The perception of Indonesia's history and culture by Western historians and social scientists

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Indonesia's Cultural Diversity in Times of Global Change

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is one of the largest insular nations in the world. Moreover, it is also the world's most splintered country. Indonesia, inhabited by 220 Mio. people, holds the fourth position as one of the most populated nations in the world after China, India and the U.S.A. The extreme insular fragmentation results in an amazing ethnic and cultural heterogeneity. There are more than 300 ethnic groups within the Indonesian territory in which just as many different languages are spoken. Thus Indonesia is one of the most pluralistic countries with the widest diversity in languages in the world. Apart from a great number of regional idioms there is, however, *bahasa Indonesia* - a national language derived from Malay during the War of Independence, in the true sense of the word embodying the national unity and the independence of Indonesia. Hence, Indonesia is one of the few nations of the so-called Third World which did not have to fall back on its former colonial power after gaining its independence in order to counteract the above mentioned sort of babylonic fragmentation of languages within the vast insular empire. What is more, Indonesia generated or harboured virtually all the major world religions – Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity of all kinds as well as a vast variety of tribal religions (Geertz 1994:12).

The picture of a more or less peaceful co-existence of so many different ethnic groups, religious communities and social classes in the past emerges as myth and forged history. Periods of comparative peace and stability were periodically interrupted by regional or nationwide violence and instability: "*There has hardly been a year since Independence when some sort of serious primordially-framed violence has not erupted in some part of the archipelago or other, and hardly a day when it has not threatened to do so.*" (Geertz 1994:14)[1]

The time between 1966 and 1998 is characterised by pseudo-stability, since structural deformations generated during the ORBA[2] era did hardly ever come to the fore. Due to the fact that during the New Order the press was only allowed to report on conflicts between ethnic groups (as well as on those between religious communities, "races" or social classes) in such a way that it is enough to make people feel "concerned", many violent conflicts were hushed up.

Long restrained tensions which evolved in violent outbreaks after the ouster of president Suharto in 1998, led to the impression of growing instability and anarchy. Freedom of the press, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly as well as the modern communication technologies (internet etc.) resulted in the fact that ethnic, religious or social conflicts could no longer be easily suppressed or covered up as it used to be. This caused the false impression of *reformasi* as era of violence, anarchy and instability.

Nevertheless, since 1998 it cannot be denied that Indonesia as many other countries of the world is facing increasing ethnic tensions and even spiralling religious and ethnic conflicts (e.g. in the Moluccas and in Kalimantan). The pretended ethnic and religious harmony and absence of overt conflict were partly due to the great emphasis on tolerance and economic growth but primarily ascribed to the strictly centralized state control and the relentless repression of any "deviant" movement. Taming of "primordial attachments" (Clifford Geertz) was the overall concept of this time: According to this theory, the problem that the "primordial attachments", the original social ties to the local culture and its own ethnic group, might turn out to be stronger than the feeling of affiliation to the state and call into question the unity of the nation seems to be of utmost importance. A corollary of this theory was a taming-policy tracing back nearly every problem to the disruptive potential of ethnic loyalties and simultaneously providing an a priori justification for the state policy and the national development concept. Accordingly, ethnic groups living in the so-called "outer islands" had not only to share their land with huge numbers of transmigrants from "Inner Indonesia" (Java, Madura, Bali, West Lombok), but were also resettled in order to make room for the new migrants. In case of violent conflicts the Armed Forces (ABRI) were bound to intervene. The intensification of the ethnic imbalance coming into existence during the colonial era was a serious consequence of this policy. Decentralization and democratisation during the *reformasi* period, however, resulted in a reduced state control and a lack of legal certainty which then often led to the eruption of previously latent ethnic/religious conflicts. Likewise even bigger ethnic communities (e.g. Dayak-groups in Kalimantan or Minangkabaus of Sumatra) were put at a disadvantage by the New Order government since those in power systematically ignored their *adat* rights (Benda-Beckmann/ Benda-Beckmann 2002; McCarthy 2002). During the Suharto era the small and peripheral ethnic groups in particular, however, used to be exalted as a negative shock image of backward isolated communities (*masyarakat terasing*). This national disgrace was to be settled by advancing the development of peripheral regions (Lukas 2002).

