always linked it to a tribal group) one of the most "ethnic" of Indonesia's provinces. For the Dayak warriors who greeted President Sukarno were not merely decorative. They represented the essence of what the province was about. Granted, nationals and provincials saw them differently. Jakartans saw primitives offering their loyalty to a greater whole, while locals saw assertions of an irreducible local identity. But for both, the warriors were an essential element. If we can understand how both these very different perceptions could exist at the same time, it will help us in a bigger quest, namely the attempt to grasp the interaction between ethnicity and the nation-state in Indonesia more broadly. This case makes us suspect that ethnicity was not merely a cultural phenomenon, and certainly not a mere vestige, but was woven into the fabric of the modern state in the decisive decade after World War II.

Sukarno's theatrical performance on the Kahayan River masked the true dynamic of the relationship between ethnicity and the nation-state. The crux of the matter lies less with the nation than with the state, which urgently needed to find loyal personnel in the regions beyond Java to build its capacity to maintain order. It faced a serious state-building problem. Two key observations will set us on our way. First, the proliferation of new provinces in the turbulent years 1957-58 are best seen as a colonizing expansion of the Indonesian state into weakly governed corners of its territory. Central Kalimantan was one of eight new provinces at this time, added on top of the ten original ones.⁸ The establishment of these new provinces was a response to disintegrative conditions, but their creation was not in itself a disintegrative event. Several anthropologists, no doubt reflecting the local reading, have written about the creation of Central Kalimantan province as a case of "secession" and "rebellion,"⁹ but this seems unwarranted. It was neither a fragmentation of the state nor really a rebellion from below. On the contrary, the establishment of new provinces was a flanking movement carried out by the weak center to combat the disintegrative regional revolts. The expansion was motivated as much by a pull from the peripheries as a push from the center, and thus resembled the outward expansion of colonial

⁷ See the articles by M. H. Munawar in the national daily *Merdeka*, July 17 and 23-27, 1957; Palangkaraya was then spelled Palangka Raya. Two photos of the Sukarno visit are in Tjilik Riwut, *Kalimantan Memanggil* (Jakarta: Endang, 1958), pp. 133-34.

⁸ A full list is given below.

⁹ Douglas Miles, *Cutlass and Crescent Moon: A Case Study of Social and Political Change in Outer Indonesia* (Sydney: Center for Asian Studies, University of Sydney, 1976), pp. 119-20; Joseph Aaron Weinstock, "Kaharingan and the Luangan Dayaks: Religion and Identity in Central-East Borneo" (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1983), pp. 131-35.

empires.¹⁰ All the new Indonesian provinces were located at the outer margins of the archipelagic state, with densely populated Java at its center. Sukarno's generous symbolism notwithstanding, this development constituted an expansion of the state at least as much as of the nation.

Second, and this too notwithstanding Sukarno's enthusiasm, the results of this peripheral pull played out among a small number of state functionaries and their non-state clients both at the center and in the peripheries. The campaign to establish new provinces outside Java was not a popular movement, at least not one rooted in widespread grassroots organization. Most political parties disliked the ethnic talk that accompanied the creation of new provinces, and they were drawn into the process of their creation against their will. At the center were security officials anxious to locate loyal and effective partners in the peripheries. On the periphery were lower level civil servants eager to prove their loyalty and lay claim to their piece of the expanding bureaucratic pie. They had to distinguish themselves both from the rebels and from rival loyalists. The negotiations between center and periphery were as a result conspiratorial. Participants switched back and forth between direct and indirect strategies, between intensive lobbying and the sponsoring of obscure militias. The idiom that passed between them was a hybrid. Sometimes they talked like nationalists, partly because they were genuinely enthusiastic about the new nation and partly because they were just loyal to their metropolitan superiors. Sometimes they talked like ethnic primordialists, partly because they needed to recruit new followers and partly to advertise their own uniqueness. The exotically dressed tribal warriors who assured Sukarno that the disparate nation was firmly unified nicely illustrated this hybrid of idioms. The following account traces the history of these center-periphery negotiations in two phases, one during the federal period under the colonial Dutch just after World War II, the next within an independent Indonesia, during a period climaxing in 1957. We will see that, in each phase, security-oriented state elites from the center sought out and negotiated deals with loyalist elites in the periphery. The result was a "Dayak" administrative territory that had been brought halfway to completion by the end of the first phase and was fully established in the second.

Federalism and the Dayak Council (1946–1949)

"Dayak" is a generic term first employed by western anthropologists to embrace the various non-Muslim indigenous peoples of Borneo. Dayaks generally live in the interior, while the main coastal towns are dominated by indigenous Muslims (sometimes known generically as Malays) and by migrant groups.¹¹ This huge island is today divided between three sovereign nations, and the Indonesian part of it is divided into four provinces. Politicized ethnic Dayak movements have a history in most parts of Borneo, but they tend to circulate within these political boundaries. Thus the

¹⁰ The processes resembled those theorized in the 1970s by scholars seeking to clarify the reasons for imperialist expansion in those cases where the economic drive from the center seemed an inadequate explanation. Empire was drawn outward by security concerns on the peripheries or by the little battles of collaborating elites in the peripheral regions. See David K. Fieldhouse, *Colonialism 1870-1945: An Introduction* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981); Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration," in *Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy*, ed. Roger Louis (New York, NY: New Viewpoints, 1976), pp. 128-51.

¹¹ Victor T. King, *The Peoples of Borneo* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

movements in West Kalimantan and in the area that became Central Kalimantan are practically unrelated.

Elsewhere I have tried to show that the key figure in the late-colonial Dayak movement in the central part of Borneo was Hausmann Baboe.¹² Both mission and government molded the career of this energetic native district chief. Initially he felt excited by the promise of national and class solidarity as forces to be mustered against the colonial oppressor. But after the Dutch successfully suppressed the militant nationalist movement in 1927, and as he himself grew wealthier and hence more cooperative, he was drawn to participate in the ethnic politics declared permissible by the Dutch. The colonials pictured the Netherlands Indies as an array of discrete ethnic units, each occupying its own territory, and they provided seats for representatives of these units in the colonial proto-parliament, the Volksraad. Hausmann Baboe became involved in lobbying for the addition of a Dayak member to this body.

The Dayak-dominated interior before World War II was encompassed by the large “government” of Southeast Borneo, with its capital in Banjarmasin. Dayaks in the region had never before had a delineated territory of their own. They began to press for the recognition of a territorial identity for the first time when Governor Haga started implementing a series of Dayak reserves in the Buntok marshes and the Meratus Mountains northeast of Banjarmasin just before the war. Native reserves were being established in other countries as well about this time—including in the United States (the Indian New Deal of 1934 revamped the reserves carved out in the 1860s) and South Africa in 1913 and 1936.¹³ Yet administrators at the time considered it impossible to grant the tribal Dayaks any more than the limited legal autonomy they already enjoyed as an indigenous community (*rechtsgemeenschap*) under colonial rule. One oft-mentioned reason was that Dayak society was “utterly primitive.” Another had to do with colonial law. Territorial autonomy was part of the system of indirect rule, through which precolonial entities retained some life of their own. Its basis lay in hundreds of “self-ruling” aristocratic principalities throughout the Netherlands Indies. The Banjarmasin sultanate had been destroyed in 1859–60, however, and the Dutch had ruled southern and central Borneo directly ever since.¹⁴ No legal basis for indirect rule existed here any more.

Nevertheless, a series of conservative reforms triggered by the rise of the nationalist movement in the mid-1920s eventually made it possible to construct a kind of indirect rule even in areas that were being directly ruled. The reforms aimed to recreate the conditions of indirect rule. The Self-Governing Regulation of 1938 intended to strengthen traditional political entities that had been hollowed out by the earlier modernizing and centralizing policies. As it happened, the Regulation would not be implemented until after the Pacific War. A decree of February 1946 permitted directly ruled areas to be converted to autonomous areas; this transformation was

¹² Gerry van Klinken, “Dayak Ethnogenesis and Conservative Politics in Indonesia’s Outer Islands,” in *Indonesia in Transition: Rethinking “Civil Society,” “Region,” and “Crisis,”* ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt and Hanneman Samuel (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), pp. 107–28, available at www.knaw.nl/indonesia/agenda/agendoc8.html.

¹³ Dayak reserves continued to exist in Indonesian forestry preserves for some time after independence, but the details are unclear to me. See Tjilik Riwut, *Kalimantan Membangun: Alam Dan Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana, 1993), pp. 293–94.

