

## CITIZENSHIP IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF DAYAK ETHNIC TRANSNATIONALISM: BETWEEN STATE, COSTUM, AND CROSS-BORDER MOBILITY

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the civic identity of the Dayak people in the West Kalimantan border region within the context of ethnic transnationalism. Recognizing that Dayak communities have historically lived beyond the boundaries of modern states. The study conceptualizes citizenship as a lived social experience that does not always align with nation-state logic. Ethnographic method research explores how Dayak people interpret citizenship in their daily life practices, kinship relations, and interactions across national borders. The findings show that citizenship is understood situationally and pragmatically, particularly in relation to administrative needs and access to state services, while ethnic and customary identities remain the primary basis of social loyalty. Custom functions as a value framework regulating community membership, social relations, and attachment to ancestral lands across borders. Continuous mobility sustains a transnational social space where borders are negotiated administrative structures rather than rigid social boundaries. The study highlights the layered and dynamic nature of border citizenship and contributes to scholarship on indigenous transnationalism.*

### ABSTRAK

Artikel mengkaji identitas kewarganegaraan masyarakat Dayak di wilayah perbatasan Kalimantan Barat dalam konteks transnasionalisme etnik. Berangkat dari kenyataan bahwa kehidupan masyarakat Dayak secara historis berlangsung melampaui batas negara modern. Penelitian metode etnografi menelusuri cara masyarakat Dayak memaknai kewarganegaraan dalam praktik kehidupan sehari-hari, relasi kekerabatan, serta interaksi lintas wilayah negara. Temuan kajian menunjukkan kewarganegaraan dimaknai secara situasional dan pragmatis, terutama terkait kebutuhan administratif dan akses terhadap layanan negara, sementara identitas etnik dan adat menjadi fondasi utama pembentukan loyalitas sosial. Adat berfungsi sebagai kerangka nilai yang mengatur keanggotaan komunitas, relasi sosial, dan keterikatan terhadap tanah leluhur lintas batas negara. Mobilitas lintas batas yang berkelanjutan membentuk ruang sosial transnasional yang stabil dengan batas negara diperlakukan sebagai struktur administratif yang dinegosiasikan, bukan sebagai pemisah sosial yang mutlak. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa identitas kewarganegaraan masyarakat Dayak perbatasan bersifat berlapis, dinamis, dan kontekstual, serta berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian kewarganegaraan dan transnasionalisme masyarakat adat.

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## INTRODUCTION

Studies on citizenship identity in the context of indigenous communities are increasingly receiving serious attention in contemporary social science discourse, especially when linked to the phenomenon of transnationalism and the lives of communities in border regions (Budimansyah & Dewantara, 2025). Within the framework of the modern nation-state, citizenship is generally understood as a legal and political status that is territorial, formal, and institutionalized by the state (Dewantara et al., 2023). However, this understanding often fails to fully explain the realities of life for ethnic groups that historically, culturally, and genealogically have lived beyond the borders of modern states. One of the most relevant examples of this is the Dayak people who inhabit the Indonesia-Malaysia border region on the island of Borneo.

Since the 1990s, the concept of transnationalism has developed as an important approach to understanding mobility, social networks, and identities across national borders. (Chiu & Yeoh, 2021). Early studies on transnationalism emphasized the role of migrants in building a simultaneous social life in more than one country, through economic, social, and cultural relations (Arpanudin & Dewantara, 2025; Ladino, 2023; Thompson, 2022). In subsequent developments, transnationalism is no longer understood solely as a phenomenon of international migration, but also as a social space that enables individuals and communities to sustainably maintain multi-local ties. This framework is highly relevant for understanding the experiences of indigenous peoples in border regions, including the Dayak community, who have long experienced cross-regional mobility without national borders as the primary reference point in their social lives.

On the other hand, citizenship studies have undergone significant conceptual expansion. Citizenship is no longer seen simply as legal membership in a state, but also as a social practice, cultural identity, and everyday experience (Isin & Ruppert, 2020; Reichert & Torney-Purta, 2019). The approaches to cultural citizenship, differential citizenship, and substantive citizenship highlight how rights, obligations, and belonging to the state are negotiated in diverse social contexts (Fatmawati & Dewantara, 2022). However, most of these studies still start from the assumption of urban communities (Prasetyo et al., 2019), international migrants (Bogucewicz, 2020; Pinson & Arnot, 2024), or minority groups in the center of the country (Dewantara et al., 2024), while indigenous border communities receive relatively less equal attention (Olendo et al., 2022).