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[1] e.g. Darul Islam revolt in the fifties, regional civil wars in 1958, the enormous "communist" massacres in Java, Northern Sumatra and Bali in 1965, separatist movements in Aceh and West New Guinea, the 23 years of war in East-Timor

[2] Orde Baru = New Order, self-designation of the Suharto-government

In spite of ethnic conflicts constantly flaring up today and the Islam growing in importance, it cannot be overlooked, however, that the perhaps most significant foundation laid for the high degree of interethnic tolerance in Indonesia is not politically decreed from the highest governing body, but rather seems to be a common cultural feature of Indonesian cultures. It is certainly due to the repeated absorption of many different cultural influences, chiefly religions: The "animistic" cultures of Indonesia had been exposed to Indianisation since the first century AD and since about the 13th century a widespread Islamisation took place. All these influences were digested into more or less syncretistic syntheses (Geertz 1969). In that way the constantly emerging new religions came to be assimilated so that there was no need for the indigenous peoples to abandon their own traditions. In particular, the Javanese culture developed a remarkable capacity for integration which becomes manifest in sectorially differentiated syncretic syntheses (cf. Clifford Geertz's distinction between three religious and cultural streams, *priyayi*, *santri* and *abangan*) whose components form parts of one and the same system in a sort of spiritual equilibrium of power in spite of their incompatibilities (motto: "everyone after his own fashion").

Many foreign observers tend to describe the current developments exclusively negative. At this point not only the positive achievements of the *reformasi* era are overlooked but also are to this day the continued effects of the grave legacy stemming from the era of the New Order government. Every keen observer of the current situation in Indonesia (after the ouster of president Suharto) is simultaneously faced

♦ with promising developments like building up civil society, ratification of the international convention against torture, removal of the police from military control, lifting restrictions on political parties, the most democratic elections in Indonesia since 1955, appointment of the first civilian defence minister in decades, freedom of the press and free association, creation of new human rights courts, decentralization, the first well meant dialogues with autonomist or separatist movements (cf. peace agreement with the Aceh guerrilla movement in Geneva on 9th December 2002) etc.

♦ as well as with alarming phenomena like rising ethno-religious violence (e.g. religious and ethnic conflicts in the Moluccas and in Kalimantan), ethno-religious revival, Islamism, separatism and even religiously inspired terrorism.

Simple answers (e.g. Huntington's theory) never help us to solve the urgent problems of our time. According to Huntington's hypothesis, Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, human rights, democracy etc. were never (and will never be ?) "ingrained" in Non-Western ("Islamic", "Buddhist" etc.) cultures. Only few civilizations succeeded in generating democratic principles. Especially in the Islamic world Huntington comes across "undemocratic nations". Instead of taking Huntington's hypothesis seriously, we should submit the present situation in Indonesia to a careful examination and look back on the history of Indonesia.

A serious investigation of Indonesian history, social structure and culture would furnish proof that the "West" in the form of the Dutch East India Company and subsequently of the colonial government of the so-called "Netherlands Indies" in no case acted as taskmaster of democracy. Furthermore, a historical analysis provides evidence that, first, the Republic of Indonesia had already a democratic development (between 1950 and 1960), and, second, the majority of biggest (but far from unitary and monolithic!) Islamic nation of the world advocated for a democratic and pluralistic Islam (This development was interrupted by the New Order government) (Hefner 2000).