¹⁴ Robert Cribb, *Historical Atlas of Indonesia* (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 2000), p. 124.

carried out by treating each of these entities like a traditional, self-ruled area, as defined in the 1938 Regulation.¹⁵ The process boiled down to artificially shaping a local political community in accordance with a concept of “custom,” as “custom” was understood in 1946. This legal device opened the door to the next state-building action in the Dayak interior. After their return following the defeat of the Japanese, the Dutch faced a serious state-building problem. The revolutionary Republic of Indonesia had seized upon a momentary power vacuum following the Japanese surrender in August 1945 to build an effective government in Java and parts of Sumatra. Republican sentiments burst out across the archipelago. Divide and rule was the Dutch solution to this problem. Their chief strategist, Lieutenant Governor-General Van Mook, set energetically to work creating ethnic units in relatively small autonomous territories surrounding the republican heartlands. “When Java proved to be a problem child,” wrote the historian Yong Mun Cheong, “Van Mook began to think of Borneo and the Great East.”¹⁶

However, diversity itself implied the need for diverse negotiating strategies. Van Mook’s approaches in the outer island regions varied markedly. In the Great East (Sulawesi and eastwards), he started building a state structure from the top down, whereas in Borneo he took all the different ethnic entities into his negotiations. These entities had become reified through the colonial policy of the previous fifty years, as illustrated in the story of Hausmann Baboe. In the end, Van Mook’s Borneo politics proved less than effective. The Sultan of Pontianak pushed so hard for special privileges that he alienated the other players, who began demanding more as well. The result was that Van Mook’s original concept of a single state of Borneo became fragmented into numerous impotent statelets. However, the Dutch intention in Borneo at this time was not to reestablish real governance in the interior, which remained wretched and neglected since the departure of the Japanese.¹⁷ Rather their state-building campaign in Borneo had a strategic aim: they wished to build a political fence of pro-Dutch sentiment around the republican-minded Banjarmasin and Hulu Sungei areas, which lay to the south and east of the Dayak lands.¹⁸

The Dutch began seriously to rally forces in the outer islands toward the middle of 1946. Faithful to colonial tradition, they held separate conferences for different racial groups. One in Malino (South Sulawesi) for Indonesians was held in July 1946, and another in Pangkal Pinang (Bangka Belitung) for Europeans and Alien Orientals took

¹⁵ *Naar De Nieuwe Rechtsorde in Indonesië: Bouwstoffen Voor De Federatie*, 2 vols. (Batavia: uitg. in opdracht van de Voorlopige Federale Regering van Indonesië, 1948), pp. 26-27.

¹⁶ Yong Mun Cheong, *H. J. Van Mook and Indonesian Independence: A Study of His Role in Dutch-Indonesian Relations, 1945-48* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), p. 59.

¹⁷ Just how wretched conditions were became clear during a visit to the interior in March 1948 by Resident Deelman of South Borneo. He traveled up the Katingan River as far as Tumbang Samba. It was the first Dutch official visit since 1932. He wrote: “Without exaggeration, I would call conditions alarming. No textiles, corruption in textile distribution, not a grain of salt, the salt barns entirely empty, a corrupt district government, no transport, no medical means, the population like twenty years ago nearly all clothed in tree bark again and apathetic; children with swollen bellies (worms?), a great deal of malaria, dysentery, and worst of all a tremendous amount of framboesia (footnote: the doctor accompanying me came to the conclusion that 25 percent of the population was afflicted with framboesia, among them a very large number of tertiary cases) ... The circumstances are such that I am ashamed as a representative of the government to show my face here.” S. L. van der Wal, ed., *Officiële Bescheiden Betreffende De Nederlands-Indonesische Betrekkingen, 1945-1950*, 20 vols. (‘s-Gravenhage: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1982), XIII: 212–15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII:330-34, 481.

place the following October. The conferences aimed to formulate the shape of a Dutch-led Indonesian federation. Conference organizers invited participants along ethnic corporatist lines rather than based on the size of the population they represented. Experience had taught them that smaller groups were more pliable than larger ones. Particular care was taken at Malino to avoid inviting cosmopolitans with extensive experience of Java, for the Dutch organizers feared such people might have fallen under the influence of “ideologies” and could cause unnecessary confusion among their “tribal relations.”¹⁹ The Dutch-colonial mistrust of all political parties found a fresh outlet during this anxious period for the imperial Dutch. They described the Indonesian nationalist parties as leftist organizations of propaganda and intimidation, whose members would decide the future of Borneo “over the heads” of the politically unorganized population.²⁰

Opinion at the Malino conference ranged from pro-Dutch to pro-republican. Dayaks stood at the pro-Dutch end of the spectrum. Along with Torajanese and Papuans, they were, according to the Dutch reporter, “backward minorities seeking protection.” Christian Manadonese took this position as well. At the Republican end were Banjar ethnic leaders from Banjarmasin in South Borneo. In between, other regional representatives adopted various compromise positions.

The Dayak representative who was part of a delegation of three people from South Borneo at Malino was Raden Cyrillus Kersanegara.²¹ He was a native district chief in Pangkalan Bun, located within the coastal principality of Kotawaringin, well to the west of Banjarmasin.²² Hausmann Baboe had once put him forward as the Dayak candidate for the Volksraad in 1926, when Cyrillus was still a young paramedical student in Surabaya. Despite being a representative of a “backward minority seeking protection,” in 1946 Cyrillus refused to perform his role as an obediently abject dependent. He said he would cooperate with any Dutch proposal as long as Dayaks got their own administrative region.²³ The conference recommended dividing Borneo into three autonomous regions (*daerah*), namely West, South, and East Borneo. The royal houses of Pontianak and Kutai were prominent in the West and East, while ethnic Banjar had a Banjar Council in the South. Thus Cyrillus’s opinion bore little weight. Ultimately the conference merely recognized the establishment of a fourth region in the Dayak interior as a possibility that might be undertaken at a later date.²⁴

Less than six months later, the growing threat of republicanism in central Borneo forced the Dutch to improve their offer. Dayaks got what they wanted. The legal instruments used to accomplish this were the previously mentioned 1938 Regulation and the 1946 decree on indirect rule. These converted the hitherto directly ruled parts of Borneo into several “neo-self-governing lands” (or “neo-lands”). One of them was the Greater Dayak region (*Groot Dajak*). Its constitutional status was inferior to that of a federal state, but the intention was that it would move towards statehood. Its demographic heartland lay north of Banjarmasin, in the middle reaches of the area

¹⁹ Ibid., IV:308-9.

²⁰ Ibid., XI:71.

²¹ Ibid., XIV:375-81. A poor photograph of him is in W. A. van Goudoever, *Malino Maakt Historie* (Batavia: Regeerings Voorlichtingsdienst, 1946), p. 18.

²² Yong Mun Cheong, *H. J. Van Mook and Indonesian Independence*, p. 88.

²³ Goudoever, *Malino Maakt Historie*, p. 32.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

bounded by the Barito and Kahayan Rivers and mainly inhabited by Ngaju Dayak.²⁵ Westwards it bordered on the small “self-ruled” sultanate of Kotawaringin. When the sickly sultan of the Kotawaringin was deposed in mid-1949, Dayaks argued in vain that, based on historical precedent, Kotawaringin should join Greater Dayak. (They eventually pursued this claim with more success in 1957.)²⁶

The Dutch resident appointed a governing council (*Groot Dajakraad*) in December 1946, which started working the following March.²⁷ Funds to support its budget were generated by a timber operation of dubious legality. In exchange for awarding a huge concession to the largest timber operation in Southeast Asia, the council was given a substantial share in the company, which was run by (ex-) soldiers of the colonial army.²⁸

The Greater Dayak region was inhabited by a uniformly rural population of 340,000 people. About 70 percent of them were Ngaju Dayak from the catchment areas of the Kapuas and Kahayan Rivers.²⁹ The remaining ethnic groups were each thought to number fewer than 30,000—all Dayak except for the Banjar. Despite an intensive missionary effort, only 6 percent of the population in this area was Christian; in this way, they differed from Dayaks in West Borneo who had converted to Christianity in larger numbers. The non-Christian majority was evenly divided between Muslims and “heathens” (later called Kaharingan). Nevertheless, the better educated “Christian-Dayaks” (always referred to in this manner in colonial correspondence) had a disproportionate influence on Dayak affairs in the period under discussion.

When in December 1948 elections were finally held for representatives who would constitute the Greater Dayak Council, the Dutch were relieved to note that its nineteen elected members were chosen with almost no influence from political parties. The small Serikat Kerakjatan Indonesia party (SKI), republican and based in South Borneo, was the one, weakly organized, exception.³⁰ On the whole, Dayaks chose people they (or the Dutch) “trusted.” Nearly half of those elected to the Greater Dayak Council belonged to *demang* families, a Dayak class of local bureaucrats created by the Dutch.

²⁵ Cribb, *Historical Atlas of Indonesia*, p. 160.

²⁶ Wal, ed., *Officiële Bescheiden*, V:23.

²⁷ *Naar De Nieuwe Rechtsorde in Indonesië*, p. 28.

²⁸ Bruynzeel Dajak Houtbedrijven N.V. was a technology-intensive Dutch operation. The Greater Dayak Council ‘awarded’ the company a timber concession one and a half times the geographical size of the Netherlands in exchange for the shares. These shares later passed to the Republic of Indonesia in Jakarta, where they were managed by the politicians Mahir Mahar, I. J. Kasimo, and Quaggo (? – original poorly legible). In the mid-1950s, it employed over a thousand men, mostly ex-soldiers who had belonged to the colonial and the Dutch army KNIL/KL (Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger, Royal Netherlands Indies Army, and Koninklijk Leger, Royal Army [of the Netherlands]). A report in *Indonesia Raja* in May 1954 showed that its massive financial losses in recent years had been largely due to corruption rather than the costs of repairing wartime damage. By this time, the enterprise was 85 percent owned by the Indonesian government. Regent Tjilik Riwut presumably nationalized the remaining 15 percent. See Nederlands Commissariaat Te Bandjarmasin (Indonesië) 1951-1957, Nationaal Archief, ingang 2.05.61.02, geheimarchief inv. nr. 83 (politiek) & geheimarchief inv. nr. 82 (dienstrijzen), 1951-1957, May 29, 1954 (’s Gravenhage: Nationaal Archief, n.d.); and *Indonesia Berdjung*, May 12 and 15, 1954.

