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Frontiers, Sovereignty, and Marital Tactics: Comparisons from the Borneo Highlands and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle

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This article considers transnational relationships between men and women from two Southeast Asian border zones, the Kelabit Highlands of Sarawak, Malaysia, and the Indonesian island of Batam, part of the growth triangle that connects Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. It expands on Aihwa Ong's discussion of 'graduated zones of sovereignty' by examining how social relations are being reconfigured along these two international frontiers in the context of changing economic processes and state practices. The case studies, and the comparison between them, illustrate how men in Malaysia and Singapore, who are increasingly marginalised in the globalising economy, become involved with Indonesian women from the other side of the border in order to reproduce patriarchal structures that are connected to 'traditional' family forms.

Keywords: Transnational Marriage; Sovereignty; National Borders; Malaysia; Singapore; Indonesia

In recent years, Aihwa Ong has developed a model of 'graduated zones of sovereignty' (1999, 2003) in order to conceptualise how state sovereignty has been reconfigured in the context of economic globalisation in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Even while states retain formal territorial control, there are cases where the regulation of particular populations and spaces is transferred to non-state actors, primarily through the reformulation of law. The specific zones that she

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identifies include: the low-wage manufacturing sector, the illegal labour market, the aboriginal periphery, the refugee camp, the cyber corridor, and the growth triangle (Ong 2003, p. 44). These various forms of graduated zones are 'unevenly integrated into the structures of state power and global capital' (ibid., p. 60). This results in a 'system of variegated citizenship in which populations subjected to different regimes of value enjoy different kinds of rights, discipline, caring, and security' (ibid., p. 43).

In this article, we expand on Ong's argument by paying ethnographic and historical attention to the reconfiguration of social relations in two graduated zones of sovereignty, the 'aboriginal periphery', exemplified by the Kelabit Highlands in the interior of Borneo, and the 'growth triangle', exemplified by the Indonesian island of Batam. The Kelabit Highlands and Batam are both located along the borderland area that divides Indonesia from Malaysia and Singapore. While Ong's analysis is valuable in stressing that state power is not evenly extended throughout its territory, this perspective also inadvertently homogenises the state by failing to consider it fully in historical terms—giving primacy to space over time—and by avoiding close ethnographic attention to state practices and the transformation of social relations in graduated zones of sovereignty. Furthermore, it is important to stress that sovereignty was, in fact, never fully achieved on Batam or in the Kelabit Highlands and that there has been an expansion of state practices during the post-colonial era. In other words, while particular forms of state sovereignty are relinquished, others are in the process of being produced.

In this paper we develop Ong's discussion by focusing attention on cross-border marriage practices in the Kelabit Highlands and on Batam. In both areas, Indonesian
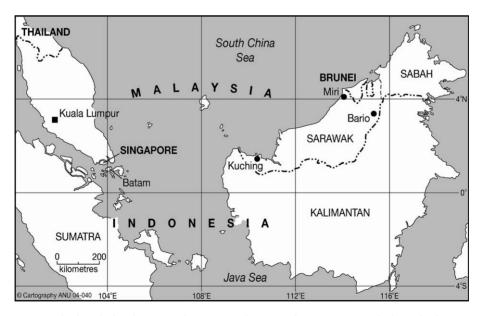

Figure 1 The borderland area: Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, including the location of Bario in the Kelabit Highlands of Sarawak, Malaysia and Batam, Indonesia.

migrant women are increasingly engaged in relationships with Malaysian or Singaporean men. In the highlands, the extensive migration of Kelabit to towns and cities has created a situation in which Indonesian women are sought out to marry Kelabit men in the rural borderlands. In contrast, since the emergence of the growth triangle, Singaporean working-class men are travelling to Batam and other nearby Indonesian islands, where they not only engage in prostitution, but also keep mistresses or marry.

In both cases, men who are increasingly marginalised in the globalising economy become involved with less well-off women from the other side of the border in order to reproduce patriarchal structures that are connected to forms of 'tradition' and masculinity. As will become clear in our cases, in these graduated zones of sovereignty forms of *de facto* marriage have developed, which circumvent formal state regulations but also become possible because of other forms of state effects, namely the increasingly successful policing of the border between citizens and non-citizens. In other words, the regulation of populations and the intensification of certain state practices is, in fact, increasing the power of marginalised men in particular ways.

Following Borneman (1992, 1996) (who in turn borrows from De Certeau), we argue that this can be understood as a question of the 'individual pragmatics' of local (which in these cases also are transnational) marital *tactics* compared to state marital *strategies*, which are 'legal devices used by the state to regulate its citizens internally and to demarcate them from outsiders' (Borneman 1992, p. 296). Yet, by understanding the state as a series of effects rather than as a homogenous whole (Trouillot 2001; Das & Poole 2004), this distinction highlights how particular forms of tactics can be strengthened by state practices in realms that are not directly connected to marriage, namely the concern with patrolling the boundaries of citizenship.