On the other hand, pre-modern structures and concepts also seem to have survived up to post-colonial Indonesia. Liddle (1985), for instance, is working on the assumption that the tradition

of the "theatre state" was still alive in the New Order Era. Western scholars, who believed in the persistence of this above-described "great tradition" of political culture, tried to explain the symbolic legitimisation, particularly the "bureaucratic populism", of the New Order government as an increasing recourse to court ideologies of pre-colonial Indonesia. Furthermore, a historical analysis provides evidence that, first, the Republic of Indonesia had already a democratic development (between 1950 and 1960), and, second, the majority of biggest (but far from unitary and monolithic!) Islamic nation of the world advocated for a democratic

2. The Padris of Sumatra – an Islamic revival movement of the 19th century

An interesting example for a biased European view of the past would be the so-called **Padri war** or **Imam Bonjol war** after the Minangkabau Imam Bonjol (1772-1864), the most outstanding leader of the Padri movement. This war started 1821 and ended 1838 with the capture of the last Padri fortresses, Bonjol and Dalu-Dalu, by the Dutch colonial army. The so-called Padri warriors were the most noticeable sign for the Islamic revival movement among the Minangkabau on the eve of the 19th century. Inspired by Wahabitic ideas imported to Sumatra by returning hajjis, the Padris who called themselves *orang putih* ("white people") tried to reform the Islamic faith and to get accepted strict observance of the sharia. In their course of combating infidelity and syncretism the Padri started already in 1803 to forbid gambling, cockfights, betting, and consummation of palm wine and opium, as well as to burn down symbols of the pre-Islamic *adat* like communal meeting halls (*balai adat*); only after 1825 the Padris of Minangkabau turned against their neighbours in the north, the Bataks by invading the Batak area, scorching many Batak villages and killing thousands of pigs. Their is every indication that the cruelty and the fanatism of the Padris are the result of systematic exaggerations by Dutch administrators, civil servants and scientists who used this as justification for the conquest of Indonesia, euphemistically paraphrased as *Pax Neerlandica*.
I take the view that it took very long time until the colonial government regarded Islamic "agitation" and "infiltration" (from outside, i.e. mainly from Arabia) as the greatest threat to the Dutch rule in Indonesia. During the second half of the 19th century the Dutch government became particularly suspicious towards Islam as a potentially oppositional force to their regime, and identified the Hadhramis, i.e. the Arabs of the Hadhramaut (see below), as the bearers of Islam in the colony. It was not until the second half of the 19th century that this fear of rebellious Islam caused the Dutch government to send C. Snouck Hurgronje in the late seventies of the 19th century to make a secret research on the *hajji* pilgrimage in Mecca: "*Disguised as a Moslem, he [i.e. Snouck Hurgronje, a Dutch Jew!, H.L.] observed all the rituals of the hajj as a participant, and also interviewed many of the Indonesian pilgrims who were staying in the Indonesian quarters of Mecca during the celebrations.*" (Koentjaraningrat 1975:53)
In a over subtle phrasing: The rebellious Muslims (Wahabites, Muslim brotherhoods, pan-Islamic networks etc.) were for the Dutch of the 19th century what is nowadays Al-Qaeda for the Bush administration. Therefore the Dutch became blind to the real causes of political uprisings in Indonesia.
The common (and superficial) interpretation of the Padri war and the Islamic revival movement by the contemporary Dutch observers as well as of the majority of Western scientists was pointing to the influence of the Wahabites from Saudi Arabia flowing into Indonesia by the Indonesian *hajjis* coming back from their pilgrimage to Mecca. The government as well as the scientific community of this time seems to have been fairly unaware of the fact that economic and socio-cultural changes in Indonesia itself could be the ultimate

reasons of this ideological change. It was not until the eighties of the 20th century that Western scientists realized that this Islamic revival was mainly induced by drastic <u>socio-economic changes</u>, especially by the rapid development of the coffee export (Dobbin 1983):