In the context of Dayak society, existing research tends to focus on customary issues, land rights, ethnic identity, and structural marginalization (Cahyono, 2018; König, 2012, 2016; Sada et al., 2019). Classical and contemporary anthropological studies have succeeded in documenting the richness of customary systems, kinship structures, and ecological relations of the Dayak people with their living areas. Classical and contemporary anthropological studies have succeeded in documenting the richness of customary systems, kinship structures, and ecological relations of the Dayak people with their living areas (Efriani, Hasanah, et al., 2020). In addition, studies on the Kalimantan border also highlight the intensity of cross-border mobility carried out by the Dayak people for economic purposes, education, traditional rituals, and kinship relations (Dewantara, Budimansyah, Komalasari, et al., 2025; Großmann, 2020; Martono et al., 2022; Olendo et al., 2025). This mobility often occurs regularly and is passed down through generations, thus forming a stable and sustainable transnational social space. However, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding how this transnational mobility influences the construction of Dayak citizenship identity. Many studies position the state as an external actor confronting indigenous

communities, while the internal dynamics of communities' interpretations of citizenship are often not explored in depth. Yet, for Dayak border communities, citizenship identity is not always understood dichotomously as "Indonesian citizen" or "Malaysian citizen," but rather as a contextually, situationally, and pragmatically negotiated experience.

In everyday life, identity as a Dayak, a member of a kinship group, and a member of an indigenous community often has a more fundamental meaning than formal citizenship status. Custom serves as a normative framework that regulates social relations, land rights, and communal solidarity across national borders. The state, in this case, is selectively present through population administration, border security, and development policies, but is not always the primary source of identity legitimacy. This situation demonstrates the overlap and negotiation between state logic, customary logic, and transnational mobility practices (Efriani, Praptantya, et al., 2020). Research shows that although the concepts of transnationalism and citizenship have been widely developed, their integration in studies of indigenous border communities remains limited. Studies that explicitly link ethnic transnationalism to citizenship identities based on local experiences, particularly in Dayak communities, are still rare. Most studies highlight the legal and security aspects of borders, while the subjective and cultural aspects of citizenship tend to be marginalized.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by offering an ethnographic perspective on Dayak citizenship identity within the context of transnationalism. By focusing on the relationship between the state, custom, and cross-border mobility, this study contributes to the development of more inclusive and contextual citizenship studies. This study not only enriches the literature on Dayak communities and border regions but also provides a theoretical contribution to the discourse on citizenship in a world increasingly characterized by mobility, plurality of identities, and the limitations of the modern nation-state framework in explaining the social realities of indigenous communities.

The national border that divides Kalimantan does not always serve as a divider in the lived experiences of the Dayak people. For those living in the border region of West Kalimantan, the boundary is more often understood as an administrative marker than a social and cultural one. Villages located on the Indonesian and Malaysian sides are connected by networks of kinship, customs, and collective memories of shared origins. In daily life, these relationships are maintained through family visits, cross-border work, and participation in traditional rituals involving communities on both sides of the border.

In everyday conversation, the term "country" is rarely the primary reference point when people describe their identity or social relations. More frequently, however, are the markers of village, clan, and ethnic group. Someone is known as "anak kampung sini" or "saudara dari barat" (a relative from across the border), rather than solely as a citizen of a particular political entity. This way of referring to oneself and others reflects how social identity is built on a foundation of kinship and customs, while formal citizenship exists as a situational layer of identity. However, it can also erode national identity if it is not balanced with a strong understanding of nationality (Nabilah et al., 2025).

These experiences of living across borders do not negate the existence of the state. The state's presence through border policies, population administration, and public services gradually shapes new interactions between communities and formal authorities. However, this state's presence is always negotiated within a framework of pre-established local values. Dayak border communities develop adaptive ways to relate to the state without abandoning the traditional ties and communal solidarity that underpin their lives.

