

# Choose as Indonesian but Act as Malaysian: Overview of National Identity and Linguistics of Indonesia-Malaysia Border Communities

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**Abstract.** This study aims to see how national identity is at the Indonesia-Malaysia border. This field study was conducted in the villages of Sebunga and Temajuk in Indonesia, which are directly adjacent to the village of Telok Melano in Malaysia. In terms of language, the two communities use or at least can speak the same language, namely, Iban/Bidayuh Malay. It turns out that the different functions as an identity; so, they can choose to be Indonesian or Malaysian. This study strengthens the conclusion that the true state boundary is still just an imagination. An imagination controlled by language and pragmatic choice. The results show that the boundary between Indonesia and Malaysia in this region has been clearly defined. Physically, there are boundary markers and cross-border posts guarded by the Border Security Army (Pamtas). In addition, residential areas are also separated. However, in reality, in some ways, the limit is a pseudo.

**Keywords:** Border, Language Identity, Sambas

## 1 Introduction

The Indonesia-Malaysia boundary in the Kalimantan region and parts of Sumatra today was agreed through a London agreement 200 years ago. At that time, the Dutch, represented by... and the British, represented by... agreed on the division of their territory in the archipelago. The agreement arose because of the chaotic situation and detrimental to the interests of – especially – the Netherlands, in the economic activities of trade in the region.

Through the agreement, it was agreed to divide the colonies on the land of Borneo. Northern Borneo, which today is part of Sarawak and Sabah (Malaysia) and Brunei, was under British rule; while the southern part of Borneo, which today is the territory of West Kalimantan,

Central Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, East Kalimantan and North Kalimantan (Indonesia), was under Dutch colonial rule.

The agreement became a new chapter in the political arena and affected the socio-economic development of the community. Although these boundaries are agreed upon through the imagination of negotiators, the implications are far-reaching. This boundary separates parts of the island in its own dynamics and development, in all aspects. Moreover, when the authorities from the bordering area apply strict boundaries for their territory, the boundaries also become the demarcation of the community. People become restricted in their movements, and separated from their groups, even though they come from the same origin.

Based on the explanation above, the author tries to reveal changes in the national identity of the people living in the Indonesia-Malaysia border region in Aruk, Sajingan Besar, West Kalimantan. In addition, the writer also wants to describe the public relations between the two countries based on facts on the ground.

## **2. Research Problems**

The problem of paper is how the aspect of changing the national identity of the people living on the Indonesia-Malaysia border in Aruk, Sajingan Besar, West Kalimantan. With these problems in mind, the purpose of this research is to explore aspects of changes in the national identity of people living on the Indonesia-Malaysia border in Aruk, Sajingan Besar, West Kalimantan. The writer will discuss the data from this border using an identity point of view.

## **3. Research Methods**

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with observation and interview data collection techniques. Observations were made at interaction centers, namely the Indonesia-Malaysia border, markets, sports fields, houses of worship, family circles, and government circles. While interviews were conducted with residents and community leaders at the research location, namely Sajingan Besar (Aruk). In addition to observations and interviews, the focused group discussion (FGD) technique also screened and cross-checked data obtained from the field for the validity of this research. In this FGD, resource persons, community leaders, and representatives of the younger generation were invited to dig up accurate information to minimize mistakes.

### **Border Overview**

The Aruk-Biawak border area is one between the boundaries of Indonesia and Malaysia. This area is included in the Sambas district. Aruk is actually the name of a village very close to the border gate. Residents in this area, among others, are the Selako subethnic. [11]

However, as development progressed, when this region became the official gateway for crossings between countries, Aruk became a developing region. As the last point before crossing outside the country, or vice versa as the area that became the first point to be met from outside the country, Aruk then became a new city. The development of settlements, economic development, became a multi-ethnic area. People of various ethnicities come to this area and form new interactions. [10]

Since the last few years, the government has paid attention to border areas. President Jokowi through the Nawacita program: building Indonesia from the periphery. The government builds border areas by increasing the capacity of roads, border posts and other supports. For the

people of this new city, clean water canals have been built. [12]. The construction of the border gate marks a new chapter for the people of the border area.

The border area becomes a new economic area. Cross-border trade activities are growing vigorously. Local productions are encouraged to grow the creative economy. Together with Bank Mandiri, at the Aruk border, a border market was built for small economic players. Weaving and weaving training is fostered. When this research was carried out at the end of October 2022, the government facilitated the exhibition of agricultural and processed products from the Sambas community. Coconuts, pineapples, chips, honey, Dodol pisang (Sweet sticky food made of mixed Banana and rice flour), are displayed for the public and passers-by in border areas.