As Das and Poole argue, it is important to 'distance ourselves from the entrenched image of the state as a rationalized administrative form of political organization that becomes weakened or less fully articulated along its territorial or social margins' (2004, p. 2). Acknowledging that the state is neither homogeneous nor controlled solely by centres of power, we suggest, then, that Ong's conceptualisation of graduated zones of sovereignty should be expanded to include these local permutations and transformations and the processes of 'co-constructing the state and the margins' (ibid., p. 9).

The International Border in the Kelabit Highlands and Batam

The border with which we are concerned here, and along which our two sites of ethnographic focus are located, stretches for approximately 3,000 kilometres across Borneo and through the Straits of Malacca, with Sumatra to one side and the Malay Peninsula to the other. It was initially created through a series of treaties between the Dutch and the English colonial empires in the first half of the nineteenth century, and formed the basis for the territorial distinctions between Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore with the advent of decolonialisation.

Although maps formally identify borders and the entities that they divide as homogeneous—a representation that reproduces the nation-state as a seamless whole—border and frontier areas illustrate a range of contestations of culture and power that problematise this imagined whole. Borders, as Berdahl points out, are both 'zones of ambiguity and liminality as well as places of intense and articulated lucidity' (1999, p. 233). As such, in border zones, the nation-state is often clearly articulated through immigration guards and passports, while at the same time the circulation of transitory populations creates various forms of ambiguity and 'disorder'. There is, however, great variation between border areas. While some are highly regulated, others are not, and people are able to cross boundaries without documents. Paying attention to the ethnography of border areas shows that state power takes different forms at various places, even within the same nation-states (Hansen & Stepputat 2001). This is certainly the case in the two examples that are compared in this paper.

The remainder of this section offers a general background to the Kelabit Highlands and Batam. On Batam laws have been changed to lure foreign investments to the island and, as an effect, industrial estates and brothels dot the island, while the Kelabit Highlands is characterised by the Indonesian and Malaysian states' lack of interest in controlling the border area. In the Kelabit Highlands it is possible to walk across the border without passing an immigration officer, while in the growth triangle the border between Indonesia and Malaysia and Singapore is under constant state surveillance. The entire border is, however, characterised by economic inequality, as wages are lower and the economy weaker in Indonesia compared with Malaysia and Singapore. In contrasting them, we wish to emphasise that both regions exhibit a great deal of variation and there are no ideal types or cases.[1] Further, we acknowledge that by providing examples from only two of the zones of graduated sovereignty that Ong identifies we may miss nuances that would emerge if one were to consider others. Such limitations aside, the examples illustrate how graduated zones of sovereignty offer important opportunities for redefining social life through transnational interpersonal relationships in an area characterised by economic globalisation.

The Kelabit Highlands of Sarawak, East Malaysia

The Kelabit Highlands is a remote interior plateau located in the north-eastern region of the Malaysian state of Sarawak, in Borneo. The border that separates Malaysia and Indonesia in this region is defined by meandering mountain ridges that have only recently been surveyed on the ground and marked with formal border stones. Crossing between Malaysia and Indonesia here is by way of small and rugged jungle tracks (*jalan tikus*, or mouse paths) and the journey takes about a day. No effort is made to control movement in and out of the Kelabit Highlands along these trails and, indeed, any effort to do so would be futile.

The Kelabit are one of the smaller indigenous groups of Sarawak, numbering approximately 5,000, yet disproportionately well known for their economic and

professional accomplishments in town areas. The majority of Kelabit—roughly three-quarters of the total population—live in the oil-boom town of Miri located about 100 miles to the west of the highlands, along the northwest coast of Sarawak just south of Brunei. People travelling to the Kelabit Highlands from Miri rely mainly on a rural air service operated under government subsidy by Malaysian Airlines, with regular flights to a small airstrip at Bario. Bario is the main settlement in the Kelabit Highlands and, in addition to the airport, has primary and secondary schools, a variety of shops, government offices, a Malaysian army post, and, most recently, a satellite-linked Internet telecentre opened in 2002 which operates on solar and diesel power. At present, there are no roads that reach into the highlands.[2]

While most Kelabit maintain links to home communities in rural areas, typically sending back remittances and receiving rice from family farms, the majority are settled more or less permanently in Miri and other towns in Sarawak. A critical point is that there are very few young people who choose to remain in the Kelabit Highlands; most who do stay or return are young men. Opportunities for women working in town, and the more general lure of modernity, have led to a dramatic decrease of marriageable Kelabit women in the rural homelands. As Mills suggests, throughout developing Southeast Asia young women in the labour force in towns are gaining greater 'autonomy and control over courtship and marriage decisions' (2003, p. 48). The flip side is that some young men may experience difficulties in fulfilling traditional roles. For Kelabit men, access to women from neighbouring and closely related ethnic groups from across the nearby border with Indonesia offers one possible solution to the void formed by the lack of young women in the Kelabit Highlands.

