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Introduction

Smuggling rings, clan and tribal relationships that have spanned territorial and/or public-private boundaries [...] have quietly put forth systems of meaning that imply boundaries quite different from those represented in the image of the state. Some have sought to change the lines on maps; others act only to minimize the importance of those lines. In both cases, they have openly or surreptitiously challenged a key element in the image of the state: its claim to be an avatar of the people bounded by that territory and its assumption of the connection of those people encompassed by state borders as a (or *the*) primary social bond (Migdal 2001:26).

PROLOGUE

The Indonesian-Malaysian borderland, 7 June 2007. Around noon a convoy of Kijang pick-ups with the Kapuas Hulu district seal accompanied by district police trucks entered the dusty border town of Lanjak. The convoy travelled the bumpy gravel road and passed the main bazaar at great speed with wailing sirens and blinking lights en route to the sub-district office close to a newly erected community hall at the outskirts of town. In great anticipation of this arrival a large crowd had assembled along the road, many coming from faraway villages situated close to the international border with Sarawak.

Surrounded by heavily armed police, the governor of West Kalimantan stepped out of the front car; flanked by his vice-governor and the district head, he walked the 50 meters towards the community hall. Nervously surveying the crowd, the police bodyguards tried to keep the crowd at bay by levelling their sub-machine guns and using their bodies to erect a defence line. According to a local spectator, this hefty

show of force should be attributed to the governor's anxiety about being attacked by 'timber gangsters' and other renegades roaming the border hills. In previous years, the provincial government (at the request of Jakarta) had initiated a series of police/military raids in order to end the widespread timber smuggling along the border and restore law and order. The sudden crackdowns by the provincial and central government largely crippled the local economy and aroused tremendous local antagonism. In the heydays of 'wild' logging on the border initiated in the turbulent years after President Soeharto's fall in 1998, the small border towns experienced a boom in cross-border timber commerce. This activity attracted industrious Malaysian entrepreneurs (timber barons) from across the border, internal labour migrants from as far away as Flores and Timor, and other more regional opportunity seekers. From being a quiet backwater and isolated outpost before the logging boom, the borderland changed drastically. Small, rapidly built hotels and shop houses, restaurants and brothels popped up everywhere to cater to the numerous logging crews. The smell of sawn timber hanging thick in the air and the large amount of ready cash in circulation gave these towns a distinctly frontier atmosphere.

Then suddenly in 2005 this local economic adventure abruptly ended when large numbers of military and police personnel were stationed along the border as part of a national crackdown on illegal logging. The transformation was immense. The previously so vibrant and prosperous boomtowns along the border were plunged into economic depression and almost overnight became sleepy ghost towns. Only a shadow of their former glory remained as the timber barons were chased back across the border by national police and military. The former timber mills that had been so busy stopped operating; the endless traffic of logging trucks loaded with sawn timber and shiny pick-ups with Malaysian number plates that scuttled over the dusty potholed dirt roads between the border towns of Lanjak and Badau were replaced by the occasional motorbike and women carrying vegetables to the market. Losing the only cash-generating income in the region, the border inhabitants were once again forced to turn towards Malaysia for labour opportunities in order to make ends meet, awaiting the next major political and economic shift to affect the borderland.

In the days up to the high-profile visit by the governor, influential community leaders had been busy preparing for the arrival of this 'of-

ficial guest'. The governor is not a common visitor in these remote parts of the province; on the contrary, most locals had difficulty remembering when a governor or any other highly placed state official had last visited. This was their long-awaited opportunity to present their grievances and desires. Great hopes were expressed that the governor would engage the locals in a dialogue and address the difficult circumstances of life experienced by the border population.

The official reason for the governor's visit to the border district was to open a new community hall, although the looming governor elections and the opportunity for vote-fishing seemed to be a more plausible reason for this grandly staged official visit. Border development, law and order, national security and the boisterous border population had long been hot issues in provincial and national media, and the 'brave' act of visiting the lawless borderlands would receive much needed media attention.

At the entrance of the elaborately decorated community hall the governor was greeted by a chosen group of prominent local leaders, all wearing their traditional war attire and more official regalia, as is the custom when receiving important guests. The governor and his assembly were seated on a platform in the back of the fully packed hall, where they were greeted with drinks and traditional dance. Then the governor immediately embarked on an hour-long speech about his administration's future border development plans if re-elected. (He was not.) He also praised his 'successful' crackdown on illegal activities along the border and the arrest of dangerous timber 'gangsters' that for so long had crippled development initiatives and stolen the nation's natural resources. Ironically, before the stern instructions from the president to eradicate illegal logging in the border region in 2005 the governor (and district head) himself had profited immensely from these arrangements, through unofficial taxes and private business engagements.

Having prepared their own official speeches, the community leaders were anxiously waiting for the governor's speech to end in order to get the opportunity to express their concerns about the perceived injustice that had been done them. However, their opportunity never came. After a quick photo session, and after making a generous donation for the community hall, the governor left the border district with his entourage as quickly as he had arrived. Clearly disappointed that the governor had not taken the time to listen, one of the community leaders sardonically stated:

For more than fifty years, we have patiently waited for the centre (*pusat*) to include the border area in national development. We have protected the nation's borders against the Communist threat and shed our blood, but they are still ignorant of our needs. We would be better off managing our own affairs; the centre has little to offer us border people.

The Lanjak incident clearly demonstrates the complicated interactions between border communities and government authorities in this remote part of the West Kalimantan borderlands. This book investigates that relationship as a window for understanding the dynamics of Indonesian state formation since colonial rule. It does so by analyzing more than a century of resource struggle and the quest for increased regional autonomy along a particular stretch of the Indonesian-Malaysian border.

By examining key moments in borderland history, the book illustrates how local social-political practices and strategies are constituted in a complementary relationship with shifting state policies and institutions. As illustrated in the Lanjak incident, the borderland population has a shifting relationship with the Indonesian state. A main argument of the book is that it is a dialectic relationship, in which border communities and in particular small border elites are actively involved in shaping their borderland milieu. These interrelations between state institutions, border elites, and local communities provide clues to how everyday processes of state formation are constituted along the border. It argues that international borders are equally regulatory and restrictive and provide ample opportunities for local strategies and practices that flow into and out of state control. These creative practices often transform the meaning of 'the sovereign state' and its 'strict' territorial borders. As such, the West Kalimantan borderland is a zone characterised by varying degrees of state accommodation and subversion.

The book argues that the particular milieu generated by the borderland has a crucial impact on processes of Indonesian state formation. The borderlands can be seen as critical sites for conceptualizing the changing dynamics of state-society relations and the kind of governance that Indonesia has experienced since independence, especially in the wake of recent processes of decentralization. In their role as key symbols of state sovereignty and makers of statehood, borders become places where states most often are eager to govern and exercise their power; however, they are also places where state authority is likely to be chal-

lenged, questioned and manipulated. This is so because border people often have multiple loyalties that transcend state borders and contradict state conceptions of sovereignty, territory, and citizenship.

It has been suggested that borders and adjacent borderlands can be seen as unique laboratories for understanding how citizens relate to ‘their’ nation-state and how competing loyalties and multiple identities are managed on a daily basis. From an analytical perspective, a focus on borderlands is thus one way of challenging perceptions of ‘the state’ as a cohesive and ‘faceless’ unitary whole, and a way of capturing the more intricate ways in which the state intertwines with the local. Marginal populations, especially those living in remote borderlands, are not just to be seen as passive victims of state power but as actors, actively pursuing their own political goals and strategies. Although state interventions and regulatory practices in borderlands create certain constraints for cross-border movement, they also create important opportunities that often underlie economic expansion and social and political upheaval among certain entrepreneurial segments of the border people. These persons, often working in the shadows of legality, creatively exploit the nooks and crannies that border life entails.