²⁹ Wal, ed., *Officiële Bescheiden*, XVI: 465-68.

³⁰ Dutch reports mention only three parties in South Borneo in late 1948: SKI, Sermi, and SRI. None was of national scope, and they organized only in larger urban centers. SKI (Serikat Kerakjatan Indonesia, Indonesian People’s Union) and Sermi (Serikat Muslim Indonesia, Indonesian Muslim Union) were republican, but had by this time abandoned their earlier noncooperative stance towards Dutch-led federalism; SRI (Sarikat Rajat Islam) was Islamic and federalist. *Ibid.*, XI:70-72.

In a remarkable illustration of post-coloniality, this class of appointed elites was already regarded as a hereditary aristocracy less than fifty years after its creation.³¹ Ethnically divided communities chose “neutral” outsiders—usually the local government administrator (known as *kiai*). The absence of political parties had produced a government that fitted nicely with the Dutch concept of self-rule—rule by aristocrats and administrators, untainted by “ideology.”³²

Even the Dutch soon recognized that no one on the ground was really interested in this powerless council.³³ Until its demise in 1949, the Greater Dayak Council would meet in non-Dayak Banjarmasin because it could not decide where to locate its capital. Its Dutch minders complained quietly about a “lack of intellectuals” in the group.³⁴ Cyrillus was taken along to various diplomatic functions as a third-tier “advisor.”³⁵ When Mochran bin Hadji Mohammad Ali replaced him in early 1949, he was no more vocal or effective than his predecessor.³⁶ Nevertheless, this ineffective creation born of a crisis in the state had set a precedent, at least establishing the concept of Dayak territoriality.

After mid-1947, Van Mook’s reports to The Hague began to acknowledge he could not stem the growing tide of republican sentiment in the Dutch-held areas.³⁷ The establishment of Greater Dayak had been one of the small Dutch victories against a well-organized assault from the Indonesian Republic, the others being the establishment of Eastern Indonesia (NIT, Negara Indonesia Timur), West Borneo, East Borneo, and Bangka Belitung. But republican guerrilla fighters led by Hasan Basry were by early 1949 making significant inroads in South Borneo, especially in the Banjar area of Hulu Sungei, bordering the Dayak Dusun lands.³⁸ Rather than recognizing them as nationalist republicans, however, Dutch authorities made much of the rebels’ Islamic religion. They pressured the “Christian-Dayak” village heads to form militias against them. It seems the so-called Lawong Army (Tentara Lawong/Laung), discussed below, had its origins in this period.³⁹ Resident A. G. Deelman thought this ethnic-religious strife, so artificially stirred up, was regrettable but had a salutary side effect. The threat from Islamic (not to say republican) Banjar was strengthening Dayak ethnic feeling. “It has had a clearly visible stimulating influence on the ‘Dayak reveille’ already noted before the war, as well as on the accompanying feelings of solidarity of this ethnic group,” he wrote.⁴⁰

³¹ Van Klinken, “Dayak Ethnogenesis and Conservative Politics in Indonesia’s Outer Islands.”

³² Cyrillus was the key Dayak on the first, appointed council of December 1946. A less active member was Mahir Mahar, Hausmann Baboe’s nephew. Cyrillus was not successful in the election two years later; the new chairman was the freshly elected Mochran bin Hadji Mohammad Ali, native district chief in Barabai. See Wal, ed., *Officiële Bescheiden*, XVII:332-34. Mochran’s deputy chairman was H. Koenoen. Ibid., XIX:487-48. The council always acted under the patronizing supervision of the Dutch controleur for Sampit, J. Dijk. Ibid., XIV:375-81, and XIX:778.

³³ Ibid., XI:72.

³⁴ Ibid., XIX: 383-86.

³⁵ Ibid., XV:144 and XVI:29.

³⁶ Ibid., XVII:332-334, 357-62 and XIX:778.

³⁷ Ibid., IX:363-81.

³⁸ Hasan Basry was a Kandangan-born resistance fighter, and commander of the republican armed forces in Kalimantan (ALRI Division IV Kalimantan) based in Hulu Sungei.

³⁹ Ibid., XVII:686-89 and XVIII:369; Nederlands Commissariaat, November 12, 1953.

⁴⁰ Wal, ed., *Officiële Bescheiden*, XVIII:500-503.

The final blow to the Greater Dayak Council was a diplomatic one dealt by Hasan Basry. Resident Deelman had asked Mochran and his Banjar Council counterpart, Hanafiah, to travel to Jakarta in May 1949 to try to counter republican support for the Hasan Basry guerrillas.⁴¹ But no one in Jakarta was impressed with their arguments, and the trip only succeeded in demonstrating how ineffective the two pro-Dutch council members from Banjarmasin were. Seeing an opportunity to outmaneuver Deelman, who had obviously dealt these representatives such a weak hand, Hasan Basry invited them in August 1949 to take their seat on the republican National Committee in Jakarta. Doubtless fearing for their future if they were to hold out for the Dutch, they accepted. On August 17, Indonesian Independence Day, Hasan Basry declared that both the Banjar and Dayak Councils had been dissolved and replaced by the National Council.⁴² In this way, he checkmated the Dutch strategy of encouraging decentralized governance. At least for the time being, Greater Dayak had died. On December 27, 1949, the Dutch officially recognized Indonesian (federal) sovereignty over almost the entire former colonial territory. One by one, throughout the following year, the federal territories dissolved themselves and merged with the centralized republic. Indonesia entered a period of centralized rule, although it was to prove short-lived.

Independence and the Campaign for Central Kalimantan

For a time it seemed as if the prestige of the centralizing national revolution, committed to the unitary state of Indonesia, would sweep all local politics before it. That the heavily outnumbered Dayak minority managed in 1957 to get a province they could call their own anyway was due to the emergence of a set of state-building dynamics similar to those we have just described. The government in Jakarta was no longer Dutch, but Indonesian, and the state-building crisis came this time not from republican guerrillas but from the Darul Islam (House of Islam) revolt. As in 1945–49, the problem facing the national government in the early 1950s was that the center was too weak to handle a serious armed revolt in several regions of the country at once. In each case, military capacity alone was not enough to restore control. Instead, the Indonesian national government attempted to expand state capacities by seeking loyal partners in the periphery. It developed alliances with power brokers in peripheral regions bordering those affected by the revolt. These flanking movements were not created by organized popular pressure. Political parties were marginal at all times. The alliances brought together security-oriented elites in the capital and ambitious state functionaries in the provinces. The latter were often the same people who, under the federalizing Dutch only a few years earlier, had been encouraged to mobilize followers on the basis of ethnicity.

World War II and the subsequent revolution had decimated local government in Borneo. When the numerous federal and sub-federal units were abolished in 1950, Borneo was left without any provincial government until 1953, although there were regencies (*kabupaten*) that corresponded with the late-colonial subdistricts (*afdeelingen*). Even then, Indonesian Borneo constituted only a single province, with its capital in

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., XIX:487-88, 721.

Banjarmasin. From the beginning there were demands from the Indonesian regions for the creation of new provinces, but it took the outbreak of two serious revolts to move Jakarta to respond to them.

The first was Darul Islam, a popular revolt that started in West Java in 1948 but that spawned similar movements in Aceh, South Sulawesi, and southern Borneo after 1950.⁴³ In Borneo the insurgency styled itself as KRJT (Kesatuan Rakjat Jang Tertindas), the People's Division of the Oppressed, and was led by Ibnu Hadjar. Many of its members were former republican guerrillas who had failed to make the grade to be admitted into the Indonesian armed forces. Its heartland was Hulu Sungei, the mainly Banjar area that had also served as a base for the guerrillas. Related groups operated also in Dayak lands, including one near Sampit led by Suriansjah. KRJT conducted a violent campaign that proved difficult for the military to suppress. It reached the height of its powers in 1954.

The second revolt, referred to in abbreviation as Permesta/PRRI, was a more elite affair conducted by military officers in the regions beyond Java in late 1956 and 1957. It was backed by local business interests and also by the United States, which was concerned about growing leftism in the Jakarta government.⁴⁴ Rebel Indonesian military commanders declared states of emergency in their respective military areas in Sumatra and Sulawesi and cut off relations with Jakarta.

A major element in Jakarta's response to these crises of authority was the formation of new provinces. Others were a parallel subdivision of military areas into smaller units, and the use of military force from Java to suppress rebellion. In effect, areas that under the Dutch had been residencies now became provinces. By contrast, the economic policies that were a major cause of the unease in the export-driven outer island economies were not corrected.⁴⁵ The following section shows how this bureaucratic intensification was conducted in the case of Central Kalimantan, and the role that ethnic identity claims played in it.