The Kelabit Highlands has few obstacles to movement across the border and the regular flow of seasonal labour is largely unregulated. There is a small immigration office in Bario, staffed at any given time by one or two officers. As part of an agreement between Malaysia and Indonesia, residents along the Malaysian–Indonesian frontier in Borneo are eligible for special border passes to work in neighbouring communities in the region, but few people seek such official documents. One of the officers in Bario described his job as limited and admitted that he was ineffective in compelling migrant workers to register, much less obtain border passes. He estimated that, at most, 10 per cent of the Indonesian workers passing across the border reported to the office.

Historical connections, including marriages, between Kelabit and neighbouring and closely related Berian and Kerayan people, on the Indonesian side of the border, predate the creation of the international boundary. Poline Bala (2002) argues that local awareness of the boundary remained minimal until the undeclared border war known as the Confrontation (*Konfrontasi*) between Indonesia and Malaysia in the 1960s (Mackie 1974). Bala—a Kelabit herself who grew up in the highlands—asserts that Confrontation created a key transformation in which people from across the border came to be viewed as outsiders rather than relatives (*lun ruyung*). She draws on her own memories and interviews with relatives to highlight how notions of

inequality emerged only in the post-Confrontation era as people began to take advantage of economic differences. This new consciousness of the border occurred as Kelabit were becoming increasingly dependent on 'Indonesian' seasonal migrant labour for maintaining family farms. In identifying this historical shift, Bala notes how Berian neighbours, who include her own relatives, have gradually become stigmatised, and she traces her own transformation in learning to identify relatives from the other side of the border more as 'Indonesians' than family (Bala 2002, p. 95).

Over the past thirty to forty years, as increasing numbers of Kelabit have migrated to town, the importation of seasonal wage labour into the highlands has become a critical fact of life. Kelabit have been able to employ work groups inexpensively from across the border to do timely labour on their rice farms, with planting and harvesting being the most important. From the Kelabit perspective, this has created a favourable situation, in which remittances from children and relatives in town are used to employ Indonesian labour to maintain family farms. More recently, as increasing numbers of Kelabit men return home to the highlands and engage in cross-border marriages, the rural population appears to be slowly rising—reversing a pattern of rural depopulation that began with steady rural outmigration in the 1960s and 1970s (Lee & Bahrin 1993).[3] Unquestionably, these cross-border marriages play a substantial role in helping reproduce the Kelabit families and farms, but equally point to the fact that a small segment of the Kelabit community, mainly young men, does not find life in town fully satisfying.

There is a strong bias in Sarawak, both legally and according to local perceptions, that children 'follow their fathers' in terms of ethnic, religious, and national identity. As such, children of cross-border marriages are recognised as Kelabit (and, by extension, Malaysian) if their father is Kelabit. This paternal bias creates a problem for children who cannot prove their father's place of birth or whose father comes from the Indonesian side of the border (as is sometimes the case). Furthermore, many Kelabit, and not just those born to migrants from Indonesia, lack birth certificates and can have a hard time proving their legitimate right to obtain official documents later in life. In the past, once a child was entered into the local school system, their odds of getting an official Malaysian identity card (IC) were quite high. Recently, however, with increasing numbers of people moving into the Kelabit Highlands from Indonesia, including some from further afield such as Java, some Kelabit have begun to express concerns and have responded by attempting to restrict access to local resources. One mechanism to control the movement of Indonesians into the highlands is a recently adopted policy of imposing higher school fees for children whose father is not Malaysian.[4]

Having briefly sketched the social, political, and economic context of cross-border movements for marriage and labour along the Kelabit frontier, we now turn to a specific example of a Kelabit man that will be used in the next section to contrast with the relationships formed in the growth triangle.

Richard is a Kelabit man in his mid-thirties. After a decade in Miri, he became concerned that he would never find a wife in town. Soft-spoken and intelligent, Richard was working as an accounts clerk when his ailing father first asked him to come home to the Kelabit Highlands to look after him and the family farm. Once in the highlands, Richard began rice farming and growing pineapples and, in part because of his ability to speak English, he got a part-time job working as the local booking agent in Bario for Malaysian Airlines. Dividing his time between low-paid wage labour and the family farm, Richard was an ideal candidate to acquire an Indonesian wife, and he was married in 1996, less than a year after returning home.