At the eve of the 18th century Islam was disseminated even to the remote Minangkabau highlands. The international coffee-boom intensified the trade and export of coffee and induced an Islamic reform movement and created new economic and political requirements (i.e. promotion of trade, norms guaranteeing the safety of markets, elimination of unsafeness concerning the trade routes, marginalization of men by the matrilineal system etc.). It were the till then most disadvantaged villages in the high mountains of the democratic *bodi caniago adat*-areas which could derive the biggest benefits from the coffee trade. The villages of the *koto piliang*-areas, recognizing the supremacy of the aristocracy and the royal dynasty, however, were put at a disadvantage. The (1) <u>exhaustion of the gold deposits</u> (i.e. the economic foundation of the aristocratic and royal power), the (2) <u>international coffee boom</u> and (3) the "<u>flow in" of Wahabitic concepts</u> through returning pilgrims *together* caused the rise of an Islamic reform movement which became well-known as Padri movement (cf. Dahm 1983, Kraus 1984).

3. The Arab minority - a white spot on the ethnic map of Indonesia

At present many militant and scripturalistic[3] Muslim groups in Indonesia are led by members of the **Arab minority** of Indonesia, for instance:
1. Jafar Umar Thalib (leader of the *Laskar Jihad*, the Jihad troops)
2. Habib Rizq Shihab (leader of the *Front Pembela* Islam, Islamic Defence Front)
3. Abu Bakar Baasyir (leader of the *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*/MMI, Indonesian Council of Jihad Fighters; alleged links with the *Jamaah Islamiyyah*)
4. Habib Husen al-Habsyi (leader of the *Jamaah al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin Indonesia*)

As a result of the involvement of prominent Arabs in the activities of militant Muslim groups the Arabs run the risk of getting the image of Muslim radicals or even extremists. But in fact not all Arabs in Indonesia are necessary Muslim radicals or extremists. Hence it follows that it is high time to get to know the Hadhramis, the Indonesian Arab minority originating from the south of the Arabian Peninsula. Up to now this minority is still a white spot on the ethnic map of Indonesia. Due to political instability and economic hardship, on the eve of the 18th century the population of the Hadhramaut (in South Yemen) started to emigrate in large numbers to countries located around the Indian Ocean (Berg 1886). This stream of emigration lasted until World War II. At the end of the 1930s about 110 000 Hadhramis lived in the Diaspora, that is 20 to 30 percent of the country's total population, 90 000 of them in the Netherlands East Indies, today's independent Indonesia. There is a scholarly dispute concerning the early period of Hadhrami immigration (13th - 18th century) as well as their role in Islamisation of the Indonesian Archipelago. Attempting to refute the allegation that the Arabs brought Islam to Indonesia, Drewes (1985; cf. Holt/Lambton/Lewis 1977) points out that the immigration of Hadhramis into Indonesia is of a much later date than the advent of Islam there. Though this is by and large true, I should add that there is a lot of evidence for the very early presence of individual Hadhramis in Southeast Asia who played an important role in the transmission of Islam, through their religious counselling of local rulers, or even their acquisition of political power (cf. Majul 1985). Probably the coastal *Labbai* communities of Southern India introduced Islam into Indonesia via Aceh. The coastal *Labbais* of Southern India, i. e. Tamil Muslims belonging to the Shafi'i law school, claim to be descended from Arab merchants. In

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[3] That means that these groups share a literal interpretation of Islam and claim that Muslims should practice only "pure" Islam.

all probability, the *Labbais* (*Labbai* or *Lebbai* probably derives from *arabî* = "Arab") are in fact descendants of Hadhramis and derive their religious and cultural "purity" from their history of direct links to Arabia. According to Bayly (1986) these *Labbai* communities started the large-scale Islamization of Indonesia. In today's Malay or Indonesian language "*lebai*" means "mosque official" and the like.