From the beginning, those who sought to promote the establishment of a Central Kalimantan province described it as another Greater Dayak, and they justified its creation in the same ethnic terms. The first group to catch the attention of the press with a demand for a "Dayak" province was the Indonesian Dayak Kaharingan Society (SKDI, Serikat Kaharingan Dajak Indonesia), which had been formed in 1950.⁴⁶ Their demands were first issued publicly in July 1953, just as the province of Kalimantan was

⁴³ C. van Dijk, *Rebellion under the Banner of Islam: The Darul Islam in Indonesia* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981); Esther Velthoen, "Mapping Sulawesi in the 1950s," in *Indonesia in Transition: Work in Progress*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt and Gusti Asnan (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2003), pp. 103-23. Most scholarly work on Darul Islam emphasizes its leadership rather than its popular elements. Velthoen by contrast describes it, in part, as an alternative moral economy stressing equality and a rejection of "city luxuries."

⁴⁴ Permesta: Piagam Perjuangan Semesta Alam, Universal Struggle Charter; PRRI: Pemerintahan Revolusioner Republik Indonesia, Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia. See Audrey R. Kahin and George McT. Kahin, *Subversion as Foreign Policy: The Secret Eisenhower and Dulles Debauch in Indonesia* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1995).

⁴⁵ Howard Dick, "A Bizarre Economy: Multiple Exchange Rates, Business Networks and Center-Region Relations in 1950s Indonesia," Paper, 3rd International Conference and Workshop on "Indonesia in Transition" (Depok, Jakarta: University of Indonesia, 2003).

⁴⁶ Anne Schiller, "Religion and Identity in Central Kalimantan: The Case of the Ngaju Dayaks," in *Indigenous Peoples and the State: Politics, Land, and Ethnicity in the Malayan Peninsula and Borneo*, ed. Robert L. Winzeler (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1997), pp.180-200.

being established.⁴⁷ Calls for “self-determination” had helped win Indonesia its independence, and this was now the term Dayaks preferred to describe the motive behind their own cause. Even the socialist newspaper, *Indonesia Berdjwang*, in Banjarmasin, adopted this term in a sympathetic editorial about Central Kalimantan published in February 1954 (the editorial did caution that self-determination should play out “within an independent Republic of Indonesia”).⁴⁸

In February 1954, the cabinet in Jakarta announced it was preparing to divide Kalimantan into three provinces.⁴⁹ The plan thus looked like the proposal to establish three autonomous regions, which had been approved at the Dutch-led 1946 Malino conference. Dayaks responded by demanding the addition of a fourth province. A People’s Action Committee for Central Kalimantan (Panitia Aksi Rakjat Kalimantan Tengah) claimed at a meeting held in a Banjarmasin Christian high school that “all 849” villages in the colonial entity, Greater Dayak, supported it.⁵⁰ In Kuala Kapuas, meanwhile, political party representatives were asked to state publicly where they stood on the issue.⁵¹ The big nationalist parties responded by cautioning against “regionalism and tribalism” (this quote from PNI, Partai Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Party) and urging “national feeling among backward tribes” (quote attributed to PRB, *sic*, probably a misprint for PRN, Partai Rakjat Nasional, National People’s Party). But several small or local parties with a following only in specific regions spoke enthusiastically about giving “life opportunities to life units in remote regions” (Acoma, Parkindo), and “privileging backward tribes like the Mentawai, Kubu, Toraja, Tengger, and others” (Somdi).⁵²

Ethnic talk dismayed Jakarta’s governor in Banjarmasin: Murdjani, a PNI man from Java. He was a determined modernizer who saw it as his life’s work to bring economic development to Kalimantan and believed that ethnic differences would disappear as internal trade and traffic grew more intensive. From his perspective, the decision to divide Kalimantan into three provinces was a regrettable surrender to ethnic politicking. But he understood, too, that the state had failed to bring about the economic improvement the people of Kalimantan had a right to expect. His attempts to introduce reforms were frustrated by events and government failures. The cancellation through lack of funds of a large marsh drainage scheme (the Schophuys polder scheme) early in 1954 caused protests in rural areas outside Banjarmasin.⁵³ Murdjani was incapacitated during this period by a recurring illness and then replaced in mid-1954 by Milono, also from Java. Liberal Banjarmasin press commentary at first portrayed Milono as a “feudalist,” but his image improved when he began to work hard for the cause of establishing the new provinces.

Dayak activists were not alone in politicizing an ethnic idiom. In many other areas as well, for example northern Sumatra in 1956–57, activists expressed their demands

⁴⁷ *Indonesia Berdjwang*, February 24, 1955.

⁴⁸ *Indonesia Berdjwang*, February 26, 1954, and January 20, 1954.

⁴⁹ *Indonesia Berdjwang*, February 21, 1954.

⁵⁰ *Indonesia Berdjwang*, March 18, 1954.

⁵¹ *Indonesia Berdjwang* March 31, 1954, and April 4, 1954.

⁵² Parkindo—Partai Kristen Indonesia, Indonesian Christian [i.e., Protestant] Party; Somdi and Acoma were local parties whose acronyms I was unable to unlock.

⁵³ Nederlands Commissariaat, April 18, 1954.

for new provinces in ethnic terms.⁵⁴ The Banjar were an exception. *Indonesia Berjuang* always presented the issue of provincial politics not using the language of identity, but of liberal democracy. What was at stake, it often wrote, was breaking the monopoly of the Jakarta-appointed executive by means of a provincial parliament, which did not yet exist at that time. Nevertheless, Dayak activists understood that it was acceptable to advocate for their cause using ethnic terms so long as this rhetoric was confined to the local arena and did not enter the national discourse. In order to gain a hearing in Jakarta, it was necessary to avoid ethnic talk. Tjilik Riwut, the energetic and popular regent of Kotawaringin (since 1951), promoted the idea of establishing Central Kalimantan province among politicians in Jakarta by stressing the need to bring government services to the remote interior, while at the same time tactfully disavowing “destructive regionalism.”⁵⁵ Others supported the cause by citing issues of justice, arguing that those who had suffered most under Dutch colonialism deserved special attention.⁵⁶

An obstacle to the creation of new provinces was their cost. The Interior Ministry told “me too” provincial hopefuls early in 1954 that creating new provinces in Kalimantan would mean doubling the current number of 40,000 bureaucrats in the region, and that each new province would require a start-up budget of Rp. 30 million. According to the ministry, if everyone who wanted a new province was to get one, it would seriously impede the government’s effectiveness.⁵⁷ However, statistics of this sort were more likely to stimulate than to hamper ambitions among provincial elites, who favored the expansion of local bureaucracy. As it happened, developments in the interior of the Dayak regions starting in 1953 eventually pulled the government over the line.

Christian Simbar and the Buntok Incident (1953)

The creation of the new province was largely accomplished through negotiations conducted out of public sight. The key negotiating techniques included direct lobbying efforts aimed at Jakarta, backed by stealthy force in the jungles of Kalimantan. The clandestine Dayak militia was intended both to put muscle into the demand for a Dayak province and to demonstrate loyalty to Jakarta by opposing anti-Jakarta Muslim rebels. Kalimantan-based activists portrayed the militia to politicians in Jakarta as the expression of a unique Dayak culture, savage but loyal. In fact, this militia already had a considerable history. The Tentara Lawong, as we have seen, was probably a Dutch-sponsored “Christian-Dayak” vigilante group originally formed to resist the penetration of Banjar republican guerrillas into the Dusun lands from Hulu Sungei to the southeast. It survived the transition to independence and turns up again in the written record in late 1953, when it was reportedly active in Tamiang Layang, just inside the Dusun lands and across from neighboring Hulu Sungei. It had become

⁵⁴ Liddle, *Ethnicity, Party, and National Integration*.

⁵⁵ *Indonesia Berjuang*, February 4, 1955, similarly *Indonesia Berjuang*, April 7, 1954.

⁵⁶ *Indonesia Berjuang*, April 18, 1954.

⁵⁷ *Indonesia Berjuang*, March 20, 1954.

essentially a local group, no longer tied to a larger political purpose. Certainly no orthodox Christian organization, it engaged in an indigenous “mystical” cult.⁵⁸

Christian Simbar was the most prominent leader of Tentara Lawong. He was secretary to the district chief (*wedana* or *camat*) in Buntok. This small riverside town in the Dayak Dusun lands lay about fifty kilometers northwest of Tamiang Layang. The armed group’s main purpose was to defend local interests against hostile outsiders. It may even have had a vague association with Ibnu Hadjar’s KRJT (the People’s Division of the Oppressed), which, though allied to the Darul Islam, actually more closely resembled a nonreligious grassroots resistance movement opposed to state control.⁵⁹

The enthusiastic support from the local population that Tentara Lawong enjoyed was due less to ideology than to its practice of robbing passing trading boats and distributing the proceeds, Robin Hood style, to those in need. Attackers from Tentara Lawong had robbed boats at Kurau, Negara, and finally at Kalahien, near Buntok. They acted like men of authority, wearing their government uniforms during the raids as well as during the distribution of the spoils that followed. But the incident in Kalahien in late 1953 was too much for the police, who subsequently arrested a number of Simbar’s men for robbing the Chinese riverboat, *Gin Wan II*. Four of those arrested were Simbar’s relatives, and he decided to strike back. Early on Sunday morning, November 22, 1953, Simbar and hundreds of his Dayak followers stormed the town of Buntok. They liberated their imprisoned mates, but in the process killed six policemen, as well as six members of police families, including three children.⁶⁰ The acting district chief was among those murdered. The raiders then absconded with the weapons in the police armory.