Richard's wife comes from the Berian region of Indonesia just across the border. She had first come to Richard's village as a migrant worker, two years before he returned home. At the time, his younger brother and most of his friends living in the village were already married to women from the Indonesian side of the border, most arranged marriages organised by parents and older relatives. Richard and his wife met once prior to their wedding and in order to secure the marriage he had to produce a substantial bride payment of 3,600 Malaysian Ringgit (approximately US$1,000), since otherwise, as he explained, he would have been obligated to live with her family.

Richard and his wife both claimed an advantage of living in the Kelabit Highlands was that their children would attend Malaysian schools. His wife emphasised that Malaysian schools offered instruction in English and required fewer expenses and fees than in Indonesia. Richard hoped that his children would do well in school so that they would not have to be farmers like him and his parents before him. From Richard's point of view, the fact that his family had good land for gardening and wet-rice fields was key to his returning to the highlands. Despite his relatively meagre income, he was able to hire Indonesian labour to work on his rice farms. Questions about cross-border marriage as a motivating factor seemed, to him at least, beside the point; it was simply the norm.

In 2003, after seven years of marriage, Richard's wife was well adjusted to life in the Kelabit Highlands. She made periodic trips home and, more often, had visits from family members coming over to work. Ten other women from her home community married into the village where she and Richard live, a substantial presence for a community with a total population of about 100 people.

A final point about Richard and his wife is that the only times she ever travelled out of the Kelabit Highlands to town was to give birth to their children in a hospital in Miri. This was not a medical decision, but rather aimed at securing their child's place in the Malaysian system, where birth certificates are critical documents that help individuals secure future access to identity cards and thereby be legitimately recognised by the state. With their babies born in Miri, Richard and his wife were more certain to obtain proper documents for their children.

In many ways, Richard's story is a typical one for young Kelabit men seeking to return or remain in the rural homelands along the international border zone of the Kelabit Highlands. Before turning to the case of Batam, where we see a very different dynamic at work, we would stress again that the women marrying into the Kelabit

community are from closely related people, in terms of language, culture, contemporary religious practice (evangelical Christianity), traditional political structures (longhouse headmanship), and modes of subsistence (wet-rice agriculture). The fact that there has been a recent historical shift in conceptualising neighbouring people as 'Indonesians', rather than simply closely related neighbours, is not a trivial fact. Kelabit men, failing to achieve success in town, are lured back to their rural homelands and engage in cross-border marriages that can be conceived of as empowering to both themselves and their spouses. As we explore further below, this points to a harnessing of state power for local purposes wherein local negotiations of sovereignty and belonging, whether inadvertently or not, are used by Kelabit men to reproduce the family farm.

Batam, Indonesia, and the Growth Triangle

Batam offers a striking contrast to the remote and rural character of the Kelabit Highlands, with its highly permeable frontier. Located at the border to Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia, Batam is a growing multi-ethnic metropolis that attracts migrants from throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The native population of fishermen and farmers has long since been displaced by development and inmigration. Since the mid-1980s, as Singapore has been transformed from an export-processing zone into a financial hub and global city, factories have been moved offshore to places such as Batam. One effect of this process has been the creation of the so-called growth triangle, a transnational economic zone that connects Batam, the Malaysian province of Johor, and Singapore. The growth triangle is based on a notion of comparative advantages, whereby Singaporean capital is combined with inexpensive land and labour on Batam. As a result, the population of the island has expanded dramatically—from 3,000 to more than 600,000 in forty years—as Indonesian migrants have arrived en masse in search of wage labour in the booming economy. Approved foreign investment increased fivefold between 1988 and 1990 and the value of exports by almost fifty times between 1989 and 1995 (Smith 1997). The numbers of tourists have also grown dramatically, from 60,000 in 1985, to 580,000 in 1990, to 1,125,000 in 1997 (BIDA 2001). Migration and tourism have been facilitated by improved modes of transportation, including a new airport and ferry terminals on Batam and frequent ferries that take the forty-minute trip to Singapore.

Batam is a place that has changed too quickly. Golf courses, gated communities, and factory estates exist side by side with squatter communities, brothels, and empty lots. The formal economy is based in the industrial estates that lure multinational corporations with promises of low costs and wages. Along with this, an informal economy based on prostitution has developed that draws Singaporean men across the border, beyond the reach of the Singaporean state. Both economies, it should be noted, primarily depend on the use of young female labour.