I have chosen to focus on a certain section of local society that seemed to play an influential role as mediators across the supposed state-society divide. I call this group of people the border elite. This term embraces a large category of people holding various types of authority. What all these officials or leaders have in common is their high position within traditional institutions of leadership, and simultaneously their intricate and historically complex networks of patronage with state agents (both central and local), as well as their wider cross-border business relations. All play multiple roles as state agents, politicians, traders, and traditional chiefs at the same time. With the assistance of these networks, some of these local leadership figures have become local businesspersons and smugglers; others have pursued influence through local politics as party politicians or as local level government officials. However, more often than not these various roles are mixed in a complex dance, with elites wearing several hats at once. For example, a small handful of prominent local figures have become elected members of the district assembly (agents of the state), giving them a front row position from which to influence decisions made at the district level concerning their own constituencies along the border. At the same time, they were

negotiating illicit practices through their cross-border networks. I believe that the concept of elites allows for a dynamic and multifaceted perspective on borderland dynamics. The term “elite” is not used to describe a static group, but is here used to accentuate a sense of agency, exclusivity and authority, and an apparent separation from poorer segments of borderland society. Elite in this study is thus defined as the relatively small number of people who control key economic, symbolic, and political resources. This border elite has continuously used the state apparatus to enhance their position of power while at the same time maintaining their roots within their birth communities.

The book argues that this border elite is the outcome of more than 150 years of state formation in the border region. First the Dutch and later shifting Indonesian state administrations used local leadership figures as agents of indirect rule in the remote and lawless border regions. Despite engagements with the state, which have increased their room for manoeuvre, these local leaders have continued to employ a strategy of flexible loyalties that traditionally have been well suited to the ever-changing borderland milieu. The enhanced local status of this elite is the result of their ability to creatively make use of events and opportunities derived from the waxing and waning of state authority along the border. At times they emphasized their role as guardians of national sovereignty with the complicity of state institutions like the military, while simultaneously enabling illicit trade across the border and thereby disregarding formal state laws and regulations.

The book strives to achieve two interconnected objectives. First it aims to situate processes of state formation on the border in a broad historical context and in relation to instances of state-society friction. Second it aims to investigate empirically how border communities are active agents in negotiating access to resources along the border by appropriating government rhetoric of development for local purposes while at the same time challenging state sovereignty through cross-border connections. These practices all cast doubt on the central government’s ability to control its territorial border. The above aims are tied together by the assumption that in order to make sense of contemporary dynamics along these state edges, strategies and practices need to be understood in a broader historical perspective of state formation.

Ideas about the nature of the relationship between state and society are placed at the forefront of the investigation and problematized. To

specify this thinking and to provide structure for the study, the following question will guide the investigation: What does a focus on borders and borderlands tell us about the process of Indonesian state formation? This larger question can be disaggregated into five inter-related questions: How have succeeding governments (colonial and post-colonial) asserted authority over people and territory along the border? What is the relationship between border communities and government authorities? How do border communities negotiate authority and autonomy within shifting political regimes? How and to what extent do these various practices contribute to or redefine the nature of state-society relations and the more general political transformations occurring at the edges of the Indonesian nation-state? Finally, if the borderland is to be understood as a productive site for the study of state formation, then what can we learn about the shaping of ‘the state’ from local narratives of inclusion and exclusion at the border?

Concisely put, in addressing these questions the book investigates a range of cases (in different time periods) and practices (guerrilla warfare, timber logging, vigilantism and border autonomy movements) which all use the border as a vantage point. These cases and practices help us to see the ambivalent and fuzzy relationship between state and society. In particular how multiple allegiances and strategies are parts of everyday border life. Empirically, the book argues that ever since Indonesia’s founding, the modern state of Indonesia has had to expend considerable effort to control the border areas of what is now known as West Kalimantan. The means of exercising government control have changed over time (in ways that are examined below), but a constant and primary aim has been to exploit natural resources and to strengthen the modern state both in terms of physical security and national identity.

Attempts to govern the border areas have come in waves; at times state control has been strong and hard, such as during the Iban pacification in the early decades of the twenty century and Indonesian militarization in the 1960s and 1970s. At other times it was exceptionally weak and loose, as it appeared to be in the heydays of decentralization and period of illegal logging from 1999 to 2005. I argue that the shifts from relaxation of border controls to tightening of enforcement and back again play a decisive role in forming and understanding the ambivalent relations between state and society in the borderland studied. As eloquently put by Thomas Wilson and Hastings Donnan, ‘Borders are

spatial and temporal records of relationships between local communities and between states' (1998a:5).

BORDERLAND ENCOUNTERS

This was my first encounter. Since the onset of the dry season, a continual flow of logging trucks had been driving day and night through the longhouse area, making it extremely difficult for hunters to bring down any game. The noise from the trucks had made the game move further away from the logging roads. The local game of particular choice, wild boar, seemed to have disappeared. A group of men in the longhouse where I resided therefore arranged a three-day hunting trip to the still densely forested areas along the international border with Malaysia. They invited me to come along as spectator – a welcome opportunity to escape the intense sociality of everyday longhouse living and go on a small journey. At one time, after several days of arduous walking along twisting logging roads and through small forest streams searching for signs of game, we stopped to rest on one of the many forest-covered hills dotting the area. Casually, one of the four hunting participants pointed towards the foot of the hill and told me that just down there the Malaysian state of Sarawak began. I was taken by utter surprise; at no time had I known that we were that close to the border. No visible line marked the border, and to me the area just looked like a never-ending row of trees and underbrush. I immediately began speculating as to how many times during the last days of hunting we had crossed this invisible borderline without my knowledge. In my mind, I began to imagine the risks involved. What if we had been apprehended? I was a foreign researcher, and crossing an international border without official approval would have been treated as a serious offence. After I recovered from my initial worries and shared them with my hunting companions, they assured me that we had at no time physically crossed the border, which seemed to be a mere coincidence rather than a deliberate choice. The men did not appear particularly concerned with the physical borderline; on the contrary, they seemed to take little notice of the fact that this was the territorial line separating two sovereign nation states. Even though they were very conscious of where the border was situated (despite a few small dispersed concrete poles there were no visible signs of the border),

the men spoke as if the Sarawak territory simply was an extension of the area we had just passed, and just as familiar. It became clear that for my companions, the political border was very much an artificial construct – an artifact of history, mere black lines on the map that divided them from their close kin in Sarawak. On the ground they did not feel that the other side was foreign.

Poking further into the matter of border and kinship, my companions immediately began a meticulous reading of the landscape by enumerating what seemed like an endless line of names of people, supposedly both Indonesian and Malaysian citizens, who still enjoyed customary user rights to the forest and old fruit gardens along the stretch of the border where we were standing. Among the names of still-living border inhabitants, I heard the names of numerous brave men (*urang berani*) buried on the top of the small hills, as well as place names of former longhouse settlements (*tembawai*). The longhouse settlements were abandoned during the Dutch colonial period (*musim belanda*) of forced resettling of the remote and troublesome border communities during the early twentieth century. The surrounding forest landscapes that at first appeared to be virgin wilderness suddenly became sites of fierce battles and rebellious resistance.

The senior hunters told these stories of forced movement during the Dutch period in a light-hearted manner and their old stories of the Dutch frustrations of pacifying Iban rebels criss-crossing the border were accompanied by laughter. With some indignation the hunters next mentioned a much more recent time of upheaval during the 1960s Indonesian-Malaysian Konfrontasi and subsequent Communist insurgency. Numerous border communities had once again been forced to leave their community lands (*menua*), this time in order to escape ‘enemy’ mortar fire from Commonwealth troops across the border, and on their ownside the Indonesian military’s accusations of cooperation and collusion with Communists. Paradoxically, harsh treatment by the Indonesian military led many Indonesian border communities to permanently migrate and settle across the border in Sarawak as Malaysian citizens.

The hunter who had pointed out the borderline to me responded to my puzzled expression at hearing these stories by saying in a mix of Iban and Indonesian: ‘We are all Iban’ (*kami semoa bangsa Iban*). Simultaneously, he pointed in both directions. From the hill we stood on, the men were

able to point out a patchwork of old swidden fields belonging to kin and friends on the opposite side of the border and a maze of trails and routes that have connected the area's inhabitants for many decades. In consonance with the above statement, someone said, 'We are all related' (*Kami semoa kaban*). Those very same cross-border trails or 'mouse paths' (*jalan tikus*) pointed out by the men, I was told, were used for cross-border labour migration, trading (smuggling) of various commodities and visiting kin in Sarawak. During the colonial era, they functioned as escape routes for Iban raiding expeditions when they were fleeing Dutch and British punitive expeditions. A senior hunter animatedly described how Iban returning from raids in Sarawak (1870s) cut a wide trail across the border, which they later booby-trapped with sharp bamboo stakes to slow down their pursuers.

