

*Ethnography of Nationalism on the Indonesia-Malaysia Border:
Dynamics of Transnational Identity in the Study of Culture, Art, and Citizenship*

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Abstract

This study investigates identity transnationalism and nationalism along the Indonesia-Malaysia border in West Kalimantan. Residents with familial ties in both nations face challenges in maintaining their cultural, artistic, and tribal identities across national lines. Despite their common ancestry, these individuals remain politically divided but culturally unified. Our research explores how transnational communities manage their complex sense of self and examines the role of culture and the arts in preserving community unity amidst national diversity. This study addresses a gap in the academic literature by focusing on transnationalism's cultural and artistic dimensions in border regions, a seldom-explored topic. Using critical ethnography, data were gathered through documentation analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation with Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community informants. Informants were chosen based on their familial ties in both Indonesia and Malaysia, representing culturally intertwined yet politically distinct communities. The research shows that transnational communities at the frontier use diverse strategies to preserve and express their cultural identity, despite political constraints. Cultural and artistic festivals are crucial for fostering community cohesion and identity, helping overcome territorial limitations. The findings significantly contribute to understanding the coexistence of transnational and national identities and the potential of arts and culture to strengthen community bonds despite political fragmentation. Emphasis is placed on supporting cultural programs that help communities preserve their identity and adopting a more inclusive and sensitive policy approach to the dynamics of transnationalism in border regions.

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Introduction

The Indonesia-Malaysia border in West Kalimantan represents a unique area that highlights the complexities of transnational and national identities. Among borderland communities such as the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, familial ties extend across national boundaries. However, the existence of political borders divides them administratively, creating challenges in maintaining cultural, artistic, and tribal identities. These communities navigate a delicate balance where shared ancestral heritage fosters cultural unity, yet political divisions pose significant obstacles (Martono et al., 2022).

Research on transnationalism often emphasizes economic migration or geopolitical relations, leaving the cultural and artistic dimensions underexplored. However, culture and art play a crucial role in fostering and preserving community solidarity, especially in border regions vulnerable to social disintegration due to political fragmentation. Through cultural and artistic festivals, transnational communities assert their identities and strengthen cross-border connections (Sulistyarini et al., 2021).

This study aims to explore how transnational communities manage their complex identities amidst political challenges. Using a critical ethnographic approach, this research employs document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation with informants from the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community. Informants were selected based on their cross-border familial ties, representing culturally interconnected yet politically distinct communities (Fatmawati & Dewantara, 2022).

The findings reveal that cultural and artistic strategies are central to how border communities sustain their identities (Musa et al., 2021). Additionally, the study contributes significantly to understanding the coexistence of national and transnational identities. It highlights the potential of culture and art to overcome territorial divides and foster unity. This research advocates for supporting cultural programs that facilitate identity preservation and calls for more inclusive policies to address the dynamics of transnationalism in border areas. By examining the intersection of culture, art, and citizenship in transnational contexts, this study offers valuable insights into the power of cultural practices to reinforce cross-border community cohesion despite political fragmentation.

Method

This study employs a critical ethnographic approach to explore the dynamics of transnational and national identities along the Indonesia-Malaysia border, focusing on the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community. This approach was chosen for its ability to delve deeply into the lived experiences, cultural practices, and strategies employed by the community to maintain their identities amidst political and geographical challenges. Data collection involved three primary techniques: document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. Document analysis encompassed a review of academic literature, local archives, and government reports relevant to the history and policies affecting border regions. This step provided a foundational understanding of the historical and social contexts underlying identity dynamics in the area (Dewantara & Budimansyah, 2024).

In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants selected purposively. These informants were members of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community with familial ties across national borders. The interviews explored their experiences in preserving cultural and artistic

identities and addressing political and administrative challenges posed by the national divide. Participant observation was carried out by engaging directly in the community's cultural and artistic activities, including traditional festivals, religious rituals, and artistic practices. This method allowed the researcher to gain firsthand insights into the symbolic meanings of these activities while fostering closer relationships with the community to collect authentic data.

All data were analyzed thematically to identify key patterns in the community's identity strategies. The analysis process involved transcribing interviews, coding data, and interpreting findings through the theoretical lens of transnationalism and borderland culture. Data validity was ensured through methodological triangulation and discussions with informants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. This methodology not only documents the challenges faced by the community but also highlights the pivotal role of art and culture as essential forces in strengthening cross-border identity and solidarity.

Result and Discussion

Cultural Dynamics in Transnational Communities

Culture is a cornerstone of identity, particularly for transnational communities like the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, who inhabit the border regions of Indonesia and Malaysia. For these communities, cultural traditions transcend political and geographical boundaries, serving as a unifying force that sustains a shared sense of belonging. Despite being administratively divided into two nations, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi maintain strong cultural ties that bind their members together.

The Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi share a rich cultural heritage rooted in their common ancestry. Traditional rituals, festivals, and practices remain integral to their identity and are celebrated across borders (Efriani et al., 2020; Syam et al., 2024). These include harvest ceremonies, ancestral worship, and communal gatherings, which are central to their way of life. The rituals emphasize themes of unity, spirituality, and harmony with nature, reflecting the core values of the community. For the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, these cultural expressions are not merely symbolic; they are active manifestations of their collective identity. They allow community members to reaffirm their connection to their ancestral heritage and to one another, even when divided by national boundaries. However, preserving this shared cultural identity is not without challenges. The establishment of national borders has introduced political and administrative barriers that complicate cultural continuity. Differences in policies between Indonesia and Malaysia can hinder cross-border participation in traditional practices. Furthermore, globalization and modern influences have begun to alter the cultural landscape of the region. Younger generations, exposed to global trends, often show declining interest in traditional customs. The gradual erosion of native languages, which are intrinsic to the community's oral traditions and cultural expressions, poses an additional threat to their heritage.

In response to these challenges, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi have developed strategies to safeguard their cultural identity. Cultural and artistic festivals play a critical role in these efforts. These events serve as platforms for the community to celebrate their traditions, share their artistic expressions, and strengthen bonds across borders. They provide a space for younger members to learn about and appreciate their heritage, ensuring that cultural knowledge is passed down to future generations. Such festivals often feature traditional

music, dance, storytelling, and culinary arts, showcasing the richness of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi's cultural legacy.

Community leaders and cultural custodians also play a significant role in preserving their heritage. They act as mediators between generations, facilitating the transmission of knowledge and values through workshops, educational programs, and storytelling sessions. These efforts are often supported by collaborations with cultural organizations and academic institutions, which provide resources for documentation and promotion of their traditions (Konig, 2012).

Despite the difficulties imposed by political borders and modern influences, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi demonstrate resilience in preserving their cultural identity. Their ability to maintain cultural continuity across national lines highlights the enduring power of tradition as a unifying force. By prioritizing cultural preservation and leveraging the arts as a means of expression, the community continues to strengthen its identity and cohesion. This commitment to cultural heritage serves as an inspiring example of how transnational communities can navigate the complexities of modern life while honoring their ancestral roots. Through their ongoing efforts, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi not only sustain their cultural practices but also affirm the importance of culture as a bridge that connects people across borders. Their experience underscores the vital role of cultural identity in fostering unity, resilience, and a sense of belonging in transnational communities.

Artistic Expressions in Transnational Communities

Art serves as a powerful medium of expression and identity for transnational communities, such as the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, who inhabit the Indonesia-Malaysia border region. For these communities, artistic practices transcend national boundaries and provide a crucial means of preserving and asserting their shared heritage. Traditional art forms—ranging from visual arts and crafts to music and performance—play an integral role in fostering cultural cohesion and continuity amidst political fragmentation.

The art of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi reflects their deep connection to nature, spirituality, and communal values. Traditional crafts, such as intricate beadwork, wood carving, and weaving, are imbued with symbolic meanings tied to their cosmology and ancestral wisdom. These art forms often serve both functional and ceremonial purposes, reinforcing the community's cultural identity in daily life and sacred rituals. Musical traditions, including the use of gongs, drums, and indigenous wind instruments, are equally significant, providing a soundtrack to community gatherings, festivals, and ceremonies. The rhythm and melodies of these performances often narrate stories of their history, beliefs, and struggles, making art an archive of their collective memory.

One of the most distinctive art forms of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi is *silotuang*, a traditional form of storytelling through performative dance and music. *Silotuang* combines elements of oral tradition, rhythmic movements, and melodic chanting to convey narratives that celebrate their history, ancestral lineage, and cultural philosophies. Typically performed during communal festivals or important ceremonies, *silotuang* serves as both entertainment and education, instilling a sense of pride and identity in the audience. The fluid yet structured movements of the performers, accompanied by traditional instruments, create a mesmerizing display that symbolizes unity and harmony.

Despite the richness of their artistic traditions, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi face challenges in sustaining their art forms. The imposition of national borders has disrupted the natural flow of cultural exchange between family members and artists residing in different countries. Moreover, economic pressures and the allure of modernity have led some younger generations to distance themselves from traditional artistic practices. The lack of formal support for preserving indigenous art—both in Indonesia and Malaysia—further compounds these difficulties, leaving artisans to rely on community-driven efforts for survival.

In response, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi have turned to collaborative strategies to protect and revitalize their artistic heritage. Cross-border cultural festivals are central to these efforts, serving as platforms for artists to showcase their work, share techniques, and celebrate their shared identity. These festivals not only provide visibility for traditional art but also encourage intergenerational engagement, ensuring that knowledge is passed down to younger members. *Silotuang* performances, in particular, have become a highlight of these festivals, attracting attention from both local and international audiences and revitalizing interest in this unique art form.

Education and documentation also play a vital role in sustaining artistic traditions. Community leaders and cultural advocates have initiated workshops and training programs to teach traditional art forms to younger generations. These programs often emphasize the cultural significance of the art, ensuring that participants understand its role in expressing and preserving their identity. Additionally, partnerships with academic institutions and cultural organizations have facilitated the documentation of traditional artistic practices, including detailed records of *silotuang* performances, providing a written and visual archive for future generations.

In the face of modern challenges, art has become a tool for empowerment and resilience for the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi. It serves not only as a means of cultural preservation but also as a way to assert their presence and identity in a rapidly changing world. By leveraging their artistic heritage, the community has found innovative ways to navigate the complexities of transnational life while maintaining their connection to their roots.

The experiences of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi highlight the transformative power of art in bridging divides and fostering solidarity in transnational communities. Their dedication to sustaining their artistic traditions, particularly through practices like *silotuang*, underscores the importance of supporting indigenous art as a living expression of identity and a source of strength in the face of modern challenges. Through their art, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi continue to inspire and unite their members across borders, ensuring that their rich cultural legacy endures for generations to come.

Citizenship in Transnational Communities

The concept of citizenship takes on a unique dimension in transnational communities like the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi, who straddle the Indonesia-Malaysia border. For these communities, citizenship is not merely a legal status tied to a specific nation-state but a lived experience that encompasses multiple allegiances, responsibilities, and cultural identities. The coexistence of national borders and familial ties creates a complex interplay between formal citizenship and cultural belonging, influencing how these communities navigate their rights, duties, and sense of self (Olendo, 2020).

In practical terms, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi must contend with the differing policies and regulations of Indonesia and Malaysia. These policies affect their access to basic services such as healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. For individuals with family members across the border, the challenge lies in maintaining connections while adhering to the legal constraints imposed by their respective governments. The existence of border checkpoints, visa requirements, and residency laws often disrupt traditional patterns of interaction, making it difficult to sustain familial and cultural bonds.

Despite these challenges, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi have developed adaptive strategies to assert their dual identities. Their sense of citizenship extends beyond the boundaries of nation-states, rooted instead in shared cultural practices, values, and heritage. For instance, participation in cross-border festivals and rituals reaffirms their belonging to a larger Dayak community, even as they remain politically divided. These events provide a space where individuals can celebrate their common ancestry and traditions, fostering unity despite the constraints of formal citizenship.

Another significant aspect of transnational citizenship is the community's role in advocating for their rights and cultural recognition. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi have sought to engage with local and national authorities to secure support for their cultural and economic needs. This includes efforts to gain recognition for their indigenous identity, access to resources for cultural preservation, and inclusion in development programs. By leveraging their shared identity and collective voice, the community has worked to navigate the political and bureaucratic systems of both nations.

Education and knowledge-sharing play a critical role in fostering a sense of transnational citizenship. Community leaders and cultural advocates often emphasize the importance of understanding and respecting the laws of both countries while maintaining a strong connection to their heritage. Programs and workshops focused on cultural education, cross-border collaboration, and indigenous rights help equip younger generations with the tools to navigate the complexities of their dual citizenship. The community's approach to citizenship also reflects a broader philosophy of coexistence and mutual respect. The Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi view their dual existence as an opportunity to build bridges rather than barriers. Through cultural exchange, they foster goodwill and understanding between the people of Indonesia and Malaysia. Their efforts to sustain their identity and unity serve as a model for how transnational communities can thrive amidst political fragmentation.

In conclusion, citizenship for transnational communities like the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi is a dynamic and multifaceted concept. It transcends legal definitions to encompass cultural, social, and emotional dimensions of belonging. Despite the challenges posed by national borders and political constraints, the community's resilience and adaptability highlight the importance of fostering inclusive policies and practices that respect the unique realities of transnational life. By embracing their shared heritage and actively engaging with both nations, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi demonstrate the potential of citizenship to unite rather than divide, preserving their identity and strengthening their community across borders.

Conclusion

The study of transnationalism and nationalism along the Indonesia-Malaysia border, particularly through the lens of the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi community, highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of identity and citizenship in border regions. For these communities,

cultural preservation and artistic expression serve as vital means of maintaining a shared sense of belonging across national divides. Despite political fragmentation and the constraints of formal citizenship, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi navigate the complexities of dual identities by fostering unity through cultural practices, particularly art and traditional festivals.

Art, such as the performance of silotuang, plays a significant role in reinforcing communal ties and passing down cultural knowledge, acting as both a form of resistance and resilience in the face of political boundaries. By embracing their traditions, the community has not only preserved their identity but has also adapted to the changing socio-political landscape through innovative strategies that emphasize cross-border collaboration. These cultural practices transcend national borders, reinforcing the notion that identity can be both fluid and rooted, allowing individuals to belong to multiple spheres at once. Moreover, the community's experience highlights the concept of citizenship as more than a legal affiliation with a nation-state. Citizenship for the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi is informed by their cultural ties, shared heritage, and collective rights, which exist independently of national boundaries. Their efforts to secure cultural recognition, advocate for indigenous rights, and engage with both Indonesian and Malaysian authorities exemplify how transnational communities assert their identity in a world increasingly defined by political divisions. In conclusion, the Dayak Bidayuh Jagoi's experience offers valuable insights into the dynamics of transnationalism in border regions, underscoring the importance of cultural preservation, artistic expression, and community solidarity in navigating the complexities of identity and citizenship. Their story is a testament to the power of art and culture in bridging divides, promoting understanding, and ensuring the continued vitality of transnational identities in an ever-globalizing world.

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