While Singaporeans and Malaysians easily cross the border into Indonesia, for Indonesians to enter Singapore or Malaysia it is more complicated. In the context of

the growth triangle, and as labourers in the new regional economy, Indonesians are supposed to stay on Batam. Crossing the border legally demands a passport, but even this is not a straightforward process as Malaysian and Singaporean immigration officers also demand money or turn people back whom they suspect will work illegally. This has led to a major smuggling industry that moves Indonesians across the border to Malaysia to work on construction sites and plantations throughout Peninsular Malaysia. It is mainly female domestic servants who are given work visas in Singapore and, to a certain degree, Malaysia.

As in the Kelabit Highlands, Confrontation was a key historical moment with regard to the formation of the post-colonial borders that divide Batam and the Indonesian Riau Archipelago from Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia. One effect of Confrontation was that the Indonesian state discovered the limits of the territory it had inherited from the Dutch colonial era. What ensued was a process of state formation through a variety of techniques, including the control of currency, the creation of immigration checkpoints, and the increasing categorisation and regulation of the population (Lindquist 2002).

The possibility of developing Batam emerged with the nationalisation of the border area. However, it was only with the creation of the growth triangle in 1989 that the most dramatic forms of economic development were initiated. In official discourse the growth triangle is identified as an example of a new 'borderless world' (Ohmae 1995) in which the nation-state is becoming obsolete. In fact, however, this transnational zone depends on an increasingly regulated border.

Most of the Singaporeans who come to Batam in search of Indonesian women appear to be working-class men who are marginalised in the new economy. In contrast to the case of Richard, the Singaporean men below, Andi and Pak Haji, use their own movement across the border to fulfil particular desires.

Andi is a working-class Malay-Singaporean in his late twenties. He has been going to Batam almost every other week for five years: first with his friends, and eventually alone. On Batam, he said, there was an immediate 'sense of release' from the tension of Singapore life and he felt he could indulge himself in the pleasures the island had to offer. Yet, because of Batam's reputation as an 'island of sin' he rarely tells anyone that he goes there. During the first few years he mainly frequented a karaoke bar near the main port, where he would choose a woman and sing a few songs before booking her out for the night. But a few years ago he developed a relationship with Sri, a Javanese woman in her mid-twenties. After booking her out nearly every week for a year he decided to settle her debt at the bar and set her up in a rented room in the main city on Batam.

Andi comes to Batam once or twice a week and stays as long as he can, whether a couple of days or only a few hours. Often he just spends time in the small room he rents for Sri, watching TV, and chatting with other people on the same floor—among them a Chinese Singaporean man who occasionally comes to visit his mistress. Otherwise, he and Sri go out to one of the many food courts around town and frequent his favourite disco. On Batam, Andi claims, he can experience 'total

enjoyment', which means 'doing ecstasy, listening to good music and having a woman', things he claims would be much more expensive and dangerous in Singapore. According to Andi, 'Batam is like fantasy, Fantasy Island, while Singapore is like reality'.

Sri wants to come and visit him in Singapore, but he explains that he has to maintain a separation between the two places, between 'fantasy' and 'reality'. Andi says that Sri tells him that she cares about him, but he complains that she seems to be more interested in the money. He tests her sometimes by not bringing money, and this makes her angry. He also doubts her history. She claims that before coming to Batam she had never been a prostitute, but her sexual prowess makes him believe otherwise. Nevertheless, he says he enjoys his role of being her *tamu* (client), and that he might consider marrying her if he ever determines whether or not her feelings for him are true. He claims that 'in Singapore I am already too old. Most of the women will not even look at me.'

Pak Haji is a retired Malay-Singaporean man. Disillusioned by the modern lifestyle in Singapore and proud of his role in its success, he felt immediately at home on Batam, which seemed almost 'like Singapore was 30 years ago'. Increasingly estranged from his wife and her desire to have her own career, he decided to marry again, this time to a Javanese woman whom he met on Batam and who would take care of the household and fulfil his wishes for a more 'traditional' wife. In Singapore, he says, women have too many rights *vis-à-vis* their husbands.

However, the marriage was only a religious ceremony, and not conducted under the auspices of the Indonesian or the Singaporean state. With just a hint of pride he comments that he is located somewhere 'in between' those two governments. If he was married in Singapore he would be charged with bigamy—as he is already married to a Singaporean woman—and if he decided to marry within the framework of the Indonesian state he would encounter other problems, primarily in the form of bribes. Since he comes to Batam each time on a two-month tourist visa, he remains in a liminal state that he finds empowering. But the Indonesian authorities know that he lives there and occasionally he has been called to the police station to pay bribes. According to his own story, one officer told him, 'I don't want to touch you because you are a powerful Singaporean. If I touch you I will lose my job. But this woman [pointing to his wife who had come along] is an Indonesian under my jurisdiction and could be fined for harbouring a foreigner.'