Even long before the ideas of an Indonesian and Malaysian nation-state were born, the Iban were quite aware of the importance of such borderlines and made strategic use of them. As we made our way home following the dusty logging roads that encroach further and further northward towards the Sarawak border, each of us with a large chunk of wild boar popping up from our rattan backpacks (*ladung*), I realized that my understanding of the immediate border landscape and its long history of movement, forced resettlement, confrontation and resource extraction had changed radically. This broadened understanding added many new dimensions to the complexities of borderland life. When talking about family relationships, labour opportunities, trade and many other subjects of everyday life, most Iban communities in Kalimantan still regard the area immediately across the border in Sarawak as a major part of their social world. Their attitude well illustrates the fact that national borders do not always coincide with the social identities of the border populations.

The above incidents occurred during fieldwork among Iban border communities in the district of Kapuas Hulu. They revealed to me some of the ways in which the political border have and still is affecting local livelihood strategies and worldviews. My first encounter with the border communities of West Kalimantan was in late 1997 during a one-month visit to the remote district of Kapuas Hulu situated at the distant head of the great Kapuas River (1086 km). This was a time of great political, economical, and social upheaval in the region. Indonesia was experiencing economic collapse, and the New Order regime of President Soeharto

was ending. The strong man of Indonesian politics was losing his grip on power, and serious outbreaks of communal violence occurred in the province.

These changes did not go unnoticed in upland areas along the border. The economic collapse and the uncertain political situation created a power vacuum, which meant a loosening of security restrictions along the nation's borders, opening up the remote border regions, rich in natural resources, to cross-border investment and exploitation. Border inhabitants quickly took advantage of these new opportunities to trade across the border, and as I was later to find out, these cross-border strategies belonged to a long history of cross-border interaction that has changed continuously according to the waxing and waning of state power. This initial borderland encounter sharpened my interest in the complexities of life along the border and especially the intricate ways in which locals manage to negotiate the shifting circumstances of this area. Years later, in 2002-03, I returned to the same district in order to carry out research for my MA, and a few years later, in 2007, for my PhD degree. Unless I specify otherwise, the ethnographic present is 2007. The book is thus the outcome of a series of extended encounters over a five-year period in the West Kalimantan borderland, with a total of 17 months spent in the field.¹

As indicated in the 'hunting' account, the border inhabitants' special relation to the border was somehow embodied in everyday practice and knowledge – something that over time had become a natural part of their lives. Daily activities and discussions implicitly involve the border in some way or another, but rarely did I encounter people discussing the border solely as an institution of exclusion. On the contrary, working in Malaysia, trading with Malaysians, marrying Malaysians, joining ethnic celebrations in Malaysia, and using Malaysian hospitals when ill are ubiquitous topics when border inhabitants tell their life stories.

Many men and (less commonly) women hold both Indonesian and Malaysian identity cards; some even have two passports, which are proudly displayed despite the fact that most have expired. What I want to emphasize here is that the border as an institution is part of everyday life, and in order to understand it one has to take part in this experience on a daily basis. Taking part in the 'borderland experience' is, however,

¹ Additionally I visited the borderland for a few months in 2004 and 2005.

not only a matter of choice. When residing in the borderland, one must relate to its ambivalent nature. I, too, as a researcher was forced into the position of being a 'borderlander' myself. The dual character of the borderland was especially apparent to me, as I, like the locals, also had to adjust to and master the duality of the border – use two currencies, live in two time zones and, not least, learn two national policies concurrently. Like the Iban, I also had to deal with 'outsiders' who were passing through the area – Indonesian government officials, Malaysian timber entrepreneurs or transnational labour-migrants. One needed a certain flexibility in order to negotiate between the often divergent agendas of these visitors, who had often been attracted by the prospect of instant riches at the frontier.

Like a majority of the Iban, I experienced the daily hardship of being situated in one of the most remote and economically underdeveloped corners of the Indonesian state. The lack of a functioning infrastructure made transportation a dangerous and time-consuming activity and reinforced the feeling of being isolated from the rest of Indonesia while looking towards the much closer regional centres in Sarawak. In 2007 the journey to the provincial capital of Pontianak took almost two days (in the rainy season even longer) of hazardous and expensive travelling. Few locals undertake such a trip. Hence Pontianak is foreign territory to the majority of locals, who have few or no social or kinship contacts there.

Furthermore, apart from a small border elite (many of whom have second houses in Pontianak), the locals usually do not have the education needed to deal with the bureaucracy. Only a small percentage of most borderland inhabitants had ever been outside their own district. However, many have visited Sarawak. Kuching, the main economic centre across the border, is less than half a day away in an air-conditioned bus on tar-sealed roads. Not surprisingly, apart from a small border elite, few people in the borderland have visited their own distant provincial capital, but many have walked the shiny waterfront of the city of Kuching in Sarawak. Most border communities' sentiments are primarily directed towards the adjacent regional centre in Sarawak rather than to their provisional or national heartland.

RESEARCHING BORDERLANDS AND ILLICIT PRACTICES

The fact that my visits took place over a decade had many advantages. Besides deepening my understanding of change and continuity in the area, I was able to build up relations of trust with a range of people, including government officials, politicians, military, police, and locals. Trust based on extended visits has been imperative for asking questions in an area where the line between legal and illegal is often fluid and the suspicion of public authorities quite strong. This suspicion is without doubt a result of the shifting and often violent relationship with government authorities, especially during the highly authoritarian regime of Soeharto. In that period, military surveillance and large-scale resource exploitation went hand in hand. Many unspoken grievances from this recent past remain concealed, despite the revelations possible in the new climate of *reformasi* politics after the fall of Soeharto. Moreover, the borderland and the practices carried out there still raise emotions and often give rise to condemnation on the national level, leading to public pledges of tougher action against rule-bending border populations. A healthy suspicion towards outside authorities and prying researchers is part of the survival strategy of the border population. I quickly learned which questions were open for public discussion and which were too sensitive and reserved for discussions in settings that were more private.

Ever since my initial visit, I have stayed for longer periods in several border communities throughout the borderland. Besides giving me a privileged position to observe many activities first hand, being visible and hanging around has, over time, meant that many informants felt less anxious about sharing their views. Carrying out formal interviews among locals has never been very successful, and most information at this level was obtained through informal conversations hitchhiking in a logging truck, joining family and ritual celebrations and hunting trips or just hanging out in the roadside coffee shops in the small border towns of Lanjak or Badau. Hanging out at strategic points, either overseeing the central markets and rows of shop-houses or on the verandas of friends along the border road, became an important means of getting an impression of the intricate movements of people and goods. Being the only researcher, or Westerner for that matter, in the whole borderland certainly makes one stand out and draws plenty of attention, not least from persons with 'shadow' qualities, such as policemen, military and

other state agents at the border, but also from vigilantes, smugglers and other entrepreneurs operating on the verge of legality.

But more often than not, I experienced how these seemingly discrete groups were intimately entangled. As time in the borderland passed the distinction between formal and informal, state and non-state became increasingly blurred. This was readily noticeable when for example, public authorities like the military and police generated income by facilitating the flow of contraband across the border or when local communities took up the role of the police through acts of vigilantism.

Numerous colourful rumours about the *raison d'être* of my presence flourished, especially at the outset of fieldwork before the main purpose of my presence had become common knowledge. The three most common assumptions were that I was an audacious and slightly eccentric timber buyer, a central government spy, or just a bewildered conservationist. During my latest visit in 2007, after the government banned logging, locals told me that during my previous stays timber barons had carefully monitored my movements.