This opening article provides a gateway to understanding how citizenship identity is interpreted and lived out in the context of Dayak ethnic transnationalism. By placing the lived experiences of border communities as a starting point, this article seeks to shift the reading of citizenship from a normative category to a multi-layered, contextual social practice rooted in a long history of transnational life.

This study is guided by two central research questions that seek to understand the lived experiences of border communities within the context of ethnic transnationalism. First, how do Dayak communities experience and negotiate citizenship within the context of ethnic transnationalism? Second, how do custom and cross-border mobility shape social identity, loyalty, and the formation of transnational social space? These questions provide an analytical framework for examining how citizenship is interpreted in everyday life and how socio-cultural practices intersect with mobility to shape complex and layered forms of belonging in the border region.

## **METHOD**

This study used a qualitative approach with a transnational ethnographic design to deeply understand the construction of Dayak community citizenship identity in the context of cross-border mobility in West Kalimantan (Blasco & Wardle, 2007; Dewantara & Budimansyah, 2024). This approach was chosen because it captures subjective experiences, social practices, and the meaning of citizenship, which are not merely legal and formal, but intertwined with customs, kinship, and the daily lives of border communities (Prasetyo & Rizqiyah, 2024). Transnational ethnography allows for analysis that transcends national administrative boundaries by viewing the Dayak social space as a terrain shaped by cross-regional relations between Indonesia and Malaysia.

The research location focused on the border region of West Kalimantan, historically inhabited by the Dayak community of the same ethnic group and experiencing high levels of cross-border mobility. The location was selected purposively, taking into account the continuity of transnational kinship networks, active customary practices, and the community's social and cultural proximity to the Dayak community in Malaysia. The research subjects were adult Dayak community members who had direct experience with cross-border activities, whether for economic, social, educational, or traditional ritual purposes. Informants were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to capture variations in experiences based on age, gender, social role, and administrative citizenship status. Key informants included traditional leaders, community leaders, and individuals routinely involved in cross-border mobility.

Data collection was conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document study. Participant observation enabled researchers to directly engage with the daily lives of Dayak communities living on the West Kalimantan border to understand how citizenship identity is practiced and interpreted in social interactions and cross-border activities. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore the narratives of informants' experiences regarding relations with the state, the role of custom in regulating social life, and the meaning of citizenship in the context of transnational mobility. Focus group discussions were used to capture the collective dynamics in interpreting national borders, ethnic identity, and a sense of belonging to ancestral lands, while document study included a review of customary archives, population administration documents, and state policies related to the management of border areas in West Kalimantan.

Data analysis was conducted thematically using an inductive approach. All data from interviews, observations, and discussions were transcribed, coded, and grouped into key themes related to citizenship identity, the role of custom, transnational experiences, and the relationship between Dayak communities and the state. The analysis process was iterative and reflective through a dialogue between the empirical findings and the theoretical frameworks of transnationalism and citizenship studies, allowing for contextual and in-depth interpretation (Inthaly & Almubaroq, 2022; Miles et al., 2013).

Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, extended field participation, and member checking with several key informants to ensure interpretations aligned with their experiences. This study upholds the ethical principles of qualitative research, including informed consent, confidentiality of informants, and respect for local customary values. With this approach, the research is expected to yield a comprehensive understanding of the citizenship identity of the Dayak people in West Kalimantan within the context of transnationalism and border life.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Citizenship is Interpreted Situationally and Pragmatically

In the life of the Dayak people in the border region of West Kalimantan, citizenship does not exist as a single identity that is absolute and ideologically binding (Budimansyah & Dewantara, 2025). It is more often understood as a fluid, contextual category, intertwined with the practical needs of everyday life. For communities that have long lived in cross-border social spaces, citizenship is not always interpreted as a symbol of political loyalty, but rather as an administrative tool that can be activated or negotiated according to the situation at hand.

This interpretation of citizenship stems from the historical experience of the Dayak people who have long occupied border areas long before the presence of modern state borders (Dewantara, Budimansyah, & Komalasari, 2025). In society's collective memory, the living area, village, and ancestral lands constitute a unified and continuous space, undisturbed by state administrative boundaries. When the state emerged with its various legal and bureaucratic instruments, citizenship came to be understood as a secondary and functional feature, rather than the primary foundation of social identity.

In everyday practice, Dayak identity and membership in indigenous communities are the primary references for self-definition. Kinship ties, genealogical relationships, and involvement in customary systems are seen as more stable and meaningful than formal citizenship status (Allerton, 2024). A traditional figure said that citizenship is a state matter, while Dayak identity is an inseparable part of life from birth:

*"The country can change, the rules can change. But we, the Dayak people, never change. From birth to death, we remain the same." (Interview, traditional leader, male, 63 years old)*

This statement reflects a conceptual separation between citizenship and cultural identity. Citizenship is positioned as an external, administrative domain, while Dayak identity is understood as the core of social existence (Turner, 1997). This separation allows people to be flexible about citizenship without feeling a loss of identity or social loyalty.

In this context, citizenship is often interpreted pragmatically, particularly in relation to access to state services (Budimansyah, 2016). Population documents such as identity cards and family cards are considered important as they enable people to access education, healthcare, social assistance, and employment opportunities. The motivation for obtaining

these documents is rarely linked to nationalism or loyalty to the state, but rather to practical considerations to simplify family life.

*"If you don't have an ID card, your child can't go to school. So, whether you like it or not, you have to get one. It's not about love for your country, but about ensuring your child can go to school."*

(Interview, female, 41)

This quote demonstrates that citizenship is practiced as an instrument, not as an ideological symbol. The state exists as a provider of services and regulations, not as a primary source of self-identification. This relationship is functional and situational, depending on the needs of the community. Cross-border mobility, which is part of the daily lives of Dayak border communities, further reinforces the fluid and contextual meaning of citizenship. Cross-border activities are carried out for various purposes, such as work, trade, visiting family, or participating in traditional rituals. In many cases, this mobility is not perceived as movement between countries, but rather as movement within the same social space. National borders exist as administrative lines that must be addressed technically, but are not always internalized as social boundaries.

*"We go there to our relatives' villages, not to other countries. Regarding documents, that's a later matter."*

(Interview, male, 52)

This perspective shows that citizenship can be negotiated tacitly and pragmatically in cross-border mobility practices (Jackson et al., 2004). Individuals adapt their civic identity according to the context of the interaction, the authorities they encounter, and their current interests. This flexibility is not perceived as a moral violation or betrayal of the state, but rather as a rational survival strategy in a border situation. The Dayak community's relationship with the state is also marked by selective experiences with its presence. The state is intensely present through administration, border policies, and development programs, but this presence is not always consistent or equitable. In these circumstances, the community develops a pragmatic attitude toward the state: accepting the available benefits, but still relying on customs and kinship networks for social life.

*"If there is assistance from the state, then yes, it is accepted. But if there isn't, life goes on because of customs and family."*

(Interview, community leader, 57 years old)

This pattern of relations demonstrates that citizenship is not rejected, but neither is it placed at the center of identity. The state becomes one actor among many that shape people's social experiences. Citizenship is experienced as a flexible daily practice, not as a normative identity demanding exclusive loyalty.

This situational and pragmatic interpretation of citizenship is also reflected in the way Dayak people distinguish between citizenship as an administrative status and citizenship as a sense of belonging. In various interviews, informants implicitly and explicitly differentiate between "belonging to a country" and "feeling like belonging to a village." The state is understood as an entity that provides rules and services, while villages and customs are understood as emotional and moral spaces where individuals feel truly a part. This distinction results in a perspective where formal citizenship is not automatically intertwined with a sense of social and affective attachment.

For some informants, a sense of belonging to the nation emerged in a limited and often instrumental manner. The state was considered important to the extent that it provided administrative protection or economic opportunities, but not always as a symbolic space of identification. In this context, nationalism was not expressed through formal symbols or national rhetoric, but rather through selective adherence to state regulations deemed relevant to our daily needs.

*"If state regulations help us survive, we follow them. But if they have nothing to do with life in the village, we adhere to our customs more." (Interview, male, 49)*

This expression suggests that obedience to the state is conditional, not absolute. The state is not rejected, but neither is it seen as the sole source of authority. In practice, Dayak border communities filter state norms and regulations and selectively integrate them into local customary frameworks and social life. The situational nature of citizenship is also evident in how individuals narrate themselves when dealing with different actors. In interactions with state officials, formal citizenship identities tend to be emphasized, while in interactions between members of cross-border communities, ethnic and kinship identities become the primary markers. This shift in identity narratives is conscious and considered normal, not a form of falsehood or dishonesty.

*"When dealing with the government, we are Indonesians. But when we're in the village or with relatives across the border, we're just Dayaks."*

*(Interview, female, 38)*

This statement emphasizes that citizenship and ethnic identity are not mutually exclusive, but rather activated in different contexts. Citizenship is a performative identity, emerging when needed and then fading when the social context no longer demands it. This pattern demonstrates that citizenship is experienced as a flexible social practice, not as an essential category always present in every interaction. Furthermore, experiences with state bureaucracy contribute to shaping people's pragmatic attitudes toward citizenship. The process of obtaining population documents, accessing public services, and interacting with officials is often perceived as complex and energy-consuming. In these situations, people develop adaptive strategies to minimize risks and administrative burdens, including utilizing social networks, informal relationships, or assistance from community leaders.

*"It's tiring to process the paperwork yourself. Usually, I go through the village head or someone who knows the way. The important thing is to get the job done." (Interview, male, 46)*

This strategy shows that citizenship is not only practiced in formal relations between citizens and the state, but also through informal social networks (Turner, 2022). In the experience of borderland Dayak communities, the state is not always present as an impersonal and rational system, but rather as a space negotiable through social relations. The transnational context further reinforces this pragmatic orientation. The coexistence of two state regimes allows communities to directly compare the benefits and limitations of each. In informants' narratives, these comparisons are often not ideologically charged, but rather practical, such as differences in wages, market access, or ease of service. However, this pragmatism does not imply a complete absence of civic consciousness. Rather, civic consciousness exists in a different form, namely an awareness of state boundaries that must be carefully managed to avoid disrupting the sustainability of social and economic life. Communities are aware of the existence of the state and its rules, but choose to relate to them flexibly and adaptively.

These findings further emphasize that citizenship in the context of the Dayak community in West Kalimantan cannot be understood through a rigid normative framework. Instead, it must be read as a multi-layered, dynamic life experience that is closely tied to the border context and the long history of cross-regional life. This approach opens up space for a more inclusive and contextual understanding of citizenship, particularly in reading the experiences of indigenous communities in border regions. Thus, the situational and pragmatic interpretation of citizenship is not a form of disobedience or a weakness of national identity, but rather a reflection of the social intelligence of border Dayak communities in facing the complexity of state structures and transnational realities. Citizenship is experienced as a social resource that can be used, negotiated, and adapted, without sacrificing ethnic identity, customs, and kinship solidarity that are the foundation of their lives.

## **2. Custom as the Foundation of Social Identity and Loyalty**

For the Dayak people in the West Kalimantan border region, custom occupies a far more fundamental position than formal citizenship in shaping social identity and loyalty. When citizenship is viewed situationally and pragmatically, custom is understood as a binding, long-term, and inextricably linked framework for life. Custom is not simply viewed as a cultural heritage or ancestral tradition, but as a value system that governs social relations, moral structures, and the community's collective attachment to their communities and ancestral lands, even as their lives unfold across borders.

Custom serves as the primary foundation for determining social membership in the Dayak border community (Az-Zahra et al., 2021; Crevello, 2004). Status as part of a community is not determined by possession of citizenship documents, but rather by kinship, village origin, and active involvement in traditional practices. For many informants, someone is considered "our person" not because they are registered as a citizen of a particular country, but because they have blood ties, family history, and commitment to village customs. This suggests that social legitimacy derives more from custom than from the state.

*"If you want to know whether someone is part of us or not, don't look at their ID card, but look at their family, their village of origin, and how they participate in traditional customs." (Interview, traditional leader, male, 60 years old)*

This statement reflects how custom is the primary mechanism for constructing community social boundaries. These boundaries are cultural and genealogical, not administrative. In the context of national borders, this mechanism allows Dayak communities to maintain social cohesion despite being under the jurisdiction of different countries (Wahyudi et al., 2020). The role of custom as a foundation of identity is further strengthened in the context of transnational life. The Dayak community in West Kalimantan has close kinship ties with the Dayak community in Malaysia. These ties are forged through marriage, traditional rituals, collaborative work, and cross-border family visits (Efriani, Dewantara, Praptantya, et al., 2020). In these relationships, customs become a shared language that transcends differences in nationality. Similar customs create a sense of togetherness that is not divided by national borders.

*"Different countries are the government's business. When it comes to customs, we remain united. When there's a major custom, we're still called and come." (Interview, female, 47 years old)*

This quote demonstrates that loyalty to customs and ethnic groups is often stronger than loyalty to the state. The state exists as an administrative entity, while customs exist as

a living social system that is directly experienced (Efriani, Dewantara, Utami, et al., 2020; Purwanto & Mangku, 2017). In practice, custom enables Dayak communities to build a stable transnational social space, where solidarity and social obligations are maintained across national borders. In addition to shaping identity, custom also serves as an effective system of social governance. In daily life, conflict resolution between individuals or families is more often carried out through customary mechanisms than through state law. Customary processes are seen as fairer, faster, and more in line with local values. The state usually only becomes involved when a conflict is deemed to exceed customary capacity or has touched the realm of formal law.

*"If it can still be resolved through customary law, there's no need to bring it to the state. Customary law knows our problems better." (Interview, community leader, 55 years old)*

This practice demonstrates that custom is not merely a symbol of identity, but also a social institution with real functions. In the context of border regions, where state presence is often limited, custom serves as a reliable source of authority for maintaining social order and harmony. Belief in this custom strengthens community loyalty to local value systems rather than to state structures. Custom also plays a crucial role in shaping Dayak communities' attachment to ancestral lands. Land is not understood solely as an economic resource, but as an integral part of the collective identity and history of the community. Land rights are often determined by custom and the history of hereditary ownership, not simply by state administrative recognition. In border contexts, this understanding fosters the view that customary land remains the property of the community, even though it is formally located within a particular state's territory.

*"This land didn't just come into existence after the state. This land has been around since our ancestors. The state came later." (Interview, male, 59 years old)*

This expression reflects how the Dayak people position custom as a spatial system that coexists with the state's territorial system. State boundaries are recognized administratively, but they do not completely replace customary boundaries that have long been embedded in the community's collective memory. Thus, custom provides an alternative framework for understanding space, territory, and ownership. The relationship between custom and formal citizenship is complex and not always conflictual. Custom does not explicitly reject state citizenship, but places it in a secondary position. Citizenship is accepted as long as it does not conflict with customary values and disrupt the order.

*"If state regulations don't align with customary law, we discuss them first in the village. They can't be implemented immediately." (Interview, customary leader, 65 years old)*

This statement demonstrates the Dayak people's reflective capacity and cultural autonomy in responding to state policies. The state is not totally rejected, but negotiated through customary frameworks. This process reflects a form of cultural citizenship that exists outside the logic of the modern nation-state. We understand that customary law can be understood as the deepest foundation of the identity and social loyalty of border Dayak communities. It shapes how communities define themselves, build solidarity, manage conflict, and interpret their living space. In a transnational context, customary law enables Dayak communities to maintain the continuity of identity and social life despite being within different state configurations. Community loyalty is not singular and exclusive to the state, but rather multi-layered, with customary law being the most stable and long-term layer.

### 3. Cross-Border Mobility and the Formation of Transnational Social Space

Cross-border mobility for the Dayak people on the West Kalimantan border is not just an activity of moving from one place to another, but rather a way of life that shapes the way they understand space (Yener-Roderburg & Toivanen, 2024), social relations and self-identity. Movement between national territories is not positioned as an extraordinary or transgressive event, but as a practice that has been internalized in everyday life and passed down across generations (Thompson, 2022). In this context, mobility is key to understanding how transnational social spaces are not only imagined, but actually lived and produced through concrete practices. For border Dayak communities, the Indonesia–Malaysia border has never fully existed as a social dividing line (Mee, 2014). Before the state instituted these borders, this region was inhabited by Dayak communities connected through kinship, economic exchange, and traditional rituals. When the state arrived with its territorial and administrative logic, these social networks were not abruptly severed. Instead, they adapted, negotiated, and continued to function through ongoing practices of cross-border mobility.

Stories of mobility were often told by informants in a matter-of-fact and undramatic tone, as if they were recounting a completely ordinary activity. One informant explained that he never considered his trips to Malaysian territory for work or to visit family to be "going abroad."

*"We didn't feel like we were going abroad. We were just going to see our family." (Interview, male, 48)*

This statement reveals a different perspective on the concept of national borders. The state exists as a recognized formal structure, but it is not fully internalized as a social boundary. In mobility practices, the logic of kinship and social proximity, rather than the logic of state territoriality, is more dominant.

Cross-border mobility is undertaken for various purposes, from working in the plantation sector, trading daily necessities, visiting relatives, to attending traditional ceremonies and lifecycle events such as weddings and deaths. Each journey carries with it social and moral obligations that bind individuals to their kinship networks. Thus, mobility is not only an economic activity, but also a social practice that reproduces solidarity and collective identity.

While attending a traditional ceremony in a relative's village across the border, researchers observed no difference in treatment between community members living in Indonesia and those living in Malaysia (Arpanudin & Dewantara, 2025; Moyo, 2020). They sit together, speak the same language, and perform rituals according to the same customs. Formal citizenship is never mentioned or questioned. The primary reference points are kinship ties and one's position within the customary structure. This situation demonstrates that the transnational social space formed through cross-border mobility is concrete and functional. It exists not only in the imagination but is lived through repeated interactions that strengthen a sense of togetherness across borders. This space allows the Dayak people to maintain social continuity despite the modern nation-state configuration that fragmented their living areas (Jailani et al., 2023; Wirawan, 2017).

Mobility also influences how Dayak people interpret distance and proximity. Distance is not measured based on administrative maps, but rather on the intensity of social relations. Relatives' villages across the border are often perceived as socially closer than the

center of government in their own region. One informant stated that she felt more familiar and comfortable in a relative's village across the border than in the district town.

*"The city feels far away. There's no family there. The other side is closer, even though we're in a different country." (Interview, female, 42 years old)*

This statement demonstrates that transnational social space holds a stronger emotional significance than state administrative space. Social proximity transcends political boundaries, making cross-border mobility a rational and meaningful choice (Bijl & van Klinken, 2019; Chiu & Yeoh, 2021). In an economic context, cross-border mobility opens up opportunities to adapt to differences in economic structures between countries. Some people take advantage of job opportunities in Malaysia while maintaining their homes and social lives in West Kalimantan (König, 2016). This pattern allows them to combine resources from two state regimes without having to completely relocate. Mobility becomes a flexible and contextual survival strategy. However, cross-border mobility does not occur without awareness of the existence of the state and its rules. Border Dayak communities possess practical knowledge of when and how to confront state rules (Budimansyah & Dewantara, 2025). This knowledge is unwritten, but rather constructed through experience and passed down informally.

*"We know when to follow the rules, when to be careful. That's normal." (Interview, male, 53)*

This expression reflects a form of social intelligence that has developed in border regions. The state is not ignored, but rather managed pragmatically so as not to disrupt the continuity of mobility and social life. Cross-border mobility becomes an arena in which communities continually negotiate their relations with the state without sacrificing social networks and customs (Fauzan et al., 2019).

Transnational social spaces formed through mobility also influence the construction of citizenship identities (Davies et al., 2018). Citizenship identity does not exist as a single identity that binds all aspects of life, but rather as one layer of identity that can be activated according to context (van Klinken, 2018). During cross-border travel, a person may appear as a citizen when dealing with officials, as a member of a traditional community when participating in rituals, and as a family member when interacting with relatives. These changing roles are not perceived as contradictory, but rather as a normal part of social life. Identity is understood as multi-layered and contextual. Cross-border mobility provides a space for these identity practices to continue and be socially accepted.

The younger generation of Dayak border communities also grows up in a similar context of mobility. They witness their parents and relatives moving across borders as part of normal life. Schools and state institutions introduce narratives of formal citizenship, but daily life experiences continue to instill an awareness that family, customs, and villages do not stop at one side of a national border. Mobility becomes a practical and lived medium for the transmission of transnational identities (Rehardiningtyas et al., 2022). From this perspective, cross-border mobility does not weaken local identities, but rather strengthens them. By continuing to move and maintain cross-regional relationships, Dayak communities maintain the social and cultural continuity that underpins their lives. The state exists as a structure to be negotiated, but it does not become the center of lived experience.