In the context of Batam and Singapore, the nature of cross-border relationships takes on a more covert and illicit tone than the community-oriented and mainly arranged marriages found in the Kelabit Highlands. On Batam, for instance, relationships that are not recognised by the state are identified as *liar*, 'wild' or unlicensed. A common theme in the Singaporean press since the early 1990s has been reports of Singaporean men 'secretly taking second wives' on Batam. One article reports an Indonesian woman saying that she would marry an older Singaporean man so that she could live a 'life of luxury'.[5] In a recent issue of the Singaporean women's magazine *Her World*, a feature article entitled 'Sex, lies and liaisons' reminds

the reader that 'you've read the newspaper stories: Singaporean husbands are starting second families overseas, as more men get posted abroad or start companies in the region'. Another high-profile article in the *Straits Times* discusses the recent increase in Singaporeans, particularly men, marrying foreigners.[6] This is understood as an effect of globalisation and the growing ease with which Singaporeans can leave the country. In this context, the changing economy is presented not only as an opportunity, but also as a threat to Singaporean families, and, thereby, the nation.

For Pak Haji, however, Batam offers a kind of zone where social relations can be reformulated according to a patriarchal logic, something that is also true to a certain extent for Andi. Both Pak Haji and Andi are doubly marginalised in the new Singaporean economy, on the one hand, because they are part of the working class, and, on the other hand, because they are ethnic Malay in the predominantly Chinese Singapore. On Batam they share a common language and ethnicity with many Indonesians, reflecting the constructed nature of the borders that divide the nation-states. At the same time they can retain a distinction between worlds—between 'fantasy' and 'reality'—moving between Indonesia and Singapore as they please.

More generally, we might argue that fantasies concerning the patriarchal family, which are evident in Singaporean state discourse (Heng & Devan 1995), are more readily available for working-class men when they move to the other side of the border. The growth triangle has apparently not only become a vehicle for economic development, but also released the desires of Singaporean men.

Comparison of Cross-border Relationships in the Kelabit Highlands and Batam

In the Kelabit Highlands and on Batam, cross-border relationships—marriages, *de facto* marriages, affairs, and sexual encounters—between Indonesian women and Malaysian and Singaporean men, respectively, are becoming increasingly common. During the last decade, cross-border marriage has become the overwhelming norm in the Kelabit Highlands, with most Kelabit men marrying neighbouring, and ethnically related, 'Indonesian' women. In the case of Batam, improved ferry connections have made it easier for Singaporeans to cross the Straits of Malacca while Indonesian women are increasingly migrating in search of well-paid work. Singaporeans commute across the border to houses and rooms that they keep for Indonesian wives and mistresses or engage in prostitution based in Batam's bars, discos, and brothels.

Life on Batam allows for many different kinds of social relationships and levels of engagement—most based on economic inequality—between Indonesian women and foreign men. In contrast, the rural Kelabit Highlands, dominated by a strongly evangelical brand of charismatic Christianity, exhibits the uniformity and tight social control of a small rural community. In the Kelabit Highlands, couples must be married before they can engage in sexual activity and most cross-border unions are arranged marriages. Indonesian women who marry Kelabit men are, in fact,

technically there 'illegally', circumventing the formal regulations concerning the movement of 'foreigners' into the Malaysian nation-state.

The historical transformations of these border areas show an expansion of state practices that categorise populations according to citizenship. The enforcement of state-sanctioned identities is regulated through passports and identity cards. In the growth triangle this facilitates the movement of Singaporeans to Batam and makes it increasingly difficult for Indonesians to move in the opposite direction. In the Kelabit Highlands, the porousness of the border allows Indonesians to cross into Malaysia, but the boundaries to citizenship are controlled by access to Malaysian identity cards and birth certificates. As Das and Poole put it, 'these documents become embodied in forms of life through which ideas of subjects and citizens come to circulate among those who use these documents' (2004, p. 15). While the passport is the crucial document in policing national boundaries in the growth triangle, in the Kelabit Highlands it is the identity card and birth certificate that fulfil a similar function. This reflects a difference between how populations are governed in the two areas.

In the context of this article, what is of primary interest is that there is an avoidance of engaging with state regulations concerning marriage. Marriages between foreigners and citizens in Indonesia and Singapore involve a complicated bureaucratic process. Indonesia, for instance, demands that both parties share the same religion. However, as Ong points out, not all zones of sovereignty are of equal concern to the state. In the Kelabit Highlands, state officials are well aware that Malaysian citizens are marrying Indonesians, which actually appears to be necessary for survival in the area. Instead, there is a concern with controlling the border to citizenship and rights. On Batam and in Singapore, there are much greater anxieties concerning cross-border marriages, but the local government on Batam has limited possibilities of controlling relationships, in part because of limited resources and the highly transient population. Meanwhile the Singaporean government watches from the other side.