Meanwhile, from a socio-cultural perspective, the Aruk border has a unique cultural activity. There are Ba'aek and Ba'komok traditions. The Ba'aek and Ba'komok traditions are rituals in the Gawai Dayak ceremony. Social capital is formed through local institutions such as mutual assistance and mutual trust between communities, so Gawai Dayak becomes a bond of friendship, cooperation, togetherness, mutual care between individuals and the community, and can be turned into political capital that is political participation which then becomes political participation becomes a unique local norm and value. [8]

### **Previous studies**

The border area is one of the study areas that attracts the attention of researchers. Along with government policies that pay attention to border areas, researchers also pay attention to this area. Several studies were conducted for this border area.

A study of da'wah activities (preaching of Islam) in border areas was conducted by [2]. He examined the pattern of Islamic Religious Counsellor Communication in carrying out the main functions of counselling the community in the 3T Region, Sajingan Besar District, both informative, educative, consultative and advocating functions. [2]. Several researchers observed the economic development of the people in this region. Underdeveloped areas, CU thrives in society. CU Benaventura, [4];[14]

Regarding the issue of border nationalism, a study conducted by Abi Sofyan, et al. stated that the people of border areas are very dependent on neighbouring countries. The nationalism of the border communities is suspected to be a problem due to the activities of those who depend on Malaysia. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyse the condition of nationalism on the West Kalimantan border, which is focused on the Sajingan Besar border area.

The results of the study in the Sajingan Besar Sambas area showed two results in terms of the condition of nationalism which refers to the indicators of nationalism, namely: (1). National identity, (2). The role of government in raising national awareness; [5]. (1). The identity of the Sajingan Besar border community, based on the awareness, identity and ideology of the border community, while the border community depends on Malaysia and requires access to and from the country and tends to influence the purchase of dominant Malaysian products; (2). The role of the government in increasing national awareness, the dependence of border communities is due to weak development, while the Malaysian border is already quite developed. [1]. People are not enthusiastic about participating in the election. [5]

The results of this study imply that there is no relationship between nationalism and infrastructure development. In fact, nationalism depends on the program and creativity of

principals and teachers. [13]. A study on the nationalism of the people at the border was conducted by Abi Sofyan and his friends. [1]

The study conducted by [6] focused on aspects of cultural revitalization. This activity is urgently needed to be carried out in the Indonesia-Malaysia border area, Sajingan Besar District, Sambas Regency. The main problem is that the development of culture in border areas is not only caused by globalization but also concerns the condition of the cultural resilience of the border communities themselves, which have experienced stagnation, namely from existing conditions. Globalization, which is completely and inevitably marginalized, must be anticipated with cultural developments marked by strengthening the identity and local wisdom of border communities which are used as the basis for formulating strategies in preserving and developing culture.

This study uses a qualitative approach which is carried out with survey data, observation, analysis and FGD (Forum Group Discussion). This method is very effective for something urgent and important and will provide an increase in the welfare of people who generally live less prosperously. In addition, geopolitically, cultural revitalization will further ensure the realization of a policy of revitalizing the culture of the archipelago in border areas that can create nationalism, and guard border areas from foreign infiltration and become a space for conflict resolution to create peace between countries.[6]. Opportunities and Challenges for the Opening of the Aruk Border Viewed from the Economic Aspect.[8]

This paper describes the impact and factors supporting and inhibiting the development of the Aruk Cross-Border Post (PLBN) in Sebunga Village, Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan Province in the social and economic sectors. The renewal of the operation of the Aruk PLBN in Sebunga village, which is currently a cross-country gateway, in addition to guarding the border area, of course, the Aruk PLBN may have an impact on the community in various sectors of life such as the social and economic sectors.

This study uses a descriptive quantitative approach that is supported by field data in the form of public opinion (interviews) on the impact of the Aruk PLBN development. Secondary data is obtained directly from institutions related to documents related to the construction of the Aruk PLBN. The sample collection technique used a random sample selection. Based on the results of the study, the construction of the Aruk PLBN in Sebunga Village had a positive impact both in the social and economic fields.

The social impact that can be felt by the community is the ease of accessibility and distribution of public facilities and infrastructure such as educational facilities, worship facilities and transportation facilities. In addition, the means of sending goods, both postal and cargo, are easier and cheaper to obtain. In the economic sector, it is easier and cheaper for the community to access market commodities such as basic necessities and have easier access to buying and selling, thus bringing the impact of high community competitiveness and job opportunities both in the formal and informal sectors.[7].

## **4 DISCUSSION**

### **Cross-Border Situation**

The Indonesia-Malaysia border crossing on the Aruk-Biawak axis, opened in the 1990s, and became the official gate for 2019. This post is the third West Kalimantan-Sarawak border post,

after Entikong-Tebedu, Badau-Lubuk Antu. Before the opening of cross-border, relations between communities were well established. A source in Aruk said they have links to the people in Biawak.

