



# Divergent resource claims in plural ecologies

## Case studies from Southeast Asia

### Workshop

6–8 July 2017

Institute for Advanced Study, University of Konstanz

Organized by Judith Beyer (University of Konstanz) and Birgit Bräuchler (Monash University)

In this workshop, we intend to investigate divergent claims to resource access, thereby furthering our common interest in plural ecologies across Southeast Asia. Following Ribot and Peluso's Theory of Access (2003), we define access to resources as the "ability to derive benefits from things – including material objects, persons, institutions, and symbols" (2003:153). Access to natural resources (such as land, water, mineral resources) is always legitimized, negotiated, defended, and denied through the recourse to cultural resources. Cultural resources include economic (markets, infrastructure, etc.), political (legitimation discourses about civil rights, ethnicity, indigeneity, cultural heritage, etc.), and religious (traditional knowledge, cosmology, etc.) forms of power and influence. In social-political practice, natural and cultural resources never appear separately but are always intertwined, and, to a certain extent, interdependent. Competition for and claims to resources is decisive since privileged access and the inclusion of a particular group usually involves the exclusion or neglect of others (see Hall, Hirsch, & Li 2011: 8, 13; Adhuri 2009). In countries such as Indonesia, the concept of "indigeneity" is often invoked to defend or fight for one's right to certain resources, but also for the legitimation of privileged access to resources – in relation to or the disadvantage of other groups that nonetheless belong to the same nation (see e.g., Acciaioli 2007; Bräuchler 2010; Henley & Davidson 2007). In other South-East Asian countries, such as Myanmar, debates about resource access are approached with recourse to concepts of cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic, or numerical "majority" and "minority." It is important to explore how these concepts are strategically used by stakeholders to classify themselves or others as well as the legal advantages and disadvantages of such (self-)identifications and (self-)definitions.

We here consider the concepts of majority, minority, and indigeneity as political constructs functioning at the interface of local identity claims, traditional resource demands, the enforcement of national laws, and internationally promoted human rights. The "right to culture" is central in the recent development of collective human rights (see, for example, Francioni & Scheinin, 2008; Stamatopoulou, 2007) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007). Among others, it concerns the granting of long denied access to resources and promotes the advancement of group-specific rights on a national level, which is fostered by an increasing number of decentralization and democratization processes in Southeast Asia and does not go undisputed as it leads to the exclusion of non-group members (compare e.g., F. v. Benda-Beckmann & K. von Benda-Beckmann, 2010; Kymlicka & Norman, 2000; Rosaldo, 2003; Taylor, 1994; Young, 1989). In debates on minority and indigeneity the question is whether it is justified to grant specific rights to individuals or groups within a state for historic reasons (see, in particular, Barnard, 2006; Bohnet & Höher, 2004; Guenther et al, 2003; Preece, 2005). Again, this implies a close inter-linkage of political, cultural and natural resources.

What is of special interest for this workshop is how such ambivalences and contestations between local, national and international rights and claims inform ecological policies and power struggles at the respective levels. Given the rising demand for cultural rights and the plurality of ecologies within and across countries in Southeast Asia, a regional comparison would shed new light on debates about diverging normative orders, the translation of individual and collective human rights, and the (sustainable) management of a broad range of resources.

# Workshop Program

## Thursday, 6 July 2017

14.00

Arrival, Coffee

15.00

Welcome and Introduction

*Judith Beyer and Birgit Bräuchler*

15.15

Summary of previous network meetings

*Guido Sprenger and Kristina Grossmann*

15.35

Introduction of the discussants

*Keebet von Benda-Beckmann and Greg Acciaioli*

16.00

**Session I: Mythology and Religion**

16.00

Contested access to land and sea

*Susanne Rodemeier*

16.45

How land becomes a resource. Swiddening and cash cropping in Laos

*Guido Sprenger*

17.30

Discussants Feedback

20.15

Dinner

Holly's (along Seerhein), fusion food

## Friday, 7 July 2017

9.30

**Session II: Ontologies as means of resistance?**

9.30

Diverging Ontologies on Bali

*Birgit Bräuchler*

10.15

Resources of Resistance? Local cosmologies between ideology and criticism

*Annette Hornbacher*

11.00

Coffee

11.30

Claiming rights to the forest in East Kalimantan: challenging power and presenting culture

*Michaela Haug*

12.15

Discussants Feedback

12.45

Lunch and Walk

Institute for Advanced Study, catering and Seerhein

14.15

**Session III: Culture-Nature Relations**

14.15

Eaglewood (gaharu) and political ontology in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

*Kristina Grossmann*

15.00

Concepts of nature and Dayak identity: Resources for indigenous activists' resource claims in West

