Moving in a hierarchized landscape
Changing border regimes in Central Kalimantan

DAVE LUMENTA

ABSTRACT
Transnational mobility is a common feature among borderland communities. Central Borneo has been a relatively fluid and open riverine-based socio-cultural and economic space since the arrival of colonial states, without much interference from the establishment of international boundaries on local cross-border mobility practices. This applies to the Kenyah, a cluster of related ethnic groups occupying the Apokayan plateau in East Kalimantan (Indonesia), who are historically an integral part of the socio-cultural and economic fabric throughout the major riverine systems of Sarawak (Malaysia). Despite the relative absence of states, Central Borneo has not escaped the onslaught of social differentiation embedded in nation-state identities. The penetration of Sarawak’s logging industry has brought the terrestrial re-ordering of the Bornean landscape away from the relative egalitarian social order of river basins into hierarchical social relations embedded in capitalistic modes of production. This has brought about the construction of the Kenyah’s visibility as an “Indonesian underclass” inside Sarawak.

KEYWORDS
Borneo, Kalimantan, mobility, borderlands, space, and capitalism.

INTRODUCTION
Strategically situated on the major maritime trade routes linking ancient Europe, India, and China, Southeast Asia has a long dynamic history marked by shifting powers and the intense movements of people, commodities, and cultural flows. The region’s fluidity and openness is amply demonstrated by an abundance of shared cross-cultural influences within the region, such as technology, religious syncretism, language, diasporas, and even the consumption and preparation of food.

DAVE LUMENTA (1971) graduated from the Department of Anthropology of the University of Indonesia and obtained his doctorate at the Graduate School of Asian and African Studies at Kyoto University. He currently lectures at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Indonesia. His research interests cover state formation and social histories of borderlands in Southeast Asia. Dave Lumenta may be contacted at: dave.lumenta@ui.ac.id.

© 2011 Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia