Logging in East Kalimantan, Indonesia. The Historical Expedience of Illegality
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Research Methodology

The research methodology, data collection and analysis for this thesis involved two major stages. The first one involved fieldwork undertaken in association with CIFOR (Center for International Forestry) and BFMP (Berau Forest Management Project) over the period of 12 months in three districts of East Kalimantan (Berau, Malinau and Pasir), which was aimed at assembling a comprehensive picture of the operational dynamics of the illegal timber sector in the province. The second stage entailed contextualizing the fieldwork material with archival/historical sources and other literature.

The purpose of the fieldwork in the selected areas of East Kalimantan in 1999 and 2000 was to construct a detailed account of illegal logging as a functioning system of participants involved in economic, social and political interactions. The objective was to explore these interactions and explain how the system worked. This meant that entire interlocking chain of activities involved in illegal timber sector such as logging in the forest, shipping timber downstream, sawmill processing and shipping the processed wood out of the area either for domestic market or export had to be studied. Along the way, main actors at each stage had to be identified and relations between them understood.
In order to carry out this research, I enlisted the help of local assistants with connections and acquaintances among timber operators. My fraternization with the businessmen of all kinds in Berau also greatly facilitated the task of gaining access to the right people, places and facilities. However, since the illegal timber dealings are generally based on very little or no paperwork, I had to rely extensively on interviews as the primary source of information. While it is often said that research on illegal logging and timber smuggling in Kalimantan and other parts of Indonesia is daunting and can even be dangerous due to direct contact with the perpetrators, I found that once appropriate access network is in place as a result of the prolonged socialization and non-confrontational approach, most of the time people involved in illegal logging are willing to allow an inside look into their activities. Still, it was necessary to frequently crosscheck the data and for the purposes of this thesis every effort was made to triangulate the information as often as possible.

Following the fieldwork, I spent several months delving into the archival sources and other literature in order to place the fieldwork material within wider historical and socio-political perspectives. This was because while still in East Kalimantan, I began noticing surprising continuities in the way illegal logging operated vis-à-vis the banjir kap of the 1960s and 1970s. Also, old individuals in Berau would recall strikingly similar images of logging and arrangements associated with timber trade from the colonial period. As a result, I felt compelled that contextualization of the contemporary material with the historical data was a crucial step to
produce a diachronic and comprehensive explanation of the
phenomenon of illegal logging and its causes.