The appearance of armed force in an area where no one monopolizes the means of violence is bound to interest others, too, notably those with a political stake in the region. Rather than becoming outlaws, Simbar and his gang were about to be coopted and transformed into a useful political commodity. At first, the militias attracted the attention of local groups who perceived them as a religious rather than as an ethnic force. Christian Dayaks in Banjarmasin, not anti-Indonesian by any means, saw them as potential allies against the Darul Islam, which posed a threat to their religion. Reports of attacks by Kahar Muzakkar’s Darul Islam movement on Torajanese Christians in South Sulawesi were spreading fear throughout church congregations all over Indonesia. In Banjarmasin, in November 1953, Christoffel Mihing, a Dayak civil servant in Banjarmasin and a Christian, announced that he and his congregation were prepared to take up arms to support the Indonesian government and to protect themselves against forcible conversion to Islam.⁶¹ They wanted to contact the Tentara Lawong to design a “struggle program” together. Yet the Dayak militia was eventually drawn not into these religious politics, but into ethnic politics supporting the creation of a fourth Dayak province in Kalimantan, an issue that they were able to exploit because of Jakarta’s state-building problem at the time. Immediately after the Buntok attack, unnamed, evidently Christian, Dayak leaders in Banjarmasin approached Governor Murdjani. These delegates, who had taken part in the Buntok attack,

⁵⁸ *Indonesia Berjuang*, November 26, 1953.

⁵⁹ Interview with T.T. Suan, Palangkaraya, May 12, 2003.

⁶⁰ *Indonesia Berjuang*, November 25, 1953.

⁶¹ *Nederlands Commissariaat*, November 12, 1953.

declared that they were not Ibnu Hadjar's rebels, but were acting in response to a long history of enmity between Islamic and Dayak groups. The lobbyists claimed to know the "culture and customs" of the Dayaks, which were "unique" and included a strong attachment to tribe and family. They recommended a "wise" resolution of the issue, by which they meant a resolution that would not involve prosecution of the militia. An *Indonesia Berdjjuang* editorial agreed with these sentiments, and later reported with approval that the cabinet viewed the attack as criminal rather than political.⁶²

The Buntok attack had been launched, the attackers now revealed in a letter, by a movement called Telabang Pantjasila Sektor Dajak. *Telabang* (or *telawang*) is a shield; *Pantjasila* was the Indonesian national ideology, a term that clearly conveyed loyalty to Jakarta. The attackers explained that they had been motivated by grievances, such as their dissatisfaction with government corruption and the cancellation of the marsh drainage scheme. The group added (no doubt with an eye to attracting potential sponsors in Jakarta) that it was ready "to die for" Pantjasila. The next day, the group rebaptized itself in even more florid, but slightly less overtly Dayak, terms as Mandau Telabang Pantjasila (*mandau* refers to a Dayak cutlass). It announced that its leader was Ch. Simbar, alias Mandolin, a Ma'anyan Dayak tribesman. Most importantly, it declared its opposition to the loosely allied anti-Jakarta rebel movements, KRJT, Darul Islam, and the Tentara Islam Indonesia.⁶³

Simbar, the declared leader of this group, was clearly no pariah. He was a local government official now speaking out for many of his fellow officials in this Dayak area.⁶⁴ At a long and sympathetic meeting in December 1953 with a high-powered delegation of Dayak notables led by the regent of Barito, G. Obus, Simbar put forward a remarkably ideological defense of his actions. He said he was driven by a sense of the injustices suffered by Dayaks, was opposed to corruption and to Islamic rebels, and that he and his men would surrender provided they were recruited into the police force or the army.⁶⁵ Also present at this meeting was C. Luran, chairman of the Barito regency tentative assembly (DPRDS, Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah Sementara), who had been a member of Hausmann Baboe's Pakat Dayak executive in 1939.

A deal must have been made, for the next day Simbar surrendered along with 129 of his followers.⁶⁶ All were taken to Banjarmasin. Another high-level meeting followed there between Dayak leaders and the deputy governor, representatives of the police, and the prosecutor's office (mediated by district chief Barnstein Babu, a nephew of Hausmann Baboe).⁶⁷ Afterwards, most of the men who had taken part in the Buntok attack were released. The police, disinclined to take an entirely cavalier attitude to the law since some of their own men had been killed in the skirmish, did insist on detaining the ringleaders and charging them with the robbery on the *Gin Wan II*. But in mid-April 1954, Simbar simply walked out of detention and took a bus northwards in the direction of his homeland.⁶⁸ In August, the local government announced that all charges against Simbar and his associates had been dismissed. Still miffed, the police at

⁶² *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, November 26 and 28, 1953.

⁶³ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, December 3, 1953.

⁶⁴ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, January 3, 1954.

⁶⁵ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, December 4, 1953.

⁶⁶ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, December 5 and 6, 1953.

⁶⁷ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, January 6, 1954.

⁶⁸ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, April 13, 15, 23, and 24, 1954; and *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, May 23, 1954.

first insisted he had to pick up the dismissal letter in person, but in the end even that demand was dropped.⁶⁹

Indonesia Berdjuang commentators soon smelled a rat, but dared name no names. Simbar could not have planned and carried out his own escape, but must have acted on orders, they wrote. The writers suggested that this was all part of a preelection ploy to counter the Islamic parties. Simbar's escape had been organized by "clandestine elements" in Banjarmasin, they claimed, and these same elements were now giving him weapons that might be put to use in the election.⁷⁰

It is true that the prospect of national elections was already raising political tensions around the country in 1954, a year before they were eventually held. But the Simbar movement had little to do with electoral politics. Simbar was a pawn in an elite politics concerned with decentralized rule. At this time, the national cabinet was considering the division of Kalimantan into provinces. Dayak action committees were springing up to argue for the "fourth" province encompassing Greater Dayak. The best connected of them was the Committee to Channel the People's Aspirations for Central Kalimantan (Panitia Penjalur Hasrat Rakjat Kalimantan Tengah), led by Oberlin Brahim and M. Ismail.⁷¹ Oberlin's brother, Timmerman, was soon to form the Partai Persatuan Daya, while Ismail was the brother of the Parkindo leader and Banjarmasin judge, A. D. Ismail.

In June 1954, Simbar was back in the local headlines, once more identified as the leader of his armed organization named Telawang, Mandau dan Pantjasila (also sometimes referred to as "Telabang Mandau Dajak Kalimantan"). He was still based in the Barito River catchment area around Buntok and Muara Teweh.⁷² Two months later, he had reportedly walked 150 kilometers west into the Kahayan River catchment area, where he was providing "mystical knowledge" (*ilmu*) to Kaharingan and Christian Dayaks and urging them to join his armed force.⁷³ "Thousands" responded, according to *Indonesia Berdjuang*. Simbar told the press that the formation of Central Kalimantan province by "democratic" means was an urgent issue, and he criticized the weak efforts that had been made in support of this cause by Dayak parliamentarian (and ex-Dayak Councillor), Halmoat Koenoem, in Jakarta.⁷⁴

Simbar's genius lay in his ability to move back and forth at will between town and jungle, now playing the role of a Dayak electoral candidate, now that of armed guerrilla. In May 1955, apparently emerging from the jungle, he took his place as one of the top three candidates for the Partai Persatuan Daya.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ *Indonesia Berdjuang*, August 3, 1954; *Indonesia Berdjuang*, September 8, 1954.

⁷⁰ *Indonesia Berdjuang*, December 8, 1953, July 24, 1954, and August 29, 1954.

⁷¹ *Indonesia Berdjuang*, August 29, 1954.

⁷² *Indonesia Berdjuang*, June 19, 1954, August 19 and 27, 1954.

⁷³ It would be interesting to know if this *ilmu* recalled the memory of the *nyuli* movement prevalent among these Lawangan/Luangan and Maanyan Dayaks in the 1920s. See W. K. H. Feuilletau de Bruyn, "De Njoeli Beweging in De Zuider En Oosterafdeeling Van Borneo," *Koloniaal Tijdschrift* 23 (1934): 41-65; Weinstock, "Kaharingan and the Luangan Dayaks," p. 148.

⁷⁴ *Indonesia Berdjuang*, September 23, 1954.