These ethnographic accounts of mobility demonstrate that transnational social space is not a lawless space. It is governed by customary norms, kinship ethics, and social agreements that exist within communities. Mobility becomes a practice that bridges various regimes of authority the state and customary without being completely subject to either.

Thus, cross-border mobility can be understood as a central practice in the formation of citizenship identity among border Dayak communities. It connects the state, customary law, and everyday life in a continuous series of experiences. Through mobility, Dayak communities not only physically move but also continually negotiate the meaning of being citizens, members of customary law, and part of a transnational community.

This ethnographic narrative confirms that Dayak transnationalism is not a temporary phenomenon or anomaly, but rather a lived condition deeply rooted in their history and social practices. Cross-border mobility is a key mechanism for maintaining identity, solidarity, and social continuity within the modern nation-state. In this context, citizenship identity is not erased but placed within a broader and more complex relationship, where custom and mobility are key elements shaping the lived experiences of Dayak communities on the West Kalimantan border.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that the civic identity of the Dayak people in the West Kalimantan border region cannot be adequately understood through a normative citizenship approach that positions the nation-state as the sole source of identity and loyalty. In the context of life that has long existed across borders, citizenship does not exist as a single, absolutely binding ideological identity, but rather as a social practice that is lived situationally, layered, and pragmatic. This experience of citizenship is closely intertwined with customs, kinship, and cross-regional mobility that shape the daily lives of the Dayak people in the border region.

The meaning of citizenship in Dayak society is more associated with administrative functions and access to state services, such as education, health care, and employment. Formal citizenship status is treated as a resource that can be activated as needed, without being central to the formation of self-identity. In social practice, identity as a Dayak and as part of an indigenous community occupies a more fundamental and long-term position. This pattern indicates that citizenship is experienced as a lived experience (lived citizenship), rather than a rigid and exclusive normative category. On the other hand, custom emerges as the primary foundation that shapes community identity and social loyalty. Custom serves as a system of values and social governance that regulates community membership, kinship relations, conflict resolution, and attachment to ancestral lands. Loyalty to custom and kinship communities is often more stable than loyalty to the state, especially in the context of cross-border life. In this relationship, custom can be understood as a form of cultural citizenship that coexists with formal state citizenship, while also serving as the primary normative framework for interpreting and negotiating state interventions.

Cross-border mobility is a central practice connecting the state, custom, and everyday life of border Dayak communities. Movement between states is not perceived as international migration, but rather as a normal part of a shared living space, where kinship networks and customary obligations are maintained. Through repeated and sustained mobility, Dayak communities construct a concrete and stable transnational social space, where state borders exist as administrative structures to be managed, but do not completely limit social and cultural relations. This mobility practice allows for a flexible and performative citizenship identity, adapted to the context of interactions encountered. Overall, this research demonstrates that the citizenship identities of border Dayak communities are plural, dynamic, and contextual. Citizenship does not replace ethnic and customary identities, but rather interacts complexly within a multi-layered network of identities. These findings challenge assumptions about citizenship that stem from the experiences of urban

communities or the relatively homogeneous context of the nation-state and emphasize the importance of a more sensitive approach to the experiences of indigenous communities in border regions.

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in strengthening the perspective of citizenship as a situated and layered social practice, particularly in the transnational context of indigenous communities. By integrating ethnographic approaches, transnationalism, and citizenship studies, this research offers a more comprehensive understanding of how the state, custom, and mobility intertwine in shaping experiences of citizenship that do not always align with the logic of the modern nation-state. The implications of this study emphasize the need for a policy approach in border regions that focuses not solely on territorial and administrative control, but also recognizes the role of custom, cross-border kinship networks, and long-entrenched mobility practices in community life. A more dialogical and contextual approach is expected to strengthen relations between the state and border communities, without neglecting the local identities and value systems that underpin their social life.

Thus, we understand that the civic identity of the Dayak people in West Kalimantan is the result of a long social and historical process, in which customs and cross-border mobility play a central role in shaping how people define themselves, their communities, and their nation. We hope this research can serve as a foundation for further studies on citizenship and transnationalism among indigenous peoples, while also opening up a space for more inclusive dialogue on border management in Indonesia.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests relevant to the content of this article.

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