Overcoming suspicions demanded endless hours of courtesy visits to the various state and non-state authorities (timber barons, *adat* elders, village heads etc.) in the region explaining the purpose of my visit as a researcher and the rules of confidentiality that bound me. As one of the goals of fieldwork was to investigate the various actors' involvement in timber extraction (often carried out in the twilight between legality and illegality), one of my biggest problems was how to walk the fine line between talking with one group without losing the trust of others. In particular, a general distrust between certain public authorities – like border police and military – complicated matters. I experienced this when a less than five-minute motorbike ride once almost cost me a month of hard-earned local trust. I accepted a short courtesy ride from one of the many young police officers protecting the borderlands from the development of any illegal activities; afterwards I had to spend long hours assuring other segments of local society such as community leaders and *adat* elders of my impartiality. These young police officers are usually outsiders, from other parts of Indonesia, and widespread corruption, boredom and lack of local knowledge often lead them into conflict with the border communities.

When including illicit processes such as the illegal harvesting and trade in timber and various other border strategies into the research

frame, certain precautions were necessary. Andrew Walker notes how powerful interests involved in such illegal practices make the collection of qualitative information extremely difficult (Walker 1999:xiii). Owing to the sensitive nature of this research, I have changed all names of informants and their communities and have been deliberately vague about their exact location. As other scholars have commented, research in border regions has often been hampered by the difficulty in conducting it, either because of its politically contested nature or due to the different 'secret agendas' the government might have in the area (Donnan and Wilson 1994:6-7). Thus one of the main challenges of the study was how to understand ambivalent and overlapping spheres of authority and explain the intricate and often complicated relations between state actors, cross-border entrepreneurs and members of the border communities, without doing too much violence to the complexity of the local setting, and while protecting the anonymity of informants.

Fieldwork was divided among three primary sites: the subdistrict (borderland), district, and provincial levels. Although the major part of the fieldwork was carried out on the subdistrict level, I had to work back and forth between 'studying up' and 'studying down'. This involved talking to local people (elite and non-elite), Malaysian entrepreneurs, politicians, and state officials at all levels of regional government administration (subdistrict, district and province). The involvement of a broad selection of informants in the research frame provided a wealth of information and a variety of distinct views on the research topic that could be checked and cross-checked in order to create a representative picture of the processes studied. Many key informants were part of a network of my old contacts from previous fieldwork, and they worked as gatekeepers in facilitating access to new networks within both official regional government and local institutions.

During my 2007 stay, I conducted and taped 71 semi-structured interviews lasting approximately one hour or more with various state officials, politicians and border elite members (village heads, tribal heads, schoolteachers, businessmen etc.).² Besides these more formal interviews, I participated in many informal conversations with representatives of villagers and illegal loggers from Malaysia. While taped formal interviews among government officials and politicians were carried out without

² A similar number of formal interviews were conducted during fieldwork in the period from 2002 to 2005.

much difficulty, they were certainly harder to do among local (Iban) border inhabitants. Because of the often sensitive nature of information concerning local illicit activities and internal conflict, information was gathered through key-informant interviews. Carrying out face-to-face interviews proved to be extremely difficult, not least because, as many other scholars conducting research among the Iban have noticed, private interviews in the longhouse were impossible because of the sociability of longhouse living. All interviews that did not include several people were either carried out in my private accommodation in Lanjak, in out-of-the-way farm huts (*langkau*), or during hunting trips. The interview setting and context were a crucial factor for success. If I had solely relied on group interviews, I would not have fully grasped the power dynamics between elite and non-elite. Informants were very hesitant to express their dissatisfaction in larger groups because of the multifaceted nature of personal networks and the potential consequences of spreading rumours and gossip in a region where people always could find some kinship bonds with each other despite large distances separating them. The propensity for gossip made it especially important to cross-check all information received from such sources.

Data collected also include numerous field notes, a wide range of official documents (colonial, military, and government) and newspaper clippings. The independent newspapers in post-Soeharto West Kalimantan can be extremely critical because they expose government weaknesses and provide an interesting contrast with the grand plans promulgated by the government.³ In order to compare public with government opinion I followed debates in national and regional newspapers. After my initial visit in 1997, I created a database for Indonesian newspapers, national and regional, that covered a wide range of aspects of the borderland. The use of popular media like newspaper articles as data sources of course demands some caution as they are often inaccurate. Such sources should never be relied upon alone but must be applied in conjunction with and cross-checked with other sources such as interviews and official records. Taking these limitations into account, newspaper articles constituted a useful data source in comparing public and government opinion

³ The media situation was of course quite different during the New Order period where national newspapers were under heavy government censorship. For example, newspapers articles on the 1960-1970s borderland 'Communist insurgency' were by and large military propaganda.

and attitudes. Newspaper sources also were a useful way to confirm larger-scale historical patterns.

My research was carried out primarily in five subdistricts with a special focus on the subdistrict of Batang Lupar, the place where my social networks were most developed because of former visits. I visited more than 20 Iban longhouse communities chosen for their proximity to the border at locations dispersed within all five subdistricts.⁴ Furthermore I talked to members from several other communities during their weekly visits to Lanjak, the administrative seat of Batang Lupar subdistrict and a market town, which also was used as one of my two bases when in the border area.

In order to get more in-depth knowledge of specific strategies in relation to the border, I chose one particular Iban longhouse community, 'Rumah Manah', as my main locale.⁵ Rumah Manah is located in the hills in the upper parts of the Leboyan River (Ulu Leboyan) within the subdistrict of Batang Lupar, approximately 20 kilometres as the crow flies from the town of Lanjak. This longhouse community consists of ten nuclear families and approximately 100 people. The number of residents varies considerably throughout the year, and in some months the in-residence population can be much smaller. Many residents (especially young men) spend a certain amount of time every year working in Sarawak. During my stay in the community, I opted for intensive participation in daily life and gained the confidence of the community, which paved the way for productive research.

THE KAPUAS HULU BORDERLAND

The stretch of border and adjacent borderland that make up the primary setting for this book is situated in the remote district (*kabupaten*) of Kapuas Hulu in the Indonesian province of West Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) (see Map 1, p. xvi and Map 2, p. xvii). The Kapuas Hulu district consists of 29,842 km² (20.33 percent of West Kalimantan) divided into no fewer than 23 subdistricts with a total population of only 209,860. It lies in the most northern corner of the province, more than 700 km from

⁴ Many of the same communities were also visited during previous fieldwork.

⁵ 'Rumah Manah' is a pseudonym to preserve the anonymity of its residents. Other places are accurately reported, though the names of all individuals mentioned have been changed.

the provincial capital Pontianak on the coast (Kabupaten Kapuas Hulu 2006). To the north, the district shares the international border with Sarawak, Malaysia, while to the east it borders the Indonesian provinces of Central Kalimantan and East Kalimantan. I focussed specifically on a series of events unravelling primarily in five Iban-dominated subdistricts (*kecamatan*) within the Kapuas Hulu district on the border of the Malaysian state of Sarawak (see Map 3, p. xviii). When referring to ‘the borderland’ I mean these five subdistricts unless otherwise qualified.

The five subdistricts are Batang Lupar, Embaloh Hulu, Badau, Empanang, and Puring Kencana. Most of the data presented in this book was collected in the first of the above-mentioned subdistricts, Batang Lupar. The five subdistricts (covering approximately 6,296 km² or 22 percent of the district) make up the largest stretch of territory along the international border out of seven border subdistricts within the ‘mother’ district. In 2007, the population in the five was estimated to have reached approximately 37,000 (PPKPU 2007).

The principal ethnic groups are Iban, Maloh, and Melayu, with the Iban population by far the largest group. Melayu is the local term for the Muslim population in the area (compared to the predominantly Christian Iban and Maloh population). In 2007, the Iban population was estimated to account for more than 50 percent (approximately 20,000)⁶ of the total population, the Maloh 30 percent and the Melayu 10 percent. This is a rough estimate based on recent district population data (BPS-KH 2006) and an ethnic census (Wadley and Kuyah 2001:720-23), but due to the unreliability of these data, numbers may differ.

The hilly forested areas along the border and fertile valleys are predominantly shared by the Iban and Maloh population while the Melayu population predominantly is occupied as fishermen in the shallow lakes at the foot of the hills. Besides the three groups mentioned, the area has periodically attracted large numbers of migrants from other parts of the province and Indonesia. This was especially the case during the different periods of heavy timber logging, when the border population increased dramatically. These migrants largely resided in wooden shacks in the administrative posts and market towns of Lanjak and Badau and the numerous surrounding logging camps and sawmills. Besides the large number of internal migrants, the local timber adventures also attract opportunity

⁶ The Iban population is divided into 109 distinct communities, encompassing 1,843 households, plus those residing in the subdistrict seats (Wadley and Kuyah 2001:723).

seekers from across the border – for example, Malaysian Chinese entrepreneurs and their ground personnel – a mix of Chinese and Iban mechanics, lorry drivers, foremen, cooks and chainsaw operators.

The main economic sector within these five subdistricts and Kapuas Hulu as a whole has traditionally been forestry. The Kapuas Hulu economic dependency on forestry is more than twice as great as in other districts in the province (Alqadrie et al. 2003). Due to its large forests, remote location and lack of functioning infrastructure few other economic opportunities have been available. According to district statistics, between 2001 and 2005 an average of approximately 25,282 km² was said to belong to various categories of forest.⁷ That is more than 80 percent of the total land area of 29,842 km² (BPS-KH 2002, 2006). In 2001 the Gross Regional Domestic Product was Rp 307,784 million, of which Rp 74,008 million (US\$7,600) derived from the forestry sector.⁸ According to figures from 2002 and 2003, this amount has risen even more (BPS-KH 2002; 2006).⁹

Low hills and river plains characterise the landscape of the particular section of the border encompassing the five subdistricts. Hills along the border are easily crossed and pose no physical barrier. Besides the main border roads such as the one between Nanga Badau (Indonesia) and Lubok Antu (Sarawak) (which locals have used for centuries), there are estimated to be more than 50 small back-roads, or '*jalan tikus*' (mouse paths), leading into Sarawak (*Pontianak Post* 2004h).¹⁰ Upriver in close proximity to the border the area is dotted by small hills largely covered by tracts of secondary forest in different stages of growth – a result of generations of swidden cultivation and more recently commercial logging. Besides numerous small streams, two major rivers have their source in the hilly border area – the Leboyan and Embaloh. These feed into an extensive area of shallow lakes and seasonally flooded swamp forest and valleys at the foot of the hills. Between these tracts of secondary hill and swamp forest are large pockets of old growth forest. Two such large pieces of old-growth forest were designated national parks in 1995 and

⁷ Such as production forest (Hutan Produksi) and protected forest (Hutan Lindung).

⁸ Throughout the book exchange rates in US dollars are an estimate based on official rates in the year mentioned.

⁹ The actual figure is probably much higher as the income from 'illegal logging' is, of course, not reported.

¹⁰ The sheer size and amount of traffic have made locals rename these cross-border routes as '*jalan gajah*' (elephant paths).

1999.¹¹ Altogether more than half of the district is classified as protected forest, thus falling under the authority of the central state. The border landscape is thus a patchwork of swiddens, forest gardens, and old-growth forest, criss-crossed by multiple logging roads and rivers.

The West Kalimantan borderland as a whole has a long history of economic underdevelopment compared to other parts of the province. A weak socio-economic infrastructure, isolated regional markets, and scarcity of large-scale investments characterise the borderland. Until recently, the borderland has been heavily militarized as a result of tension between Indonesia and Malaysia, triggered by an armed confrontation between the two nations in the early 1960s and followed by military anti-Communist operations in the mid-1960s to 1970s (see Chapter 4). This was followed by large-scale resource exploitation. Many of the former high-ranking army personnel who fought against the communists received large concessions along the border. A prominent group of local Iban received similar grants. The result of these land distributions was a sharp escalation of timber extraction. And the distributions were carried out in the name of national security. The first part of the timber extraction period was described to me by a majority of the local population as a time of corruption and nepotism.

During discussions with non-elite community members, much anger and bitterness was directed towards these former military timber cronies and the small Iban border elite who benefited along with them. At the time, little or no compensation was paid to the majority of communities for timber extracted from local forest territories, and the operation generated few local jobs. Additionally, until the early 1990s the borderland functioned as a security buffer zone facing neighbouring Malaysia. Access for civilians not residing in the borderland was largely restricted, and permits from district military and police were needed in order to enter the borderland. Consequently, the Indonesian state purposely delayed infrastructural and other kinds of development. This meant that transport was time-consuming, unreliable, and often interrupted or made impossible by seasonally restricted roads and waterways.

Furthermore, growth of the local economy has been stalled by lack of relations with and remoteness from the provincial economic centre in Pontianak, which in turn has made cross-border trade crucial. Indeed,

¹¹ Betung Kerihun National Park, with 800,000 ha of hill forest along the border, and Danau Sentarum National Park, with 80,000 ha of shallow lakes and swamp forest.

the borderland's closeness to major political and economic centres in Sarawak has resulted in close networks of trade (including smuggling) and social mixing across the border. Not only in terms of geographical space are the Iban more closely connected to Sarawak; it is also true in terms of time. The Iban border inhabitants, for instance, do not use Western Indonesia Standard Time (WIB) GMT+7, as does the rest of the province. Local schools and other government institutions by and large use Malaysia Time (MYT) GMT+8, which is one hour ahead of WIB, as this is more convenient considering the degree of cross-border interaction. Additionally, in many border communities all cash transactions are carried out in the stronger Malaysian currency while the Indonesian rupiah buys little of value (*Kompas* 2003b).

Under the Basic Agreement of 1967 between Malaysia and Indonesia, border inhabitants on either side were to be allowed to cross the border for short, non-work-related social visits (Agustiar 2000; Bala 2002; Fariastuti 2002). But such border crossers need a pass locally known as the red letter/book (*surat merah* or *buku merah*). Applying for a pass can be time consuming and expensive. Because of these constraints, most Iban prefer crossing the border illegally. This seems to pose few obstacles as they have an intimate knowledge of the border area and can blend into the Sarawak Iban population almost seamlessly. In addition, local authorities have long ignored border crossing without official documents along these informal routes (Edward 2007; Fariastuti 2002; Tirtosudarmo 2002).

In reality, because government surveillance at the Nanga Badau border post (Pos Lintas Batas, or PLB) is very lax, with official resources few and corruption widespread, most Iban seeking employment simply cross the border without passes (*Kompas* 1999a). The few who use the pass are mostly local non-Iban traders selling or shopping at the main bazaar in Lubok Antu, although some also obtain passes to enter Malaysia with the intention of later looking for work (see Hugo 2003:445). An Iban woman said that if she wanted to sell her farm produce or handicrafts or shop at the Lubok Antu market, she just had to promise the Sarawak border officials to be back across the border the same day, although no one is likely to notice longer stays.¹² Many Sarawak immigration officers stationed at border posts are ethnic Iban themselves and often ignore Kalimantan

¹² A few times a year, women from borderland communities cross into Sarawak to sell their traditionally woven cloths, which are highly sought after because of their high quality and affordability.

Iban, to whom they are frequently related. Finding some kin connection or simply common ethnicity in border crossing negotiations can open up many doors.

In connection with illegal commerce, one interesting example is the cross-border trading of shotguns and shotgun shells. The former are illegal in Sarawak, the latter are inaccessible or expensive in West Kalimantan. Hunting being an important aspect of life on both sides of the border, such items are in great demand. The Kalimantan Iban are skilled ironsmiths and make homemade shotguns to be smuggled to Sarawak and sold. The local price for these homemade shotguns was around Rp 500,000 to 700,000 in 2002-2003, while across the border in Sarawak they sold for more than twice that amount. Shotgun shells are extremely expensive in the Kalimantan borderland while the price is much lower across the border. I was told that to be able to buy shotgun shells in Sarawak, you needed to have a licence and some used shells to show for it. The empty shells were usually collected and given to Malaysian kin who had a licence, and who then bought shells in Malaysia to sell to their Kalimantan kin, who smuggled them across the border. Because of the harsh punishment if caught, only a limited number were involved in a given transaction. One example of such illicit affairs is the case of a local Kalimantan Iban man who was caught in the Malaysian border town of Lubok Antu and jailed for smuggling a large backpack (*ladung*) of shotgun barrels across the border.

In the 1980s and 1990s the provincial and district government began constructing what is known as the North Bound road (Jalan Lintas Utara) along the border in order to connect the remote border region with the rest of the district and province and thus promote development and increase security along the border (Japari 1989). This road later became part of a larger plan to open 2000 km of roads along the entire length of the Kalimantan border (*Kompas* 2005a). The national media has often indicated that the lack of good roads connecting the border area with the rest of the province is the main reason why border communities are less directed towards their own country than neighbouring Malaysia (*Kompas* 2001).