For many years the Arabs were ignored by the Dutch government. The first *ethnographic* study focusing exclusively on the Hadhrami community in the Hadhramaut *and* in Indonesia is Van den Berg's classic *Le Hadhramaut et les Colonies Arabes dans L'Archipel Indien*, published 1886. Prior to this publication, namely in the 1850s, the Dutch ignored the Arabs to such a degree that S. Keyzer, professor at the Delft Academy for training civil servants for the Netherlands Indies, "*did not know that practically all the Arabs living in Indonesia originated from Hadhramaut*" (Drewes 1985: 7). Oddly enough, it was only in the 1990s that scholars re-discovered the Hadhrami Diaspora *per se* as their object of enquiry. In April 1995 the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), London, staged the *first* international conference concerning the history of Hadhramaut and its Diaspora (cf. Freitag/Clarence-Smith 1997). But nevertheless, one of the organizers of this conference, Ulrike Freitag, has to concede that "*[e]xact data on the Hadhrami diaspora in the second half of the twentieth century are not available*"!

Commercial and religious activities often went hand in hand in the Hadhrami Diaspora. The first Hadhrami religious organisation, the al-Irshād, was founded in 1914 in Batavia (Jakarta), inspired by Islamic modernism with its intellectual centre in Egypt (Salafiya). In the 1930s, a women's (originating in Pekalongan) and a youth wing were also established. Ideologically, the organisation emphasised the equality of all Muslim believers, thus challenging the hierarchy in its own community where the *sāda*, who claim descent from the prophet Mohammed, expect special respect from their fellow Hadhramis (Mobini-Kesheh 1997). Hadhramis have played a significant political role since their arrival in the archipelago, a fact hitherto almost ignored by scholars of Indonesia.

Due to ever stronger competition from Chinese entrepreneurs, rich Hadhrami businessmen helped significantly to establish a trade protection association organised along religious lines (as their rivals were non-Muslim Chinese), the *Sarekat Dagang Islamiah* in Bogor (near Jakarta) in 1909. This association quickly spread to the main cities of Hadhrami business like Surakarta, Surabaya and Pekalongan. Most importantly, out of this economically motivated organisation developed Indonesia's first nationalistic mass movement, the *Sarekat Islam* (United Islam). Nearly unnoticed by Western scientists is the fact, that certain Hadhrami families belong to the political elite of present Indonesia, with regard to the positions held by members of these families; for example, Ali Alatas, who was minister of foreign affairs from 1988 until 1999 under the Suharto and Habibie administrations respectively; Alwi Shihab whose ancestors founded the sultanate of Siak, was in charge until the end of Abdurrahman Wahid's presidency in July 2001.

It is worth mentioning that, in contrast to the scientific community in Indonesian public discourses, the Hadhramis as distinct ethnic category virtually do not exist. Consequently, the average Indonesian is not at all acquainted with the term "*Hadhrami*", but categorises all peoples from Arabia under the collective designations "*orang Arab*" ("Arab") or "*keturunan Arab*" ("of Arab descent").

Another characteristic of Hadhrami Diaspora communities is that they manage to find themselves in a relatively immune position concerning xenophobic tendencies in host societies. In times of religious and ethnic violence as well as increasing hostility towards foreigners in many countries of our world, it seems to be of considerable value to try to find out what makes a relationship between an immigrant community and a host society relatively harmonious or at least free of violence.

4. Peripheral minorities - ethnic imbalance - indigenous knowledge

The situation of **peripheral minorities** is an almost completely neglected issue. Beyond the accurate empirical analysis of the local situation of the respective peripheral minorities we have to put them into the socio-cultural, political and historical context as well as to compare these cases with others in Southeast Asia. My assumption is that the peripheral minorities are the touchstone of the state policy towards ethnic minorities!