Kalimantan

*Timo Duile*

15.45

Coffee

16.15

Discussants Feedback

19.00

Dinner

Il Boccone, Italian food

### **Saturday, 8 July 2017**

9.30  
**Session IV: Claiming land and property in the city**

9.30  
Transforming gossip into grievance. Rumour and religious property in Myanmar  
*Judith Beyer*

10.15  
"The right to use the land" in (post) socialist Vietnam  
*Gertrud Hüwelmeier*

11.00  
Coffee

11.30  
Discussants Feedback

12.30  
Lunch  
Institute for Advanced Study

13.30–14.30  
Final Discussion

Afternoon  
Departure of guests  
Special Issue Group (Institute for Advanced Study)

### **Sunday, 9 July 2017**

9.30  
Special Issue Discussions (Institute for Advanced Study)

## Abstracts

in alphabetical order

### **Transforming gossip into grievance. Rumour and religious property in Myanmar**

Judith Beyer, University of Konstanz

The paper demonstrates the centrality of religious property as a material resource for different forms of community-making as well as for challenges against religious communities. Religious communities in Myanmar are commonly presented as in opposition to one another, and it is assumed that rumours in which blame is put on the minority population always result in further marginalization. But these assumptions reveal a lack of research on their internal modes of organization. When a member of a nationalist Buddhist party spread the rumour that the small Shia community in Yangon (Myanmar) might be supporting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a number of distinct yet entangled power struggles became observable. To

avoid further public escalation, the community took down a black flag from one of their downtown shrines (imambara). In this particular case, a faction within the Shia community first leveraged the grievances voiced by the majority population to overcome their internal rivalries, and then entered a public dispute in which they defended their legal entitlement to perform their religion, mark their property and – therefore – to exist as a community. Throughout this process that played out within the community as well as between Shia and Buddhist actors and the state, the specific religious building where the flag had been raised remained at the centre of claims-making.

### **Diverging Ontologies on Bali**

Birgit Bräuchler, Monash University, Melbourne

As I have had no chance to participate in our previous network meetings, I would like to take the opportunity to discuss in our Konstanz workshop the paper I am currently writing for a special issue on “Plural Ecologies” organized by network members. The contribution looks at land reclamation plans in Bali’s south that triggered loud and performative local protest that does not fit Bali’s image as an island of paradise with beautiful landscapes, beaches and people that live in eternal harmony. The reclamation plans threaten to tear apart Balinese society as understandings of environmental and cultural impacts of land reclamation differ. This paper looks at stakeholders involved in the reclamation project and its opposition and uncovers the diverging

ontologies that inform the different positions and legitimize the respective claims to resource access. Whereas government and investor want to take tourism and economy to the next level through capitalist liberalism, activists and youth adopt an environmentalist and human rights stance; adat and religious figures argue with Balinese philosophy and spirituality. They all are concerned about tourism that provides livelihood for most Balinese and an important national asset. This paper discusses in how far political ontology as the fusion of political ecology and ontology allows for the analysis of these plural ecologies and their local and global entanglements and where the challenges are.

### **Concepts of nature and Dayak identity: Resources for indigenous activists’ resource claims in West Kalimantan**

Timo Duile, University of Bonn

Indigenous identity has become an important resource for political movements in post-authoritarian Indonesia. In Kalimantan, where many people in rural areas are confronted with environmental change, marginalization and dispossession, Dayakness is conceptualized as a resource of resistance by local NGOs. In this context, autochthonous perceptions of nature perceived to be specifically indigenous play an important role since indigenous identity in both international and national discourses is usually framed as an identity “close to nature.” In my presentation, I will examine in a case

study how indigenous activists of the indigenous NGO Institut Dayakologi conceptualize Dayakness with regard to the term “nature,” using both modern and animist approaches. While activists often refer to modern approaches such as sustainable development (scientific discourses) or to the idea of nature as a sublime object of ideology (esoteric discourses), local concepts challenging a culture-nature-dichotomy are also crucial for the activists. I will explain how activists maneuver between different concepts of nature in order to claim their right on resources, that is, most of all land rights.

## **Eaglewood (gaharu) and political ontology in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia**

Kristina Großmann, University of Passau

This contribution elaborates on the correlations between politics and ontologies in the course of “global connections” and “frictions” (Tsing 2005), referring to a failed gaharu (eaglewood) nursery program in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. Currently, gaharu as a “boom resource” is entangled in different ontologies or worlds to which environmental activists, indigenous people,

and the researcher relate to in diverse ways. On the base of three different aspects of political ontology, the positivist how things are, the critical anti-essentialist how things should be, and how things could be which acknowledges place-based multiplicity, I unfold entangled political ontologies in a self-reflexive way.

