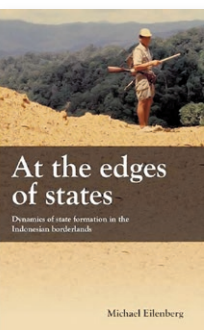


Cross border communities

In *At the edges of states*, Michael Eilenberg offers a tantalizing contribution to the field of borderlands studies, which he argues, center on the idea that the study of borderlands is critical to state formation. Thus, in the examination of the cross border Iban community stretched along the borderlands of Kalimantan and Sarawak on the Indonesian-Malay state border on the island of Borneo he has two stated goals. The first goal is to situate state formation at the borderlands in a historical context. The second is to demonstrate process of local agency at the borderlands.

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On Iban history across borders

The process of local agency is in and of itself entangled in history as borderlands arose from an eighteenth century European construct. The historical period of this study stretches from the 1850s till the end of the New Order of President Suharto (1998), which demonstrates a link between colonial policy and post-colonial relations as the recollection of history contributes to the consolidation of a community. In the mid-nineteenth century in Boeven-Kapuas, the Iban rebel leaders played both sides of the colonial settlement against each other, negotiating with both in an attempt to maintain sovereignty. Early in the 20th century forced resettlement (at the hands of the Dutch) turned the borderland from 'untouched' forests to a viscous battleground. Border elites 'repositioned themselves' as both 'clients' and 'brokers'. 'Betting on both sides' of the border often meant comprises, certain threats, a certain gamble. However, this was also a certain insurance as well. Thus, this did not limit the concept of the border to only 'Iban'-'Iban' relations, as the Iban themselves formed 'blood brothers' amongst Indonesian military officers in the 1970s and amongst 'timber barons' from Malaysia decades later.

Attempts at 'cross communal' relations were not unique to the Iban alone. In the 1950s and 1960s the Indonesia military used food rations and medical supplies in order to 'court' the Iban populations. Meanwhile, the policy of *pancasila* created a major problem for 'non-religious' and, ironically, more conservative Iban living deeper in the hinterlands. Meanwhile, policy over forest right began to shift with the assertion of the 1967 Basic Forestry Law No 5, which granted state authority over all forestland regardless of local claims. In reaction to protests, 'Iban concessions' were granted. These concessions predominantly relied on Chinese and Iban connections in Malaysia to funnel wealth into the hands of a few headmen. Certain Iban authorities did not appear to be cooperative with the state. Occasionally, raids were carried out to exact revenge upon individuals who did not abide by local practice. In one case, when a defendant refused to pay a blood price, the Iban raided the courthouse, as local police retreated, and executed him point blank. This brings us roughly to the period of Eilenberg's study.

In Eilenberg's study he found that local agents in Indonesia amongst the highland populations did not recognize the

border on the island of Borneo. The border was thought archaic. Rather friendship and kinship tied them to neighbors in Sarawak. The Iban exploitation of borderlands was a history that was as deep as the beginning of the creation of the borderlands themselves. The author himself records a certain realization that many in the community, using two time zones, official languages and currencies had become aware of 'the prospect of instant riches along the frontier'. Local schools in the Indonesian side tend to use Malay time (GMT + 8). Many of the border elite had two houses. One in Kalimantan and one in Pantiak. Meanwhile the rest of the population did not have the education to deal with the bureaucracy. Furthermore, since most logging stopped in 2005, an economic depression has set in. Hence, there was a need to stress cross border relations again and it is not surprising that by the end of the period in question one of Eilenberg's informants emphasized that on both sides of the borderlands the people 'are all Iban', as the territory in Sarawak was still considered part of the Iban territory in Kalimantan.

Reconsidering the borderlands

Amongst the fascinating historical contributions to the knowledge of Borneo and the study of cross border relations between Indonesia and Malaysia, one also finds a phenomenal review of borderlands literature and considerations of methodological problems facing the study of borderlands from both a historical and an anthropological perspective. For example, Eilenberg's discussion of methodology highlights some of the theoretical problems created by the imposition of cross disciplinary standards for carrying out research amongst human subjects. While such standards naturally need to be in place, Eilenberg demonstrates that, as is particularly the case with Southeast Asian borderlands, 'formal interviews' are 'never very successful' and the best information is gathered 'hitchhiking in a logging truck, joining ritual and family celebrations' and 'hanging out in coffee shops', while at the same time struggling to negotiate the blatantly obvious 'government agendas' that place constraints upon scholars of the borderlands. Furthermore, his review of borderlands literature is not only well versed in Southeast Asian scholars such as Alfred McCoy, James Scott, Eric Tagliacozzo, Reed Wadley and Andrew Walker, but also draws from a global perspective, utilizing such scholarly studies as those of Robert Alvarez, Oscar Martinez, and anthropologist of Tanzania: Sally Falk Moore, to shine light on the universality of borderlands.

Utilizing this theoretical background Eilenberg brings the anthropological discussion of the borderlands back to the theoretical territory of historical studies as, drawing from Moore, his study suggests that change should be the emphasis of borderlands studies as Moore's 'semi-autonomous social fields' ought to be the primary unit of analysis. Thus, the local practice of Iban often led to a decentralization of state authority and have the weakest connection to the state. Thus, as Eilenberg offers his greatest theoretical discussion to this study he relies upon the assertion of three types of peoples

in relations to the study of the borderlands. The first both reside in their state and share-cross border ties. The second are differentiated by cross border ties. The third are identified only within their state. As Eilenberg asserts, the Iban, like many 'stateless' peoples of Southeast Asia, fall into the second category. Thus, one wonders if it is the case that Eilenberg's own evidence and argument tends to undermine this assertion of three distinct categories. By asserting that there has been an overemphasis on 'narratives of resistance', while at the same time not giving much attention to 'collusions' combined with the narratives that Eilenberg summarizes in this study it becomes apparent that the Iban, yes are differentiated from the state by cross border relations, but also, at the same time, have relied on relations within both of their states, that is, now Indonesia and Malaysia. As such, it may be possible to view the Iban as both a type I and type II borderlands population. Meanwhile, one wonders if in fact there are any populations in the world that are solely defined by their state. Thus, the question is, based upon this theoretical framework, are there any true type III populations?

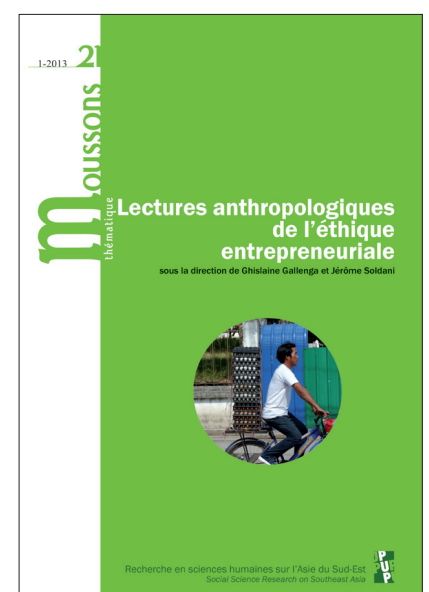
In addition to the above, fascinating, theoretical discussion of the borderlands, Eilenberg's conclusion offers what may be the greatest theoretical contributions noting that within the study of the borderlands, the notions of illegality and legality are often seen as too rigid. When in fact, as demonstrated by certain cases amongst the Iban community, the notion of what is not only acceptably 'legal' but also the 'laws' that should be followed, can differ substantially from pre-existing state oriented conceptions. Thus, Eilenberg closes with a provocative call to re-examine the blurred notions between what is 'legal' and 'illegal' practice amongst the Iban borderlands of Kalimantan and Sarawak that stretch along the Indo-Malay state border on the island of Borneo.

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