⁷⁵ It seems Tentara Lawung remained active until at least 1955, not necessarily with Simbar in control. Continued atrocities committed by Darul Islam fighters against civilians led the government to sponsor local militias called Barisan Keamanan Kampung (BKK, Village Security Front, sometimes referred to as Barisan Keamanan Desa, BKD, Village Security Front, or Organisasi Keamanan Desa, OKD, Village Security Organization). They were given minimal training, after which they joined military patrols

The 1955 Elections: A "Defeat" for Dayak Autonomy

The clearest evidence that the dream of establishing an ethnic fourth province in Kalimantan was limited to an urban elite is the fact that it failed to create electoral waves even in the three Dayak heartland regencies. As the new nation's first elections approached, the large parties spoke of national unity, human skills, and budgets. Advocates for Dayak autonomy did try the electoral avenue, but they found support only in three small parties. The Partai Rakjat Nasional (PRN, National Party of the People) had a minister in the national cabinet (Djody Gondokusumo, Justice). In March 1954, this party held its annual national conference in Banjarmasin, and came out in support of the fourth province proposal.⁷⁶ But less than a year later, the party split between a Jakarta faction that opposed significant concessions to the regions and another centered in its South Sulawesi homeland that supported them. Another was the small Protestant party, Parkindo, to which several leading Dayaks belonged, including the mission-educated Mahir Mahar. These were both national parties. The most promising potential ally, however, was the Partai Persatuan Daya. This was a specifically ethnic party, without national pretensions, set up shortly before the election in South Kalimantan by Timmerman Brahim. It was unrelated to a similarly named party in West Kalimantan.⁷⁷

Dayaks in the electoral district of South Kalimantan were not united under an ethnic banner as the 1955 elections approached. This was not through lack of interest in regional politics or parties. Douglas Miles describes a high level of politicization of rural villages even in upriver areas during the run-up to the elections.⁷⁸ But unlike West Kalimantan, where Dayaks did rally behind their ethnic party and won a seat in the national parliament, here they spread their support among many parties.⁷⁹ Many Dayaks simply did not find Dayak ethnicity appealing as an exclusive political tag to mark their identity. Partai Persatuan Daya's key candidates were Timmerman Brahim, Perdinand Dahdan Leiden, and the aforementioned Christian Simbar, all based in Banjarmasin.⁸⁰ Mahir Mahar, former member of the Greater Dayak Council and by this time a member of parliament in Jakarta, was put forward as a candidate by Parkindo. Mochran bin Hadji Mohammad Ali, another former Greater Dayak Council member and by now a Jakarta parliamentarian, stood as a candidate for Parindra (Partai

dispatched to search for the enemy. In the Banjar area in May 1955, there were six hundred militia members: three hundred in Rantau, fifty in Amandit, twenty each in Bababai and Tandjung, and others operating elsewhere. (Nederlands Commissariaat, May 18, 1955). Some of these militias had an ethnic character. In July 1955, a Dayak militia named Laung Kuning (its name resembles Tentara Laung [Lawung]), but this group operated in Hulu Sungei itself rather than on its northwestern margin) was "legalized" as a BKK. Laung Kuning proved an effective force against Ibnu Hadjar's base in the Amandit mountains near Kandangan in the following months. See *Indonesia Berdjung*, May 6, 1955, July 5, 1955, August 14, 18 and 24, 1955.

⁷⁶ Nederlands Commissariaat, March 9, 1954; *Indonesia Berdjung*, February 12 and 17, 1955.

⁷⁷ Jamie Seth Davidson, "Violence and Politics in West Kalimantan, Indonesia" (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 2002), p. 86.

⁷⁸ Miles, *Cutlass and Crescent Moon*, p. 127.

⁷⁹ *Suluh Umum*, May 1955, pp. 14-16; *Indonesia Berdjung*, May 3, 1955; Nederlands Commissariaat, July 9, 1955.

⁸⁰ Other Partai Persatuan Daya candidates were Adji Djaga Bahyn, Kristinus Wanden Wente (a Banjarmasin junior military officer), Mrs. Bahara Njangkal (head of a native primary school in Banjarmasin), Johannes Idjau, and Sikoer.

Indonesia Raya, The Greater Indonesia Party). Matseman Usup, the father of K. M. A. Usop, who was to become such a significant Dayak leader after the early 1990s, was aligned with the PNI in Kuala Kapuas, though ranked so low that he had little chance of victory. Christoffel Mihing, the Dayak civil servant in Banjarmasin, though a member of PNI, stood as an independent. Finally, Tjilik Riwut, the high-profile regent of Kotawaringin and a former soldier, was the number-one candidate for the military party, IPKI (Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia, League of the Supporters of Indonesian Independence).

The results of the election for the South Kalimantan provisional provincial parliament (DPRD Peralihan), also held that year, confirmed just how ineffective ethnic Dayak electoral politics were. In South Kalimantan as a whole, 82 percent of the votes went to the two Islamic parties, Nahdatul Ulama (NU, 49 percent) and Masyumi (33 percent). PNI took another 6 percent of the vote. None of these had expressed an interest in the creation of a fourth province. In what were thought to be the predominantly Dayak regencies of Barito, Kapuas, and Kotawaringin, the smaller parties made more of a showing, but not nearly enough to break the dominance of NU, Masyumi, and PNI. The big parties won a total of 70 percent, 52 percent, and 60 percent in these three interior regencies, respectively. Those parties that had actively supported the establishment of a fourth province—Partai Persatuan Daya (Dayak Unity Party), PRN, and Parkindo—each won tiny portions of the vote, though Partai Persatuan Daya, Simbar's party, certainly did well as a newcomer (Simbar's party won, respectively, 3 percent, 14 percent, and 3 percent of the total vote in each of the three regencies).⁸¹ This showing was not enough to persuade Simbar to stay with party politics, however, and he returned to his older tactics soon afterward.

Simbar Deploys Guerrilla Tactics Again

Having lost the election, Christian Simbar went back into the jungle in September 1956, but he did not sever his links with the authorities. Much of his time was spent in his home area of Buntok and the northern part of Hulu Sungei, but he also ranged west to the Kahayan River.⁸² Douglas Miles presents evidence from the area around the upper Mentaya River (above Sampit, in Kotawaringin) indicating that Simbar enjoyed the cooperation of the military. Tjilik Riwut, who combined a role in the civil administration with his continued activities in the military, acted as his conduit and possibly his taskmaster.⁸³ This allowed Simbar to act with impunity. His gang raided the military arsenal in Sampit on November 10, 1956.⁸⁴ On December 6, he and his men attacked the township of Pahandut, at that time merely a district capital (*kecamatan*).⁸⁵ Two policemen were killed, and the district chief (*camat*) was among the three people

⁸¹ Election results calculated from Miles, *Cutlass and Crescent Moon*, p. 118; there are minor differences in the statistics listed by the Nederlands Commissariaat, August 25, 1956. Miles fails to make clear that this set of election results was not for the national, but for the provincial, parliament.

⁸² Nederlands Commissariaat, September 24, 1956; *Harian Rakjat*, December 25, 1956.

⁸³ Associates of Simbar still believe that A. H. Nasution had instructed Tjilik Riwut to set up a militia to create "a few ripples" in the Kalimantan interior in order to put pressure on Sukarno. This military connection explains, they say, why Simbar attacked only the police and not the military. Marko Mahin, personal communication, December 9, 2003.

⁸⁴ Miles, *Cutlass and Crescent Moon*, pp. vii, 130-133.

⁸⁵ *Harian Rakjat*, December 11, 1956.

injured. The gang allegedly burned houses, raped women, then ran off with gold and diamonds they had robbed from the locals, as well as materials stolen from government offices. The marauders headed north to Kuala Kurung, along the Kahayan River, apparently intent on a repeat performance. They always left leaflets in their wake—this was a modern movement!—promoting the creation of Central Kalimantan province, asserting Dayak commitment to Sukarno, and declaring opposition to an Islamic Indonesia.

Simbar's vigilantes gave the impression that they controlled most of the interior of the Kapuas regency. They openly held marching and shooting drills just a few kilometers outside the regency capital, Kuala Kapuas. The metropolitan press portrayed the entire interior as unsafe for boat travel, warning that Simbar would shoot at and rob passing trade and government boats. Meanwhile the Katingan River, the next catchment area to the west, was under the control of another gang leader called William Embang, whose force was allied with Simbar's.⁸⁶ Together, these insurgents continued to call their movement Mandau Telabang Pantjasila Kalimantan. But in the interior, Simbar was not seen as a rebel. Local government leaders there seemed to support him. Embang also had official allies: the district chief of Kasungan, Embang's hometown, joined Embang in the forest for a time. When captured, he claimed Embang had kidnapped him, and all charges were dropped.⁸⁷

Curiously, the Jakarta PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party) newspaper, *Harian Rakjat*, reported in December 1956 that Simbar and Embang's gang differed from other jungle militias because they never engaged in robbery. The journalist alleged that the gang had its own "prosecutor general," who severely punished any member caught thieving.⁸⁸ Coming just a few days after the bloody attack on Pahandut, which had been reported in the same paper, this strange assertion was another hint that Simbar and Embang's elite connections now stretched all the way to Jakarta. And influence may have flowed both ways, for just as Simbar's late 1953 attack on Buntok virtually coincided with the first discussions in the national cabinet about the creation of new provinces in Kalimantan, so his 1956 attack on Pahandut came just two months after the cabinet had once again considered the Kalimantan question, suggesting that perhaps his actions were being guided by shadowy figures in Jakarta.

The Creation of the New Province of Central Kalimantan

By late 1956, the Darul Islam rebellion had been seriously weakened. In South Kalimantan, many of Ibnu Hadjar's men had surrendered (though without handing over their weapons) and been rewarded with jobs in a state-owned rubber plantation.⁸⁹ But just then an even more serious threat erupted, as local military commanders staged increasingly serious acts of insubordination in several outer island regions as part of the Permesta/PRRI revolt. These disruptions occurred first in North Sumatra in November 1956, then in Central Sumatra and South Sumatra, and last in North

⁸⁶ *Harian Rakjat*, December 25, 1956.

⁸⁷ *Harian Rakjat*, December 15, 1956.

⁸⁸ *Harian Rakjat*, December 25, 1956.

⁸⁹ Nederlands Commissariaat, November 19, 1956.

Sulawesi. Colonel Abimanju, the military commander of Kalimantan, appears to have sympathized with the rebels, though hesitantly and without burning his bridges to Jakarta.