Some of them have family there. The relationship has been closely maintained until now. Even when the border is closed, traditional crossings can still be an alternative choice for border communities. Aruk is developing. For example, seen from the building. The building now uses materials imported from outside, compared to formerly using local materials. [9]

### **Semukil**

Semukil is a cross-border activity which from a legal perspective is a smuggling activity. Semukil is illegal. There are several points that are usually used as crossings. Along the 1000 Km line on the West Kalimantan-Sarawak boundary, the data for the year is that there are 52 rat lanes. Of that number, at the Sambas-Bengkayang border with Sarawak, there were 29 rat path. *Sindonews*, 2020.

This rat path is an unofficial activity trajectory for border communities. This activity has been carried out by border crossers since the 1950s. In fact, until now. However, in the past, this activity was not considered as an illegal activity, because state boundaries have not been rigidly defined as they are today.

The goods carried for cross-border activities consist of various types. Starting from natural products, to processed natural products. Several informants said that there were differences in the goods brought before and now. In the past, the goods carried by the passers-by were goods from natural sources, such as rubber, honey, ... now, the goods carried by the passers-by are vegetables. The vegetables brought included tomatoes, cabbage, beans, chilies.

When they go home, they bring items such as milo, cooking oil, sugar, and so on which are considered cheap and valuable. This value is not only from an economic point of view, but also from a social perspective.

Clothing is not an item brought for crossing. However, typical souvenirs still attract the attention of passers-by. So, at the Aruk market, there is a shop that sells clothes with various writings that reflect the Indonesian taste of Malaysia. This situation is related to the economic development of the two regions. In Indonesia, especially the area around the Sambas-Bengkayang border, agricultural production is now increasing, and the region is the main producer of vegetables in West Kalimantan. Their vegetables are supplied to markets in Pontianak and Singkawang areas.

Along with increased mobility and the opening of state crossings, vegetables from border areas are sent to markets in Sarawak, Malaysia. This cross-border trade is an important part of the economic development of the community, and it is also important to show the relationship and even the dependence between them. Although there are already state borders that are guarded by various Immigration-Excise policies, Quarantine, etc., traditional activities are respected by the State.

The state continues to provide convenience for the community to carry goods across the border, so that similar or continued smokil activities can continue until now. Permits for local passers-by, and permits for them to carry goods in and out of neighboring countries, provide space to preserve their history and identity.

### **Malaysian Culture**

Smokil is not only a movement of people carrying goods between regions but is actually a cultural and psychological movement. The passersby buy various goods and it causes the emergence of a new culture in society. For example, if the traditional community on the Indonesia-Malaysia border recognizes coffee with its various variants as the main drink, interaction with Malaysians makes them familiar with milo and teh Tarik. Milo, a type of drink that was first popular in Malaysia, is traded in border areas as the main item. Milo became a souvenir that was sold to other Indonesians who came to the border areas.

People actually know coffee and tea as the main treats. Traditionally, this drink is known for a long time and has been in the community, as an important drink for guests. In fact, coffee has a higher degree: it is served online, and has its own charms when not drunk. In the Dayak and Malay culture in West Kalimantan, there are prohibitions with severe consequences if one does not drink the coffee served by others. This abstinence is known as "pemali": people who don't drink the coffee that is served get a serious disaster.

Milo beats coffee in its position as the main drink. Among Sambas people, Milo's treats are classy. Only "rich people" or wealthy people can serve the drink, and only people who are considered (glorified) get Milo's treat from the host.

Apart from Milo, there is now a traditional Teh Tarik, which was brought from Malaysia. Teh Tarik is a type of drink that was initially considered strange by the Indonesian people: strange because it mixes tea and milk, because people usually know that milk is the equivalent of coffee. This tea is also strange in terms of manufacture. Tea is made by pouring tea water that has been mixed with milk, from one container to another from top to bottom, alternately repeatedly, until it produces a lot of foam. The more foam that is produced, the Teh Tarik is considered the more stable.

Tongkat Ali, one of the favourite drinks to increase male vitality, in Malaysia, is now also the main drink under Milo. This drink is also a favourite selling brought from neighbouring countries. Become a sale that shows the important identity of border sellers. So, the Indonesians at the border made Milo and The Tarik as drinks and important merchandise, and that became their identity as traders at the border.

Roti Canai provides another variation of Malaysian culinary which is gaining popularity in Indonesia. Although the food is associated with India in Malaysia, but, in Indonesia, Roti Canai is associated with Malaysian identity. This bread is often found in various areas in Sambas and in Pontianak; and so far, made by people who have traces/experience in Malaysia.