The Department of Social Affairs has identified 360 tribal societies which are considered as still living in "backwardness", living in ninety districts dispersed in eighteen provinces of Indonesia. Peripheral minorities are geographically as well as culturally, economically and politically peripheral. It is impossible for these ethnic groups to resist external threats ensuing from unfavourable political, economic and ecological developments in the present nation-state. In this light, responsible anthropological policy means detecting and translating their real needs as well as realizing sound concepts of protection. These ethnic groups are worth being protected due to their ideal sustainable utilization of natural resources. As for instance the *Anak Dalam* of Sumatra represent the periphery, which according to the cultural symbolism of Southeast Asian states is regarded as a negative reflection of the core area, the state society: in terms of its ecology, its religious practices, its social structure, its governance, and its fugitive dissident population (The usual designation "*Kubu*" which is indeed an extremely pejorative exonym reflects the customary discrimination). Why has the state almost always been the enemy of people who move around? The contention of James Scott is that hunter-gatherers and hill societies in Southeast Asia represent the illegible, non-state space, where state control has always been tenuous. Consequently, the kingdoms of the past as well as the modern nation-states see these peripheral peoples not only as peoples who are just out of reach: "*They see them instead as examples of all that is uncivilized, barbaric, and crude. Even when they are looked at with some sympathy, as they are by current «developmental regimes», they are seen as benighted primitives, «our living ancestors» who need to be developed, brought into modern life. They are thought of as what we were like before we discovered Islam or Buddhism, rice cultivation, sedentary life, and civilization.*" (Scott 1999:45). Moreover, the New Order government categorized forest dwelling peoples routinely as "security problem", regarding them as people susceptible to communist influence

Hopefully through an intercultural dialogue the Western perception could make a contribution to the improvement of the traditionally bad image of peripheral ethnic groups. By this dialogue we could learn from each other. According to the principle "No culture is perfect" we should try to discover our respective blind spots. On the other hand it seems that the treatment of peripheral minorities is not only an outcome of historical traditions but depends to a large part on the current political developments as the following example shows: Since the seventies of the 20th century the former "New Order" government of Indonesia launched many projects in the course of the "Five-Year Development Plans" intended to integrate the so-called "isolated tribes" (*suku-suku terasing*) or "isolated communities" (*masyarakat terasing*) into the mainstream society of the nation-state. On the other hand, the living space of these originally roaming foragers was increasingly reduced by large-scale clearings of foreign as well as domestic logging companies over the last 30 years. Moreover, the government "transmigrated" poor people from Java into this "empty" land and in this way produced a population pressure not yet existing by then. During the last few years vast areas of Sumatra covered with forest were just burned down, in order to open big plantations. These illegal actions of scorching the forests were often ordered and protected by powerful politicians and tycoons. The big forest fires of 1997 and afterwards which raged in Sumatra and Kalimantan destroyed many hundred

thousands of hectares rain forests. The impact of this forest fires on the hunter-gatherers can not be estimated at the moment. Fortunately, since the end of the "New Order" government of General Suharto in May 1998 a fundamental change of the attitudes towards the hunter-gatherers and other peripheral minorities has been going on. For instance, the pejorative term "isolated tribe" / "isolated community" (*suku terasing* / *masyarakat terasing*), formerly used by government officials, was replaced by the more honourable designation "*adat* society" (*masyarakat adat*). In sharp contrast to the past the peripheral minorities are now more and more described as very just and democratic societies and as native ecologists who are protecting the ecological environment, if necessary also against the pressure of profit-oriented timber-hungry groups of the "modern" Indonesian society[4].

State-sponsored transmigration often connected with a resettlement of the local swidden cultivators intensified an already existing **ethnic imbalance** instead of functioning as a bridge between the supposedly 'backward' communities and the modern world.

As a rule contemporary development in the periphery (*daerah*) is destroying not only the botanic gene pools of the tropical forests, but also the **indigenous (traditional) knowledge** of how to exploit this gene pool. I would wish that foreign as well as Indonesian "development planners" learn from anthropologists and start to regard villagers or tribesmen as experts and abstain from seeing traditional societies primarily as subject for planned intervention and change. In many cases the modern formal education might even be a cause of developmental problems in Indonesia: "*Some problems stem from removing the student from his rural environment to continue his schooling. This removal prematurely terminates the student's informal schooling in the technical aspects of his local economy and ecology. As a result, the average educated inhabitant of Java's or Bali's cities is far more ignorant of and insensitive to the principles of a balanced rural ecosystem, for example, than the average uneducated inhabitant of Java's or Bali's countryside. Nonetheless, it is the former not the latter to whom the government solely entrusts development planning for the rural environment – with the result that much of this planning is wrongheaded and unsuccessful. This will continue to be the case so long as traditional systems of knowledge and belief are regarded as obstacles to development, to be destroyed wherever possible, as opposed to resources for development, to be studied and utilized wherever possible.*" (Dove 1990:7f) This problem might be solved by establishing participatory management of ecological resources (incl. ecological sustainability). Because of the fact that interethnic problems on Papua and Kalimantan not only have economic but also ecological underpinnings, democracy and economic issues are interconnected!