By the end of 1956, army chief of staff General A. H. Nasution was the most powerful man in the country. Reports of his activities had been featured on the front page of all national papers every day for months, even before the Ali Sastroamidjojo cabinet resigned on March 14, 1957, at which time martial law was declared throughout Indonesia to deal with the PRRI/Permesta regional rebellion. The non-party "business" cabinet that replaced Sastroamidjojo's cabinet was overshadowed by Nasution. It announced that resolving the regional problems was its main priority. The most important element in its political strategy was to build support by creating new provinces. Cost was now much less of a consideration. In fact, this approach had already been initiated with the creation of Aceh province the previous September, when Aceh had been separated from North Sumatra province, designated as a Special Region (Daerah Istimewa), and granted a degree of autonomy. Many more provinces were to follow, but none gained such significant autonomy as did Aceh. In these provinces, decentralization meant deconcentration of government administrative tasks, but not devolution of authority. It did not matter. Those who wanted the new provinces to be created were more interested in the promise of jobs and money, which they hoped would revive their crisis-ridden economies, than in political autonomy. The abject delegations traveling to Jakarta made it clear to Nasution and to anyone else who would listen that they condemned rebellious activity.

The communist-nationalist political party, Murba, which aimed to support President Sukarno by opposing Islamicism and regionalism, contributed to the new strategy by organizing a series of "people's congresses" around the country. The All Indonesia Congress, under the leadership of the Murba-leaning A. M. Hanafi, sponsored many regional meetings around this time. Speakers at these events often began by expressing their support for the government in Jakarta and ended by asking for provincial status. One such congress for Central Kalimantan, chaired by Mahir Mahar, was held in Banjarmasin in December 1956. It attracted six hundred participants, including Governor Milono. It urged the speedy establishment of a Central Kalimantan province while nominally renouncing Simbar and Embang's "undemocratic" movement.⁹⁰ East Sumatra also demanded to be recognized as a province at about this time, as did Tapanuli, Bangka, and Lampung.⁹¹ Picking and choosing among these supplicants as its own state-building needs dictated, Jakarta refused some but accepted others. Among the victors were South, Central, Southeast and North Sulawesi, Jambi, West Sumatra, and Riau.⁹² Maluku was changed from an "administrative" to an "autonomous" province the same year, and Nusa Tenggara was split into three provinces the following year.

Preparations to subdivide Kalimantan into three parts had been inching along since early 1954, but the implementation date was now set for January 1, 1957. This plan made no provision for the establishment of a Central Kalimantan province, however.

⁹⁰ Ibid., December 12, 1956.

⁹¹ *Merdeka*, January 12, 1957; February 19, 1957; April 20, 1957; and June 26, 1957.

⁹² J. D. Legge, *Central Authority and Regional Autonomy in Indonesia: A Study in Local Administration, 1950-1960* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1961), pp. 66-68.

Kotawaringin's regent, Tjilik Riwut, therefore sent urgent telegrams to Jakarta in October 1956, calling for the creation of Central Kalimantan. Perhaps to his own surprise, he now found ready listeners. The PKI came out in support of Central Kalimantan, despite its stated dislike of the "tribalism" (*rasa kesukuan*) inherent in so much provincial politicking.⁹³ A desire to put arch-rival Masyumi in its place by appropriating most of its territory in South Kalimantan clearly played a role in the PKI's response. No doubt Tjilik Riwut's military connections were also put to good use. He could show the Jakarta politicians a photograph of himself, barefoot and gun in hand, personally leading an expedition against the KRJT in his area.⁹⁴ As a result, the main government party, PNI, agreed in October 1956 that Central Kalimantan would get its own province within three years.⁹⁵

Tjilik Riwut became the key player in the culminating phase of this small provincial struggle. He was dispatched early in the new year to an office in Banjarmasin to prepare for the establishment of the new province of Central Kalimantan, working under the leadership of Governor Milono, who had been governor of all Kalimantan.⁹⁶ The proposed three-year wait was too long for these men. The opportunity to whittle it down came when Jakarta declared martial law in March. Tjilik Riwut and Milono set off for Jakarta once more to argue their case. Milono, who had managed to slough off his early image as an outsider governor imposed on the people by Jakarta, enthusiastically vowed that he would not return empty-handed.⁹⁷ The issue of Central Kalimantan was no doubt on the agenda of an important military meeting set to discuss martial law and regional autonomy in mid-April 1957.⁹⁸

Security conditions in the region were now "ideal," Tjilik Riwut and the new military commander of Kalimantan declared.⁹⁹ Indeed, after having done his part, Simbar had been eased out of the picture. He and Embang came out of the jungle and were taken to meet acting Kalimantan governor, Sarkawie, and his entourage in Banjarmasin in March. Simbar told them he had "ten thousand" men committed to him all over Central Kalimantan. The group then travelled together to Buntok and to Bundar to witness four hundred Tentara Lawong members in each place take a symbolic oath of loyalty to the state.¹⁰⁰ The following month, the gang members figured as guests of honor at official celebrations repeated in each of the three regencies that were to join the province. Simbar and Embang's gangs were rebaptized the Youth Front for the Development of Central Kalimantan; the group was still led by Simbar, who was subsequently counted among the heroes of Central Kalimantan.¹⁰¹

⁹³ *Harian Rakjat*, October 15, 24, 25 and 26, 1956; see also, *Harian Rakjat*, February 12, 1957 on Central Sulawesi.

⁹⁴ *Indonesia Berdjung*, January 30, 1955.

⁹⁵ *Harian Rakjat*, October 26, 1956.

⁹⁶ *Merdeka*, April 6, 1957.

⁹⁷ *Merdeka*, April 9, 1957; *Merdeka*, May 7, 1957.

⁹⁸ *Merdeka*, April 13 and 29, 1957.

⁹⁹ *Merdeka*, April 16, 1957.

¹⁰⁰ *Merdeka*, February 23, 1957; *Merdeka*, March 1, 25, and 26, 1957.

¹⁰¹ Riwut, *Kalimantan Membangun*, p. 62; K. M. A. Usop, *Pakat Dayak: Sejarah Integrasi Dan Jatidiri Masyarakat Dayak Daerah Kalimantan Tengah* (Palangkaraya: Yayasan Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Batang Garing, 1996), p. 82.

The Losers and the Winner

A list of gubernatorial hopefuls for the new province that circulated in Banjarmasin around this time indicates who was considered worthy of leading the region.¹⁰² The memory of Hausmann Baboe, the father of Dayak ethnic self-awareness, who had been executed by the Japanese, apparently still reigned supreme in politicized Dayak circles. The name of his son, Ruslan Babu, by this time a consul for the Republic of Indonesia in San Francisco, appeared on the list. Another son, the trader Alfons Babu, had earlier been put forward as a candidate in the first flush of excitement about the province in 1954.¹⁰³ Christoffel Mihing, the Banjarmasin civil servant who had wanted to send his Christian church into battle against the Darul Islam forces, had chaired the council of the Central Kalimantan People's Congress the previous December; he was named as a possible candidate. There was also Mahir Mahar, who had served on the Greater Dayak Council under the Dutch. G. Obus was listed; Obus was the regent of Barito who had given Simbar a voice in the national media in 1954. Another potential candidate, A. D. Ismail, was the leader of the Protestant party Parkindo that had supported the province from the start. Only J. M. Nahan, a Ma'anyan Dayak, was a relative unknown. None of these men was ultimately elected as governor, but no aspirant for office was disappointed, either. All the other players were rewarded with one of the numerous official positions that now opened up; they took their places in a variety of posts ranging from bank manager to assembly chairman.¹⁰⁴

The front runner for governor and eventual victor proved to be Tjilik Riwut, who was at that moment putting the finishing touches to the new administration. Tjilik was charismatic, and he had a convincing record. Educated as a paramedic, he had fought as a republican guerrilla in the interior of Borneo. In 1955, as Kotawaringin district chief, he nationalized the Bruynzeel timber operation. He was also a prolific author.¹⁰⁵ In 1954, he had submitted his own proposal for a new province, to be called South Kalimantan, with Sampit as its capital.¹⁰⁶ Dayaks had poured into Sampit to express their support, and a committee of "Kotawaringin Dayaks" had been formed to promote the idea.¹⁰⁷ After some months, during which Milono was acting governor, Tjilik Riwut became the first Dayak governor of Central Kalimantan; his tenure as governor would last ten years, from 1957 to 1967. Dayaks held the position until 1984, when at the height of the New Order the governorship was taken over by outsiders.

The capital was to be built at Pahandut. Tjilik Riwut had argued sensibly for Sampit because of its decent deepwater harbor and the nearby Bruynzeel timber operation. But the bureaucratically oriented Central Kalimantan activists argued in support of this small village, Pahandut, which boasted only an abandoned Japanese airstrip, in romantic terms. Pahandut was appropriate as a "cultural center," they said. What's more, it was not afflicted with Sampit's "harbor city mentality."¹⁰⁸ Also, it was the homeland of the mission-educated core group who had fought for the province.

¹⁰² *Merdeka*, April 27, 1957.

¹⁰³ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, April 21, 1954.

¹⁰⁴ Many names are listed in Tjilik Riwut, *Memperkenalkan Kalimantan Tengah Dan Pembangunan Kota "Palangka Raja"* (Palangka Raja: n.p., 1962).