Beginning in 2007, this slowly improving infrastructure has included stretches of paved roads, electricity in many roadside communities, and cell phone towers, and has recently reduced travelling time for residents when going to town to sell cash crops, buy consumer goods, attend

school, and visit government offices and clinics, as well as to cross the border to work or visit family in Sarawak. The building of a road network along the border has facilitated an increased flow of people and goods, both legal and illegal, in both directions. The Asian economic crisis and the development of regional autonomy following the fall of Soeharto's government had already accelerated these flows.¹³ During fieldwork in 2007, the last stretch of road from the district capital of Putussibau to the border crossing in Nanga Badau was finally paved and subsequently upgraded to a national highway. However, the generally poor quality of construction will probably make the road highly vulnerable to heavy seasonal rains and require high maintenance expenses in coming years.

Despite these initiatives, the borderland is still seen nationally (and regionally) as both backward (*terbelakang*) and left behind (*tertinggal*) in regards to the national development and is consequently classified as an area of high poverty (*daerah miskin*) (KNPDT 2007; PKB 2005b). As pointed out by the border scholar Oscar Martínez, people living in such out-of-the-way places have, because of their weak national orientation (Martínez 1994a:18-20), often been branded as a hindrance to national development. The political centre tends to see border populations as less sophisticated and even uncivilized compared to more centrally located populations. Such prejudiced attitudes of the central government and its agents have exacerbated local feelings of alienation from the national scene and increased the popular orientation towards Sarawak. This sense of separateness and otherness seems to pervade the lives of the majority of the border population. For many, their connections over the border are often stronger than those with their own nation (Eilenberg and Wadley 2009).

Locals describe the second period of timber extraction in the borderland running from the late 1990s until 2005 as a good time, as the local economy prospered. After Soeharto's fall in 1998, all timber concessions along the border were cancelled. Although the legal status of timber extraction during this transition period was undecided, local governments and communities nonetheless invited Malaysian timber barons to come and fell their forest in return for royalties and taxes paid to local government and communities. This period of fuzzy regional autonomy

¹³ Fariastuti 2002; Riwanto 2002; Siburian 2002.

and cooperation with Malaysian timber barons lasted until 2005, when the central Indonesia government, who viewed these undertakings in the more or less self-ruling border areas as illegal, initiated several large-scale raids along the border.

After 2005, the economic situation in the border area has been one of crisis, since the only major local income provider – logging – was stopped. Border communities are enraged and blame the central government for the local economic depression. Consequently, a local ‘border autonomy movement’ has received massive local support. The border population is also afraid that history will repeat itself and that the renewed government focus on the borderland is a sign that central government once again will take over control of local forest resources. Many feel that the only way to prevent this outside confiscation of local assets is to create a semi-autonomous border district.

THE BORDER ADVANTAGE

The Iban border population, who form the ethnographic starting point of this book, reside within a contested and ever-changing border environment. The populace has for centuries been involved in an ongoing effort to maintain control over, and access to, their forest resources under the fluctuating power of former colonial rule and, more recently, the Indonesian state. This attempt has involved dealing with both national and transnational interests in harvesting their forest. The Iban, like many border people, do not think of themselves as part of a large national entity and have divergent definitions of citizenship, space and place. For the majority of people living in borderlands, central government often is seen as a confining entity that restricts their everyday practices and spatial mobility. Citizens often think that the distant provincial and national centres do not comprehend the special and shifting circumstances of life in the borderland that denote a high degree of spatial flexibility. Subsequently, they consider themselves less obligated to abide by formal state laws. As ethnicity plays a major role in local self-understanding, and is strategically applied in negotiations with government authorities, a small introduction to the Iban is imperative. I introduce the basics of Iban social organization below, especially the different levels of traditional authorities that make up the power base of border elites. Because

this is not a study of Iban social organization per se, this description is only sketches out the most important social units, which will be referred to throughout the book.

Categorizing a large group of people under one label can be problematic, and it is not the intention to treat 'Iban' as a natural category but rather to show how ethnicity plays a strategic role. For a detailed discussion the Iban ethnic category in Kalimantan, see Reed Wadley (2000a) and Victor King (2001). In order to avoid any confusion and to simplify the argument, the study will apply the term Iban as a common label for the Ibanic group studied. In terms of ethnic identities, at least three main types of border populations can be identified:

- (i) those which share ethnic ties across the border, as well as with those residing at their own state's geographical core; (ii) those who are differentiated by cross-border ethnic bonds from other residents of their state; and (iii) those who are members of the national majority in their state, and have no ethnic ties across the state's borders (Wilson and Donnan 1998a:14).

The West Kalimantan Iban are a good example of the second type of border population. The outlook of the Iban population in Kalimantan has been, in many ways, directed toward the much larger Iban population living in more prosperous Sarawak. Ethnic identity consequently plays a crucial role in everyday, cross-border interaction. According to Robert Alvarez and George Collier, 'ambiguities of identity in borderlands can also be strategically played upon to forge, reformulate and even mobilize ethnic identity to [an] advantage' (1994:607). Being Iban is thus not only a marker of community belonging, but also a strategic asset used in social and economic negotiations along the border. With respect to the border, Iban identity in West Kalimantan may be seen as two parts of a whole – the first being ethnic Iban and culturally connected to the larger Sarawak Iban population; the second being long-time residents of the remote border area, at the edges of the Indonesian state and at the bounds of citizenship. These two parts of Iban identity are a critically important factor in local Iban perceptions and decisions and applied appropriately to fit different times, places, and circumstances (Wadley and Eilenberg 2005).

When dealing with neighbouring Iban communities within the spe-

cific area where they live the Iban in West Kalimantan do not call themselves Iban. Rather, they identify themselves by referring to the name of the community, river, and wider area in which they live. Locality being the traditional marker of identity, the inhabitants of the community Rumah Manah in this way identify themselves as Urang Manah (people of Rumah Manah) and as Urang Emparan (people of the low-lying hills) etc. The label used to identify a certain group belonging to Iban, like other groups in Borneo, is very much dependent on the context, and on the group from whom you want distinguish yourself at a specific moment (Wadley 2000a:83-94).

The term 'Iban' becomes the prime identity marker, with which the majority of the population in the study area identify when they seek wage labour across the border and when they have to deal with ethnic kin and Malaysian government officials. However, when facing local or provincial Indonesian government officials, they often downplay ethnic affiliation and instead emphasize their national identity as Indonesian citizens (Lumenta 2001; 2005; Pirous 2002). As a district government document on border underdevelopment from the late 1980s explains frankly, one should not be surprised that people in the border areas are more familiar with officials in the Sarawak government than with those in the Indonesian government (Japari 1989:13-14).

In numerous cases, families are split in their orientation, with some members knowing almost nothing about Indonesian politics because of long-term work or schooling in Sarawak, while their siblings or children may be more 'Indonesian' after attending boarding school or university in Pontianak. For example, in the subdistricts of Badau and Puring Kencana more than 50 percent of Iban children attend school across the border in Sarawak because of lower cost and better quality.¹⁴

As an ethnic label, 'Iban' refers to a widely distributed portion of the population in northwestern Borneo. In the province of West Kalimantan, the Iban constitute a small minority primarily residing in the five border subdistricts, while across the border in Sarawak the Iban are the single largest ethnic group. The Iban number more than 600,000 in the Malaysian state of Sarawak, where they make up slightly more than a quarter of the population. Smaller Iban groups live in Sabah, the Sultanate of Brunei, and along the international border in West

¹⁴ For detailed discussion on the paradoxical outcomes of schooling in the borderland, see Eilenberg 2005.