## **Claiming rights to the forest in East Kalimantan: challenging power and presenting culture**

Michaela Haug, University of Cologne

My paper focuses on the forests of East Kalimantan, where divergent claims over access to the forest and the ability to benefit from timber and various non-timber forest products have repeatedly led to (severe) conflicts. Ever since the Indonesian state intensified its control over land and natural resources as well as over the people who use them, Dayak individuals and communities have struggled for the maintenance of their customary adat rights, contesting companies and state policies. I will demonstrate two recent situations in both of which Dayak people try to sustain their adat rights to specific forest areas. However, both situations are embedded in diverse social, political and cultural dynamics and as such the actors are making use of

very different means to reach their aims – with varying success. While in the first case a Dayak family engaged in a strenuous and rather forlorn dispute over land rights and compensation payments with a coal mining company, the second case tells about the promising attempts of a Dayak community to secure their adat rights to a forested mountain area by promoting customary Dayak culture. Comparing the two differing situations and respective contexts sheds light on the questions a) how and why various stakeholders make use of different means to push through their interests and b) what impact does the marginalization and re-vitalization of Dayak culture have on the handling of resources and ecological conceptualizations?

## **Resources of Resistance? Local cosmologies between ideology and criticism**

Annette Hornbacher, University of Heidelberg

In recent years, anthropological studies have explored how different perceptions of the environment involve different practical relationships of humans and non-humans presented as ontological alternatives to the modern world. But while ethnographic descriptions of Amerindian perspectivism and the agency of non-humans are epistemologically as well as ontologically fascinating because they involve a critical stance towards western paradigms, there are few investigations that explore how and to which extent such intellectual

and spiritual traditions can become local forms of resistance against the overwhelming power of modern ontologies and economic power. My paper draws on my fieldwork in two Indonesian islands, and it investigates how cosmological ideas about water in Bali and animist ideas about lizards in Komodo are commoditized and reified by tourism agencies and political stakeholders at the risk of losing its critical power and political agency.

## **“The right to use the land” in (post) socialist Vietnam**

Gertrud Hüwelmeier, Humboldt University, Berlin

In (post) socialist Vietnam, the “right to use the land” is officially regulated by the state. Access to land, housing and the public space such as streets, pavements and parks as well as natural resources such as the seaside and the mountains is strictly controlled and monitored by the authorities. However, there are manifold ways to circumvent rules and regulations by different groups such as street vendors. Moreover, non humans such as spirits are imagined to be the proper owners of the country's territory and are therefore con-

sidered as powerful agents on various levels of the society. Based on long term ethnographic fieldwork, this paper focuses on recent interventions of state authorities to make Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, a “green and clean city.” One of the key projects of the Vietnamese government as part of this policy is the replacement of “traditional markets” with supermarkets, hypermarkets, and new commercial centres. This policy has an impact not only on the physical spaces of the markets, but on the people who work in them as

well. Further, in March 2017, the Vietnamese government started a huge campaign called “pavement clearance” in many cities, in order to make the pavements a safe city space for pedestrians, who had to walk on the streets, as the pavements were “colonized” by shop owners and restaurants and by millions of motorbike owners as parking space. Local authorities gave

instructions about future parking of motorbikes and destroyed all “illegally” built steps and stairs in front of thousands of shops. The public had given wide-spread approval to the campaign to clear the pavements until the authorities decided that this included removing the additional ramps that residents use to get their motorbikes inside the houses.

## **Contested access to land and sea**

Susanne Rodemeier, University of Heidelberg

This presentation refers to research on Pantar Island in Eastern Indonesia. Poor soil as well as long dry seasons make survival only possible when people are diversifying their access to food. Therefore, inland people are hunters and gatherers but also planters. Furthermore, gathering does not only take place in woodland gardens but also at the coral reef. This is different with coastal residents, who are mainly fishermen and traders. The difficult food access is an important reason why groups and villages installed a variety of contracts with partners who are willing to share their surplus. As we learn from local myths, several waves of newcomers were integrated into that network of contracts without receiving landownership. Ancestors in the inland (woto) only gave the permission to use

the land for settling down or growing plants. Changes happened in the 1960s, when the local governor forced inland people to move to the coast. Now they were still living on their own land but in direct neighbourhood to their ancestors’ contract-partners, who so far were regarded of lower status. Local myths help to understand why and how moving to the coast has forged ahead impoverishment, mainly to the former “inlanders.” These problems were not solved so far. On the contrary. During the last years, seemingly resettlement is even driving forward the social distance now adding religious differences. Nevertheless, descendants of inland people are caring especially strong for their rights and obligations concerning landownership – if necessary, even with the help of spirits.

## **How land becomes a resource. Swiddening and cash cropping in Laos**

Guido Sprenger, University of Heidelberg

This talk links two strands of understanding agricultural transformation in Laos. The first considers the phenomenon from the point of view of the transition of pre-capitalist to capitalist economy. In this view, the transformation of community land into private land appears as one running parallel to the transition from subsistence to market-oriented production. The second point of view complements this with a considera-

tion of the role of non-humans. When collectives include both humans and non-humans, the status of land changes when it turns from animated landscape to objectified resource. This is indicated by the transformation of ritual. Drawing from examples in southern Laos, the talk attempts to break up the dualism of the animation/object scheme, as well as the dualism of economy and ritual.