¹⁰⁵ Personal communication, P. M. Laksono, who has researched Riwut's biography, July 27, 2004.

¹⁰⁶ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, April 1 and 3, 1954.

¹⁰⁷ *Indonesia Berdjjuang*, May 18, 1954, August 12, 1954.

¹⁰⁸ *Nederlands Commissariaat*, March 18, 1957; *Merdeka*, May 7, 1957.

The government-financed construction boom soon to come would no doubt benefit everyone.¹⁰⁹

Simbar was set up with some money and went into business. He had little talent for business, however, and went bankrupt. In 1961, he returned to the jungle, still imagining that he had pioneered the only route to political success (while conveniently forgetting the contributions of those who had tirelessly lobbied Jakarta). He had been passed over for governor after Tjilik Riwut's term expired, and this angered him. Perhaps he did not realize that he had lost influence and, for that reason, immunity from the law. Simbar was captured and died under mysterious circumstances shortly after being released from military detention in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan. The authorities had not forgotten their own cohorts who had suffered death at his hands, and many suspect he was executed.¹¹⁰ Simbar had become dispensable. Embang, by contrast, lived to old age in Palangkaraya.

Afterthought

The formation of Central Kalimantan province is not a major story in Indonesia's history, nor a particularly glorious one. But it is interesting because it gives us a glimpse of a dynamic that has again become important. After the collapse of the New Order in 1998, a weakened Jakarta created a large number of new districts and provinces, many of them carved out along ethnic lines. The dynamics that characterize ethnically charged local politics have often been misinterpreted. In the story of Kalimantan, at least, the campaign to claim more autonomy for the provinces was not so much the work of rebels as it was part of a loyalist movement among junior civil servants. Insofar as "unruly" guerrilla fighters were involved in the struggle for a separate province, they ultimately figured as pawns manipulated by the more important players. The move to create new provinces was the sharp end, as it were, of a bureaucratic state extending itself and at the same time being drawn into the remotest territories of the archipelago. The images this campaign invoked to establish group identity and allegiance were, moreover, not "natural," ancient ones, but quite recent inventions. In the hands of those who politicized them, these images were associated less with autonomy than with conformity, and less with self-determination and democracy than with expanding an administrative machine.

During his visit to Palangkaraya in July 1957, when he came to lay the foundation stone for the new provincial capital, President Sukarno unwittingly gave his blessing to an ethnically delineated form of provincial statecraft that embodied the "tribalism and separatism" he had passionately warned against.¹¹¹ The ethnic qualities of the savage but loyal native, invoked so deftly by both the provincial bureaucrats who fought for the province and by A. H. Nasution and his lieutenants in Jakarta who finally approved its establishment, was less a form of popular resistance than an element in the conspiratorial politics conducted between Banjarmasin and Jakarta.

¹⁰⁹ Rapid conversion earlier in the century had nearly persuaded the German mission to move its seminary from Banjarmasin to Kuala Kurung above Pahandut. See J. Paulus, ed., *Encyclopaedie Van Nederlandsch-Indie*, vol. 1 ('s Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff; and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1917), I:364.

¹¹⁰ Interview with T. T. Suan, Palangkaraya, May 12, 2003; Personal communication with Marko Mahin, December 12, 2003, based on recent interview with Ch. Simbar's brother, Damang Bubu Simbar.

¹¹¹ *Merdeka*, April 23, 1957.

What a genuine local resistance against oppression might have looked like—and whether it would have adopted the same ethnic idiom—we do not learn from this story. Perhaps if Simbar had not been coopted, he would have developed his relations with Ibnu Hadjar's KRJT and fought, not for a province, nor for Pantjasila, nor for Islam, but for social justice.

The episode discussed here was shaped by the decentralized state-building efforts ongoing throughout Indonesia during the period, from the 1940s into the 1950s. The outcome was a new province that Dayak activists would long describe as "a Dayak home."¹¹² Ethnic-identity politics had been admitted to the Republic of Indonesia, not because ethnic rebels intent on separatism had forced it in, but because Jakarta itself had chosen to recruit provincial loyalists who had presented themselves as "backward minorities seeking protection," a phrase that recalled the Dutch characterization of the Dayaks in Malino in 1946. These ethnic politics, with all their implied exclusion of non-Dayaks, would enjoy a resurgence in 2001. A revived Dayak militant organization, which included a well-connected militia resembling Ch. Simbar's vanished gang, sought to impress itself on post-Suharto provincial politics by expelling all migrants of Madurese origin from Central Kalimantan.¹¹³

This article has traced the ethnicization of local politics, not to any roots in popular local primordialism, but to the process of state formation under difficult conditions. In the 1940s, the new Indonesian state needed to find loyal partners in order to maintain or extend its influence into remote regions of its territory. By seeking out partners who promised to be effective on the ground, regardless of democratic procedure, the central state ended up sponsoring ambitious individuals with a record of mobilizing support along ethnic lines. Probably Jakarta's judgment of who these supporters might be derived from its own stereotypical, essentialist views about culture. Thus while Dayak identity politics did not appear to appeal greatly to the voting public, the military found it convenient, for a time, to sponsor violent expressions of it. They judged, correctly, that ethnic militancy can accord with loyalty to the center in cases where the ethnic loyalties exist in a relatively small and isolated territory ("backward minorities seeking protection"). Unlike democratically channeled ethnic sentiment, ethnic sentiment mobilized by the center is unlikely to threaten the status quo because it is handled by administrators and not unleashed through the ballot box. Thus the central state acts in ways contrary to its announced principles favoring modern, national inclusiveness, and actually sponsors, in a highly pragmatic way, chauvinistic ethnic movements in the regions. This mutual transformation and interpenetration of the state and social forces has been recognized in African politics since the 1970s. Politicized ethnicity is a product of state formation, via the creation of a petit bourgeois urban lower middle class that deploys it as its competitive ideology.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Usop, *Pakat Dayak*, p. 82.

¹¹³ Gerry van Klinken, "Indonesia's New Ethnic Elites," in *Indonesia: In Search of Transition*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt and Irwan Abdullah (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002), pp. 67-105, available at www.knaw.nl/indonesia/transition/workshop/chapter4vanklinken.pdf.

¹¹⁴ Melson and Wolpe wrote in 1971 about a politics of communalism that was inherent in the process of modernization. Lonsdale and Berman argued in 1979 that, to maintain order in an economy that also included precapitalist modes of production, "the [colonial African] state had to convert its superior coercive force over Africans into a legitimate authority accepted by Africans and therefore mediated through their own pre-existing or emergent relations of power." Berman later developed this into an explanation for "uncivil nationalism" in postcolonial Africa. See R. Melson and H. Wolpe, eds., *Nigeria:*

There are also more recent examples of the Indonesian state adopting a strategy that favors indirect rule in order to reinforce its own authority, a move that appears paradoxical, but is not. Burhan Magenda likened the rehabilitation of traditional aristocracies in the Outer Islands under the militaristic early New Order, following years of democratic republicanism in the 1950s, to a “revival of elements of Van Mook’s federal rule: strong demands by the regional indigenous rulers to be governors and regents, protection of the rights of minorities, and the demand for *kemajuan* and *pembangunan* [progress and development].”¹¹⁵ Even more recently, Jakarta has sponsored localist movements among the Gayo in Aceh and among those who favor the establishment of a West Irian Jaya province in Papua. Both were intended to counter separatist sentiments that had revived after 1998.

Sometimes the strategy of seeking strong local partners and, in the process, ignoring democratic niceties spins out of control. The militant ethnic movements in West and Central Kalimantan that expelled Madurese local migrants in 1997, 1999, and 2001 were not exactly sponsored by Jakarta, but neither can they be understood as purely social expressions of outrage. They were quasi-fascist maneuvers by established local elites intended to capture and expand the local bureaucracy by deploying (threats of) mass violence, all conducted in a spirit not alien to the authoritarian New Order. They were hardly preceded or followed by any serious organized popular movements invoking ethnic identity.

The group identities put forward in these moments of moral panic are often flexible and pragmatic. Activists for Central Kalimantan province in the 1950s were mostly Christian (often associated with the Christian party, Parkindo), but they chose not to campaign on that basis, knowing it would cut little ice in Muslim-dominated Jakarta. The identities can moreover be reinvented when necessary. Recent attempts by local elites to promote the creation of a new (resource-rich) province of Greater Barito (Barito Jaya), to be carved out of Central Kalimantan, have appealed to an ethnic collective previously considered “sub-Dayak,” comprising the Dusun, Ma’anyan, and Lawangan (abbreviated Dasmala). Their campaign has so far been unable to stir up the sympathetic responses in Jakarta that facilitated the creation of Central Kalimantan in the 1950s, responses motivated at the time by the central government’s need to expand its own reach and reinforce the state.¹¹⁶

Modernization and the Politics of Communalism (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1971); John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, “Coping with Contradictions: The Development of the Colonial State in Africa,” *Journal of African History* 20 (1979): 487-506; and Bruce J. Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage, and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism,” *African Affairs* 97 (1998): 305-342.

¹¹⁵ Burhan Djabier Magenda, “The Surviving Aristocracy in Indonesia: Politics in Three Provinces of the Outer Islands” (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1989), p. 10.

¹¹⁶ “Dasmala Usulkan Referendum,” *Kalteng Post*, March 23, 2004.