5. Reformation (*reformasi*): decentralisation and *adat*

The post-Suharto governments are facing a vast number of problems, among other things the restoration of the rule of law (*Rechtsstaat*, *negara hukum*, incl. fair procedures etc.) as well as the execution of anti-corruption measures and of a participatory development. In contrast to the New Order era decentralization is now regarded as a main prerequisite of a more democratic society as well as a more transparent and accountable government

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[4] On 31st January 2000 the "head" (*tumenggung*) of an *Anak Dalam* band, who waged peaceful resistance campaign against the mindless destruction of the Hompongan forest in Jambi, was called "environmental savior" and received the Kehati award 2000 from a non-governmental organization fighting for saving the bio-diversity in Indonesia (cf. *The Jakarta Post*, Tuesday, February 8, 2000:7; *Suara Pembaruan*, 1st February 2000:16; *Kompas*, Kamis, 3rd February 2000).

(regional communities should decide their own affairs according to their own interests and aspirations ...): But the project to decentralize Suharto's over-centralized system turned out to be very difficult. Let me summarize some effects of Suharto's centralization / unification policy:

- Weakening, undermining, pushing back or even abolishing *adat* institutions: "*Since Suharto had unified the village political and financial structure throughout Indonesia in the late 1970s, the traditional adat structures had largely become dormant. ... Neglect of adat unity and leadership was held to be responsible for the malfunctioning of the administration, lack of democratic values, the loss of respect for the old, and the squandering of village resources.*" (Benda-Beckmann, F./ Benda-Beckmann, K. 2002:12) Many people in the countryside lost control of their land or other natural resources. Land and resources were taken away, often under pressure, by those close to the Suharto government.

- Most of the government interventions and projects were characterized by a remarkable lack of understanding of the respective social structure of the region in which they worked

If decentralization should work, it has to be linked with poverty alleviation as well as with anti-corruption, human rights, governance and democracy issues. But in fact decentralization in the form of a return, reinstallation or revival of the old adat was now seen as an opportunity to regain or to get control over land or other resources. But then the question arose what these traditional *adat* structures were. This was not only a philosophical issue; different definitions and concepts are favouring different people. For instance: How should the newcomers be incorporated into the Minangkabau matri-clan system, which prefers the descendants of the founding lineage core etc.? How should the Islamic leaders be integrated into the adat council? At the national level this adat revival is looked upon sceptically because it is often associated with ethnic clashes and regarded as a threat to the unity of the state (Benda-Beckmann, F./ Benda-Beckmann, K. 2002). In fact, the reassertion of *adat* rights and the recreation of *adat* institutions was quite often leading to open conflicts: "*... re-assertive village actors [in Central Kalimantan] are asserting de facto control over surrounding resources held to be subject to customary property rights. In the absence of institutions that secure customary property rights or mediate conflicts, village actors can only take recourse to "people's justice" initiatives such as demonstrations, direct intimidation of rival claimants and even open violence.*" (McCarthy 2002:21) Under these circumstances it is very likely that the villagers "take the law into their own hands" (*main hakim sendiri*). Decentralization efforts, neo-liberal reforms and the loss of authority produced a very weak and fragmentary state which cannot guarantee at least a minimum of social security as well as provide institutional frameworks for negotiating access to resources and to resolve conflicts in a fashion that avoids violent conflicts.

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