However, despite these differences, both Batam and the Kelabit Highlands offer opportunities for the reformulation of social relationships as 'traditional' in the face of modernity. In each case there is a male demand, in one form or another, for 'traditional' women. Women from across the border are said to be more willing—a willingness that is at least in part based on their structural position—to retain their roles in the patriarchal household, as Malaysian and Singaporean women are considered to be more concerned with modern life.

Richard, Andi, and Pak Haji's stories each reveal how these border areas allow men, who have been left behind by global and regional processes of social and economic change, each experiencing a 'crisis of masculinity' (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000, p. 307), to become engaged in relationships with women from Indonesia. While the lifestyles they have achieved in the border area are quite antithetical on the surface— responsibility and family life for Richard, excitement and fantasy for Andi, a comfortable retirement for Pak Haji—they have in common the fact that life in the border zone offers each of them new opportunities.

In many ways this is similar to the role of transnational marriages recently identified by Suzuki (2003) and Constable (2003). Suzuki examines relationships between Filipina women and rural Japanese men who, facing a shortage of potential brides, are able to achieve adulthood and maintain their gendered privilege by acquiring Filipina wives. Also focusing on Filipina women, but ones married to Western men, Constable looks at these relationships in terms of their different motivations and desires, 'as Western men seek "traditional" marriages and Asian women "modern" ones' (2003, p. 177). Transnational marriages and relationships, in each of these examples, become a vehicle to achieve gendered identities not otherwise available to these men and women.

Although this paper primarily focuses on men—which is atypical as most anthropological literature on transnational marriage has tended to focus on women and treat men stereotypically 'as over-aged, unattractive men who are rejected by local women and who "take advantage" of their foreign wives' (Suzuki 2003, p. 91)—it is useful to consider these cases from the perspective of the Indonesian women who become involved with or are married to men like Andi, Richard, and Pak Haji. For Andi's girlfriend Sri, the situation is complicated and one should be careful about framing her relationship with Andi—or all relationships between Indonesian women and Singaporean men—in terms of exploitation. Eventually it became clear to Andi that Sri was also seeing other Singaporean men, and, when Andi finally broke off their relationship, she did not seem very upset. She shrugged her shoulders and said, 'I liked him, but it will not be difficult to find another one.'

For Indonesian women on Batam, relationships with Singaporean men rarely turn out to fulfil the promises they may have anticipated. Power and the ability to travel are linked and the lure of the foreign is considered a way of accessing economic capital that can be sent back to the village or create a family life that corresponds to the imagined Indonesian middle class (Sears 1996).

For Indonesian women entering the Kelabit Highlands, expectations are embedded in local conditions that do not radically differ from one side of the border to the other, in stark contrast to the more extreme gulf between Singapore and Batam. In the Kelabit Highlands, however, cross-border relationships are considered legitimate and beneficial for both the men and women involved. Indonesian wives living in the Kelabit Highlands stressed the same general points: that the economy, quality of schools, and access to good agricultural land were all better on the Malaysian side of the border and there are too many people, too much land pressure, and too little opportunity for paid work on the other side in Indonesia. Few saw themselves moving beyond the border area, but understood that their children, as Malaysian citizens, would have greater opportunities and mobility.

Siegel has claimed that the Indonesian family is no longer a source of legitimacy in itself, but rather must be understood in relation to the nation. As he puts it, 'the household is no longer the place one goes to find someone who knows how the family should operate. That knowledge rests with the enlightened nationalists. The family is a site of potential disruption' (1998, p. 87). Thus the family, as a particular

form defined by nationalists, is a normative structure that the state is concerned with controlling. It follows that any aberration from such norms should be seen as disruptive to the state project, as in both cases that have been discussed.

Arguably this statement is relevant in Malaysia and Singapore as well. Recall the stories in the Singaporean press and the identification of these relationships as 'wild' or 'unlicensed' on Batam. However, in the Kelabit Highlands, there is a situation in which 'foreign' women are allowed to engage in marriages with Malaysian citizens. This highlights, among other things, the discrepancy between national ideology and the actual reproduction of nation at the margins of the state.