Still related to this culinary business, at several points it was observed that the brands used for local businesses showed a Malaysian taste. In Indonesia, places to eat usually use the name "house restaurants", cafes, warungs, ...however, in border areas, it is observed that the use of "kedai" for business is parallel to warung. Likewise, it was found that someone used the name "toilet" to cooperate with the word WC (water closed). WC is a general term used to refer to a place to defecate, while "toilet" is used for the same purpose in Malaysia.

The names of the stalls with "Mak Teh", "Kak Long" etc... even though they are still related to the name of the owner for the purpose of being easy to remember/familiar among the residents, however, are not common. This name is related to the Sambas Malays (actually several other Malays in other regions (Quote), however, according to the informant, it cannot be denied that giving this name was also inspired by Malaysians.

There are several vocabularies found, related to culture. Frontiers call /antenna/ with /anten/. Antenna is a general term for a device used in Indonesia as a signal receiver for television. While /anten/ is commonly used by people in Sarawak, Malaysia for the same tool. The word /minute/ found is used by residents to indicate a certain time. In Indonesia, the word /minutes is used for the same thing. While the word /minute/ is generally used throughout Malaysia.

### **Mobility and Identity Across Borders**

The cross-border mobility of Aruk, Sajingan Besar is elevated. Sources in the sub-district estimate that every day there are 500 border crossers. They come with various interests. There are two main interests that are often found: first, medical interests, and second, social interests. Including that interest is work.

The current situation has just recovered after the border was previously closed during the Covid-19 outbreak. For two years the border was closed and no mobility occurred. Previously, mobility in border communities had been going on for a long time. Although the connecting road between villages in this area is only a mouse road, mobility often occurs. Many border people still have memories of having to walk for hours on end. This memory is more than just a memory, but also explains the social relationship between two communities in the border area. This relationship crosses national boundaries, even though those boundaries are strictly guarded.

### **Identity Battle**

The traders show that they as traders have an identity as sellers who sell various goods; regardless of whether the goods they sell are Indonesian goods or Malaysian goods. These goods became their identity as border traders.

What is interesting is that the issue of selling foreign products to strengthen the nation's identity (quote) does not echo here. Because for them selling is not a matter of national identity. That is the identity as a seller only. As it turns out, identity can be controlled to some extent.

Perhaps this can be seen from a theoretical perspective, that identity is not rigid, not rigid, not stagnant. Identity is dynamic and changing. Can form anything and any material, which is tailored to their needs. However, in terms of nationality, once again, it was found that nationality looks false to them because the boundaries of the country marked by border gates do not bind them as citizens of the nation. They do not care about the State and its boundaries. They look more at the pragmatic issue of the value derived from their business activities.

This can indeed be explained from the perspective of identity choice. Identity is multiple and many choices can be taken from the stock. One option is to display some Malaysian "ingredient" items in their identity. That choice then makes them look like Malaysians.

### **Weaving Craft**

The important roles of women weavers in Sajingan Besar, namely: (1) Utilization of natural resources is to strengthen nationalism by utilizing the availability of natural resources in managing it into weaving craft which is a form of expansion of nationalism because weaving is a cultural heritage and has local characteristics of Sajingan Besar, (2) The role of women weavers in Sajingan Besar is able to create a harmonious life with the Malaysian people to strengthen nationalism. They have become role models at the border where the territory is

inhabited by various ethnic groups, religions and cultures, but still maintains its unity. (Elyta & Razak, 2019).

## 5 Conclusion

The Indonesia-Malaysia state boundary in Aruk, Sajingan Besar has been firmly established. The official entrance has been in effect since 2013. Boundary markers are installed, and crossings are guarded by border security. The policy limits traffic, and only legal crossings and activities are allowed. On the other hand, this limitation presents a different social situation than before. Previously, the traffic of people at the border was rather free through rat roads. Since the past era when Indonesia-Malaysia became two sovereign states, crossing activities have been carried out by communities around the border. Some passers-by carry out trading activities, bringing natural products to neighbouring countries. Others continue to interact because they have kinship relations and common origins. The government provides convenience for local travellers to this day, so that the social and economic interests of border communities are maintained.

In terms of language, the community in this border is a multilingual society. They can use several languages, including Sambas Malay, Selako-Bedamea language, and Bekati' language. Some of them master Iban, Javanese, and others. This multilingual ability makes people in this border area have many choices in communicating. The choice relates to their identity as "border people", which is different from other people who do not live on the border.

They can appear or show their identity as Indonesians, however, display traits like Malaysians. And vice versa, someone can claim to be Malaysian but have the characteristics of being Indonesian. In certain situations, in the cases encountered, sometimes they even look very Malaysian or very Indonesian, by choosing to use one of the languages they know. This study confirms the assumption that national borders are still the limits of imagination for border communities. In fact, national boundaries provide a new imagination for the community for a new identity: a mixture of the identities of two countries.

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