Kalimantan (Sather 2004:623). The majority of the Iban in the border area still practice traditional longhouse living, although in the 1960s and 1970s, during the period of strong military presence in the borderland, some communities were forced to abandon their longhouses and move into single-family dwellings. Government and military largely saw longhouses as primitive and unhygienic fire hazards, and considered their supposedly communal structure and organization to be ideal bases for Communist infiltration. Despite intense pressure, the majority of communities resisted and kept the longhouse as their prime organizational unit. The military was only partially successful in one area, namely the subdistrict of Nanga Kantuk (subdistrict of Empanang), where their presence and authority was especially high (McKeown 1984). Since the late 1990s, local government has encouraged longhouse dwelling because of its tourism potential. The anthropologist Derek Freeman has described the Iban longhouse community as a street of privately owned houses (Freeman 1970:5). A more popular image of a longhouse community, as seen by outsiders (government officials, migrants or tourists), is that of a single structure where the inhabitants live in one large joint community and where values such as communal ownership prevail (Dove 1982).

A longhouse consists of a set of generally closely related but individual families, living side by side in separate apartments (*bilik*). Each *bilik* is semi-autonomous and is primarily responsible for its own economic production and general welfare. They do periodically enter into loose working relationships and, if need be, receive help from other *bilik*. The separate *bilik* are often parts of larger kinship alliances, which cooperate both economically and politically. While the *bilik* is the fundamental point of belonging for the individual Iban, the longhouse is the largest unit of traditional Iban organization. A longhouse community is an autonomous entity that holds the rights over a specified tract of land that makes up the longhouse territory (*menoa*). Inside this territory, each *bilik* owns certain tracts of land. Furthermore, the longhouse communities are politically and ritually independent of each other.

Throughout history, the longhouse has proven to be a stable social unit among the Iban in the borderland, and the traditional political autonomy of longhouse communities has resulted in divergent interests between longhouses. Even after incorporation into the Indonesian nation-state, the longhouse has maintained its integrity as the primary

social unit. However, in the early 1980s the Indonesian government implemented a new administrative hierarchy at the local level throughout Indonesia. Under this new system, one or two longhouses were suddenly designated hamlets (*dusun*), and several hamlets were grouped into one village (*desa*). Each village elected a village head that became an official of the district government, in charge of dividing various government subsidies and implementing development plans. In reality, this new system created a fair amount of confusion and conflict as the new status of a village head (*kepala desa*) meant that one person now had the official authority over several longhouses, which was in sharp contrast to the traditional autonomy of the longhouse unit. Hence the authority of a village head in reality is often limited. Despite the introduction of these new administrative units, the longhouses have continued to operate autonomously.

Within the *bilik* and longhouse community, each member is regarded as autonomous. Individualism is in this way one of the fundamental principles in Iban society and is assigned much symbolic capital. The Iban have an anthropological reputation of being highly 'egalitarian'; i.e., there is equality between all individuals in society (Freeman 1970; Sather 1996). It is true that no institutionalized formal social stratification systems dividing people into social categories are to be found in traditional Iban society. To say that Iban society is egalitarian is to a certain degree correct, but that does not mean that all Iban are basically equal. This said Iban and other so-called egalitarian communities in upland Indonesia have always recognized various informal levels of status or class, based on achievement and on an individual's personal ability to accumulate wealth.

In the borderland, social egalitarianism still appears to be a central principle, though not to be understood in the romantic sense that everybody should be basically equal, socially and economically, but that everybody is equal to compete and follow economic opportunities as they appear. Those who do not have the ability to compete because of their lack of needed social or economic capital largely end up as the new and increasingly marginalized rural poor, excluded from the benefits of borderland life. Conjuring up the popular idea of community solidarity can obscure how certain elite members of society exploit their less educated kin to sell the produce of forest or land to timber companies and plantation schemes.

Those members of borderland society who have obtained the social and economical capital to move between the various layers of government have not been slow to take advantage of policy changes on the border and the opportunities they bring. They have managed to position themselves as what some spectators have called ‘small border kings’, whose authority is not based on raw physical power but on their ability to create alliances and negotiate influence within multiple settings.

The Iban recognize differences between individuals, which, among other things, are expressed in the relationship between the sexes, level of education, wealth, and age. Individual agency is highly honoured. Strong values of personal autonomy and achievement permeate Iban society and influence the way they deal with the outside world. Because of those values, however, substantial material and political differences can exist between households within the same longhouse – an occasional source of resentment and disdain in internal relations. As such, there is a general: ‘... tendency towards measuring decisions according to the relative advantages that the Iban anticipates’ (Sutlive 1988:111).

Traditionally an Iban longhouse has no chief who can exercise power over the other inhabitants of the longhouse. Instead, they have an elected person (*tuai rumah*) who acts as spokesperson and mediator in internal or external disputes but who does not enjoy any authority other than what the community grants him. The relations between members of a longhouse community are mediated by the traditional law system of *adat*, which is made up of a set of rules of conduct that touch upon every aspect of life. *Adat* prescribes the way of maintaining equilibrium in society. In the border area, *adat* still plays a crucial role in conflict settlement, which is why the Iban population seldom makes use of official Indonesian courts. Disputes between local communities in the Iban-dominated border subdistricts are largely handled by a tribal head or *adat* leader, *temenggong*, and deputies, *patih*, who are a group of influential senior members of society.¹⁵ This system was originally introduced by the Dutch colonial administration and was later officially recognized by the Indonesian state as an alternative to its own courts (Harwell 2000b:49; Kater 1883; Wadley 1997).¹⁶

The traditional economic foundation of the Iban communities is

¹⁵ Each of the five subdistricts has its own *temenggong* and *patih*.

¹⁶ For an example of how *adat* is employed in local resource management in the area, see Harwell 1997.

subsistence agriculture and forestry, its fundamental component being rice farming in hill or swamp swiddens. Very few have official deeds on their lands, which for centuries have been passed from generation to generation through intricate systems of rights (Wadley 1997). As a supplement to rice farming, the Iban engage in hunting, fishing and collecting different kinds of forest products. Iban rely heavily on their forests for swidden rice farming and numerous non-timber forest products. One study determined that Iban purchased only nine percent of their foods; the remainder came from fields and forest (Colfer et al. 2000). To further supplement the household economy, be able to buy consumer goods, and pay for children's schooling, people engage in wage labour across the border in Sarawak.¹⁷ Although the Iban are dependent on subsistence rice farming, the flexibility of Iban social organization has made it possible for Iban men especially to seek wage labour in neighbouring Sarawak for certain periods during the year. Such flexible household economies have been shown to be successful life strategies in the ever-shifting borderland milieu.¹⁸

The transborder Iban as a whole have a long history of migration and a well-established network of trade, communication, and kinship dating back to pre-colonial times. After both Malaysia and Indonesia achieved independence in the mid-twentieth century, the old colonial borders of Borneo, as with many former colonial territories, continued to demarcate the new post-colonial states, and the Iban subsequently became Indonesian and Malaysian citizens. Yet, in almost all West Kalimantan Iban communities, every family in one way or another is closely related to people living on the opposite side of the border. A middle-aged Iban informant explains:

My grandmother has 12 sisters and brothers, and she is the only one who lives in Indonesia. Other grandchildren from my grandmother's sisters and brothers live in Batang Lintang, Batang Lupar, Semenggang, Miri, Bintulu, and Limbang (all Sarawak place names). Therefore, I can definitely say that we have much family over there.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Eilenberg and Wadley 2009; Wadley 1997, 2000b.

¹⁸ Sturgeon notes a similar diversity and flexibility of production among the ethnic Akha in the Thai-Burma-China borderlands and claims that it constitutes a strength when engaging with shifting political regimes (Sturgeon 2005:7).

¹⁹ Personal interview, Lintang, 23-3-2007.

These relationships are strategically used to engage in various border-crossing activities. Well aware of their special ‘border advantage’, the Iban continually exploit state inconsistencies on both sides. Indeed, border residents find it difficult to imagine life without the special opportunities that the border gives them. In addition, having been absorbed into two very different nation-states, the two Iban populations have been exposed to different political-economic regimes. As a large percentage of the Sarawak population is ethnic Iban, the Iban language is widely spoken and understood throughout the state. Iban culture, in various forms, permeates Sarawak society because of their sheer numbers, and the Iban are widely recognized as having played a key role in the state’s history. Not only were they centrally involved with the early British Brooke kingdom, but they later became important political players after Malaysian independence (Jawan 1994; King 1990). The Sarawak Iban have enjoyed greater freedom of cultural expression than their cousins in West Kalimantan, a freedom of which the latter are often envious.