The important issue in relation to this article is that these relationships creatively utilise changing forms of state sovereignty for tactical and personal purposes that are not part of the formal scripts of statecraft and citizenship yet are made possible by these processes. In the Kelabit Highlands, the distinction between local tactics and state strategies has apparently collapsed, as local Kelabit state officials are well aware that the Indonesian women are 'illegals'. In the most simplistic terms, these cases illustrate ways in which cross-border relationships offer new kinds of cultural capital and opportunity for the men who benefit by virtue of their access to Indonesian women—access, and this should be reiterated, that is largely afforded by virtue of conditions of structural inequality. But such marital tactics also embed these relationships in expectations and concerns about citizenship and, thereby, challenge us to reconsider what national sovereignty means, particularly when people are accustomed to thinking about borders and belonging in more localised and pragmatic terms. As such, Batam and the Kelabit Highlands are not only 'zones of graduated sovereignty' that 'call into question the uniformity of citizenship, and the kinds of political and moral claims that subjects can make on state power' (Ong 2003, p. 60), but, further, actors in such locations are able to use the expansion and colonisation of state practices creatively for their own ends (Das & Poole 2004).

Concluding Discussion

Writing against the notion that globalisation is leading to a borderless world in which states become less significant, Ong suggests a reconceptualising, or 'rezoning', of sovereignty in Southeast Asia. She asserts that the state 'remains a key institution in structuring spatial order' (1999, p. 215) and that it is valuable to 'look at how the art of government, which is strained by the condition of transnationality, has to further stretch the bounds of political economy and sovereignty' (ibid., p. 214). She not only sees the state as 'taking an active role refashioning sovereignty' (ibid., p. 215), but, more critically, treats sovereignty as central to 'understanding the shifting relations between state, market, and society' (ibid., p. 215).

Batam and the Kelabit Highlands represent opposite extremes in terms of border permeability (Martinez 1994). While the border in the Kelabit Highlands remains porous, border enforcement in the growth triangle is increasingly regulated. This has opposite effects in terms of mobility. While the growth triangle is characterised by

male mobility from Singapore to Batam, in the Kelabit Highlands the porousness of the border facilitates female mobility from Indonesia to Malaysia. While in both cases women appear to have the subordinate position in cross-border relationships, the broader social context suggests that wives in the Kelabit Highlands are in a more powerful position in their roles as wives than are mistresses or wives on Batam, though one must be careful not to generalise about these issues (e.g. Tsing 1993, ch. 7).

On Batam, tax breaks and other incentives for multinational corporations are obvious examples of how sovereignty is being 'sub-contracted' by the state, while in the Kelabit Highlands the porousness of the border is a sign that regulating the movement of people is not high on either the Malaysian or the Indonesian state's list of priorities. However, as we have shown, it is also possible to push Ong's argument further and show how the refashioning of sovereignty in the context of globalisation—as state practices both expand and contract—offers space for reconfigurations of social relations at the local level. Das and Poole refer to this as a form of 'colonisation' of state practices, which they see as responses to 'the pressing needs of populations to secure political and economic survival' (2004, p. 7).

The same processes of economic globalisation that are leading governments to give up particular forms of sovereignty are affecting the lives of populations around the region in various ways. In this article, we have shown how certain groups of men are becoming increasingly marginalised in relation to national and global processes. Their changing status in relation to mobile women has led to a particular crisis of the family, which motivates many of them to look across the border for relationships based on economic inequality (see, for instance, Donnan & Wilson 1999, pp. 91–6).

Regardless of what needs or desires such reconfigurations serve, the cases presented here show how institutions, such as marriage, which are standardised by the state, may be manipulated in graduated zones of sovereignty in a variety of different ways. While the control of bodies and territory may represent some of the more prominent concerns of states, local practices at the margins of the state need not share this monolithic focus. Indeed, these practices carry their own logics, and ones that are not necessarily geared toward a sense of belonging with regard to the nation-state.

In conclusion, it should be reiterated that the changing forms of sovereignty that Ong is concerned with have broader implications than she has previously identified. Focusing ethnographic and historical attention on marital tactics in borderland areas highlights not only how these relationships are embedded in local conditions that are connected to regional and global change, but also how the unevenness of state sovereignty allows for the reconfiguration of social relations across borders.

Notes

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[2]   There is currently a great deal of debate over whether a road—or more accurately a timber tract—should be allowed to reach the Kelabit Highlands, and Kelabit are in strong disagreement about this issue.

[3]   In 2003, a baby boom was under way in the three communities of the northern region of the Kelabit Highlands, with virtually all of the younger families composed of Kelabit men with Berian (Indonesian) brides from across the border. Similar patterns were reported from the southern Kelabit Highlands, where Kelabit are mainly marrying women from the nearby Kerayan area of Indonesia.

[4]   There is, however, an exception to this rule for local Penan—an indigenous group of semi-nomadic forest dwellers—who are recognised as coming from Malaysian territory yet also often have no IC cards.

[5]   For instance, see *Straits Times* (7 July 1991).

[6]   *Straits Times* (3 January 1999).

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