Claiming the Grounds for Reform: Agrarian and Environmental Movements in Indonesia

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This essay examines the convergences, tensions and mutual influences of agrarian and environmental movements in Indonesia and their connections to transnational movements under state-led development and neoliberal governance regimes. The authors argue that environmental movements of the last quarter of the twentieth century affected the strategies, struggles, mutual relations with, and public discourses of resurgent agrarian movements in diverse ways. Environmental movements had significant influences on national policy, law and practice within a decade of their emergence under the state-led development regime of President Suharto. Environmental activists used the appearance of technical ‘apolitical’ concerns to their advantage. They mobilized at multiple scales, targeting laws and other institutions of state power at the same time as organizing the grassroots. The repression of the Suharto regime forced agrarian reform activists underground, while environmental issues were mainstreamed. Agrarian movements in Indonesia today, under a decentralized regime dominated by neoliberal policies, have faced new opportunities and constraints due to national and transnational influences of environmental and agrarian reform discourses and networks. We show how these influences have changed the political fields within which Indonesian agrarian movement groups operate: forming, shifting and struggling over critical alliances.

Keywords: agrarian movements, environmental movements, agrarian politics, environmental politics, Indonesian movements