In Sarawak, Iban culture is on display everywhere, from posters advertising Iban pop and traditional music to banners from the Malaysian Tourism Board promoting ‘exotic’ Iban culture as a major tourist attraction. Many young Iban interviewed emphasized that the Iban in Sarawak are respected and that life is easy and full of possibilities for them. In contrast, Kalimantan Iban are still poor people (*orang miskin*). In addition, when discussing the difference between Sarawak and Kalimantan, they often described the former as a place of ‘order’ where things functioned properly, thanks to a strong government, while the latter was a place of ‘disorder’ where nothing functioned, corruption was widespread, and the government was weak. Such idyllic images of Sarawak as the land of honey, both culturally and economically, were commonly expressed among all generations in the borderland.²⁰ Although the partitioned Iban groups on either side of the border are strongly connected by social, cultural, and economic ties, the inhabitants experience the border in profoundly different ways. In his study of the coastal Malay village of Telok Melano in Sarawak, situated on the tip of the border with West Kalimantan, Noboru Ishikawa (2010), observes a similar strategic use

²⁰ Although the living standards of Sarawak Iban have generally been better than that of their Kalimantan relatives, Sarawak Iban, like other indigenous and non-Muslim groups there, have enjoyed less of Malaysia’s rapid economic development than the dominant Malay and Chinese populations (King and Jawan 1996).

of ethnic identity and cross-border networks among the border dwelling Malay communities. However, as is the case among the Iban, the flow of Malay people and their trade commodities is most often directed across the border towards wealthier Malaysia.²¹

The duality experienced by the Kalimantan Iban and other border communities on Borneo is in keeping with the identity of border communities elsewhere (Martínez 1994a; Ominiya 1997). As in many borderland situations, it is often the minority portion of the partitioned population that exhibits this identity complex. Whether among Italian Swiss or Kalimantan Iban, contradictory identities are felt, while their kin on the other side of the border do not face a similar ambiguity (Leimgrubber 1991). Indeed, Sarawak Iban, even those living close to the border, do not show the borderland ‘mentality’ that their cousins across the border do. They may cross the border to visit kin in order to engage in a casual cockfight (a legal pastime in the Kalimantan Iban-dominated border area, but illegal in Malaysia), or to marry one of the ‘gentle’ and hard-working Kalimantan Iban women. However, they feel no attraction from Kalimantan to be something other than Iban and Malaysian. Whenever the Malaysian Iban speaks of the Indonesian side, he or she most often exhibits fear of the Indonesian state stemming from the various military confrontations along the border, and a sense of superiority with respect to their ‘rustic’ Kalimantan kin.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into three sections beginning with an introduction to the main argument of the book and the central theoretical discussions framing this argument (Chapters 1-2). This is followed by a broad historical introduction (Chapters 3-4) and a series of in-depth case studies divided into four analytical chapters (Chapters 5-8). Finally, the book concludes by wrapping up the main arguments (Chapter 9).

Chapter 1 sets out the research agenda and introduces the contextual backdrop of the study. Chapter 2 draws attention to border areas as critical sites for exemplifying the changing dynamics of state-society interactions and the art of governance that Indonesia is experiencing in the

²¹ For a similar arrangement among the related border populations of Kelabit (Sarawak) and Lun Berian (East Kalimantan), see Amster 2005a.

wake of the last decade of political transformations. The chapter applies the insights drawn from the anthropology of the state to the realm of the borderland. Within this theoretical framework, a special focus is placed on the burgeoning literature appearing on states, borders, and local agency in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. In addition, the analysis is grounded in regional discussions on the relationship between frontier peoples, the state, and the struggle over access to natural resources. These discussions problematize in various ways how the Indonesian rural uplands have been transformed, imagined, and (attempted to be) controlled by the Indonesian state. By discussing these processes, I contribute to broader attempts to grasp the political orders and the scrambles for resources that are emerging in the wake of the 1999 decentralization processes.

Chapters 3 and 4 outline the particular historical formation of the border and adjacent borderland studied. First, they provide an account of border formation in the pre-independence period and shows how the Iban-inhabited border area gained a large degree of autonomy under the Dutch. Second, they provide a detailed discussion of the undeclared border war and subsequent 'Communist insurgency' in the 1960s and 1970s and the onset of resource extraction in the Soeharto New Order period in the 1980s and 1990s. The historical perspective will illuminate the long-term flow of people and commodities across this border. The main aim of these chapters is to explore the changing regulatory regimes and practices in the borderland.

Chapter 5 presents a series of case studies on how border communities reacted to the uncertainty during the political transformations in a decentralizing Indonesia after 1998. I focus on cross-border logging operations carried out in cooperation between border communities, district government, and Malaysian timber barons from 2000 to 2005. These cases illustrate the long-term configuration of patronage relations that involve local collaborations with different state authorities (border military and district officers) and cross-border relations (Malaysian timber barons and ethnic kin). Special attention is given to locally based elites and their general role as mediators between state institutions and local communities as well as their more specific manoeuvres to position themselves as patrons to certain villagers, thereby controlling access to forest resources.

Chapter 6 discusses the intersecting spheres of legality and illegality in the borderland. It explores how local strategies are often perceived

locally as acceptable (licit) while deemed illegal by state rules, even while state authorities at different levels take part in these strategies. The book here discusses cases of ‘gangsterism’ and ‘vigilantism’ that demonstrate the fair amount of local autonomy the border population enjoys in handling local matters, especially how these small zones of autonomy have been created in the borderland – zones in which state regulations are negotiated and interpreted locally according to the ‘special circumstances of border life’. The cases show how local strategies along a politically contested border often take a ‘shadow’ or ‘twilight’ character and are therefore perceived nationally as signs of disloyalty towards the Indonesian state.

Chapter 7 examines perceptions government authorities and the borderland population hold vis-à-vis each other, especially how the various government authorities (central or regional) conceptualize the borderland and its population. It attempts to answer the question, through what actions are government authorities trying to integrate the borderland and its population into an Indonesian nation-state, and how do those actions fit or collide with local needs? The book here touches upon the often-divergent perceptions of citizenship, territoriality, and their implications for the relations between state and non-state actors. The overall argument of this chapter is that central government imaginations of borderlands in relation to development plans, security and territorial control, are far from monolithic. Government regulatory practices along the border are here understood as entangled with those of border communities. The outcome will depend on the manner in which they are interpreted and put into play by lower-level government employees, elected representatives and others. Uneasy relationships and contradictory ties and commitments among state authorities coexist at various levels of government and in various departments.

Chapter 8 analyzes an ongoing local claim for border autonomy through the attempted creation of an administrative border district. This final case feeds into the previous cases and illustrates local border elites’ long-term attempt to claim authority over a stretch of the Kalimantan-Sarawak border by ‘formally’ creating their own autonomous border district, enacted within the legal (but fuzzy) framework of recent administrative decentralization reforms. This case will illuminate how the state is understood creatively and how national loyalties are claimed at the state edges by appropriating state rhetoric of development and good citi-

zenship. The focus here is the creation of nationhood along state edges. Chapter 9 concludes by summarizing the main arguments of the book and discussing their theoretical and empirical implications.



Fig 1: Badau border crossing (PLB), 2007 (Photograph by author)



Fig 2: Traders and labour migrants resting before crossing into Sarawak, 2007 (Photograph by author)



Fig 3: Official border crossing point with immigration and customs facilities (PPLB), 2007 (Photograph by author)



Fig 4: The town of Lanjak, 2005 (Photograph by author)



Fig 5: The Lanjak-Badau road (Jalan Lintas Utara), 2007 (Photograph by author)



Fig 6: The Governor's visit to Lanjak, 2007 (Photograph by author)



Fig 7: The Governor's speech, 2007 (Photograph by author)



Fig 8: Forest cover along the West Kalimantan-Sarawak border, 2007 (Photograph by author)



Fig 9: Iban swidden fields in the border hills, 2002 (Photograph by author)



Fig 10: Planting hill rice in the border hills, 2002 (Photograph by author)



Fig 11: Hunters in the border hills, 2007 (Photograph by author)



Fig 12: Small concrete border pillar, 2007 (Photograph by author)

