

The law of 'Regional Autonomy' (*Otonomi Daerah*) - the instrumentalisation of dialects and languages in endeavors to establish new governmental units

Bernd Nothofer, Goethe-University Frankfurt

Recent studies have shown that in several parts of Indonesia attempts are being made to use linguistic arguments in the setting up of new governmental units, such as provinces or regencies. My own research which has concentrated on Java has clearly demonstrated that dialects and languages are being instrumentalised in various parts of the island. It can be observed that provinces such as Central Java and West Java are 'threatened' by processes which Indonesians call 'pemekaran'. Areas such as Banyumas and Cirebon use - among others - linguistic facts in order to argue for the creation of new provinces whose boundaries more or less correspond to dialect boundaries. Linguistic arguments are also being used in the regency Cilacap in which Sundanese and Javanese are spoken as regional languages.

This instrumentalisation of dialect and language phenomena in these 'balkanisation'-processes appears to be a means of avoiding reference to more sensitive cultural arguments, e.g. religion or ethnicity.