CONTEXTUALISATION OF HUMAN (IN)SECURITY: A BORDERLAND CASE STUDY OF KAMPUNG DANAU MELIKIN, SERIAN, SARAWAK

SHAFINA TANTIANA BINTI ZULKIPLI

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2023

CONTEXTUALISATION OF HUMAN (IN)SECURITY: A BORDERLAND CASE STUDY OF KAMPUNG DANAU MELIKIN, SERIAN, SARAWAK

by

SHAFINA TANTIANA BINTI ZULKIPLI

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

May 2023

PREFACE

This thesis is grounded in my ongoing interest in the study of borders and human security. Some research projects that I was involved in related to borders and (in)security were an important reason for me to conduct this study. My fieldwork in 2015 on part of the maritime borders on the east coast of Sabah was an eye-opening. The insecurities that border communities face in relation to transnational crime have led to people's insecurities.

I have thought a great deal about how my study of human security and borders would primarily offer a view from a particular area that is context-specific. I believe that the reading of events on the borders is tainted by the lack of reliable sources and the different social cultures, which is inevitable. As a Sarawakian, it was much easier for me to relate to very different people in Sarawak and build a trustworthy bond with the community from different socio-cultural backgrounds. It helped me to understand the true meaning of living in a 'vulnerable' and 'marginalised' area. During the fieldwork, I learned about the experiences of insecurity through the narratives of the border community and my own observations. Describing such a story requires reflexivity, and my subjectivity was necessary to address the ethical challenges of studying such sensitive issues at the borders. My experiences of the environment (study site) also helped to inform the data analysis and the findings of the study.

The community of Danau Melikin provided me with a safe environment in a place that is not always welcoming and where social interaction between different cultures is not always easy. This is because local people near the border are often suspicious of strangers and their motives. Interestingly, the notion of the border was somehow embedded in everyday practices and knowledge and had become a natural

part of their lives over time. At the time of the research, the security climate in the border regions had changed significantly. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, which occurred globally in March 2020 and led to lockdowns in many countries, had significantly impacted my research for several reasons. While the path was uncertain at the time, it was also very challenging and overwhelming. In the days of the early lockdown, I could not help but draw parallels between what happened before and after the pandemic in terms of human (in)security. The concern was the same, cross-border threats in various forms led to a sense of insecurity among people who live near the borders between Sarawak and West Kalimantan.

The discourse on border security and the impact on people's safety had become dominant. The state had tightened security along the border with Kalimantan, Indonesia, especially in areas which were identified as hotspots so as to combat human trafficking and smuggling as well as to curb the spreading of Covid-19. It was also interesting to see how the complexity of borders was discussed and led to an exploration of the existential threats at borders, how people perceive the dangers posed by borders, how they deal with them and what protection strategies border communities needed for their security. It has been one of my concerns that until recently the borderlands were not considered significant and local authorities did not pay enough attention to them. Beyond the context of the borderland, attention to security concerns expressed by individuals or communities can contribute to a better understanding of human (in)security.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Embarking on a PhD has been one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of my life. I have shared both happy and difficult moments with many people in this study. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to those people who helped me in this study. It is not simply a product of my efforts without the help of many people who have played a crucial role, directly and indirectly in the completion of this thesis. I am inwardly grateful that the development of this thesis has been an intellectual journey that has been both challenging and invaluable.

It has been a great privilege to be mentored by Prof. Dr. Kamarulzaman Askandar, who has provided constructive comments, encouragement and support for me in developing my thesis. I am deeply grateful for his intellectual engagement and assistance throughout the process of conducting this research. Many times, he saw the storyline before it was clear on paper. However, he patiently waited for me to learn on my own while training me in this academic writing process. Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to him for putting so much trust in my abilities.

PhD is a tough road with many potholes along the way. Completing the thesis in the middle of the pandemic was never easy. With the unyielding support from Tikah and Zaza, the journey became less stressful. I appreciate all the academic discussions we usually had over coffee. This journey had been made easier by knowing that both of you were on the same 'bumpy road'. I would like to thank friends and staffs from the Research and Education for Peace (REPUSM) and School of Social Sciences (Universiti Sains Malaysia) for offering me kind support when I needed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF MAPS

LIST OF PHOTOPGRAPHS

Page

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FGD   Focus Group Discussion

GOF   General Operation Force

ICQS   Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security

MAF   Malaysia Armed Forces

NCR   Native Customary Rights

SDMC   Sarawak Disaster Management Committee

TNI   Tentera Nasional Indonesia

UN   United Nations

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNTHFS   The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security

LIST OF APPENDICES

KONTEKSTUALISASI KESELAMATAN INSAN: KAJIAN KES PERBATASAN DI KAMPUNG DANAU MELIKIN, SERIAN, SARAWAK

ABSTRAK

Kawasan sempadan antara Sarawak (Malaysia) dan Kalimantan Barat (Indonesia) sejak sekian lama mencetuskan kebimbangan Kerajaan Negeri Sarawak. Kebimbangan ini didorong oleh peningkatan aktiviti jenayah rentas sempadan. Meskipun pelbagai inisiatif telah diambil oleh pihak berkuasa untuk mengawasi dan melindungi kawasan sempadan Malaysia, namun persepsi dan pengalaman berkaitan isu keselamatan dalam kalangan komuniti di sempadan jarang diketengahkan. Dalam konteks tesis ini, konsep keselamatan insan dan sempadan digunapakai untuk mengkaji isu ancaman dan kesannya kepada keselamatan insan, termasuk cadangan pencegahan dan perlindungan dari perspektif komuniti sempadan. Keselamatan insan sebagai rangka konseptual membantu mendalami isu keselamatan insan di kawasan sempadan. Kajian ini menkontektualisasi keselamatan insan daripada perspektif sempadan sebagai pendekatan epistimologi untuk memahami landskap keselamatan yang kompleks di sempadan Sarawak, dengan memberi perhatian khusus kepada naratif dan pengalaman komuniti sempadan. Keseluruhan analisis tematik memberi penekanan kepada pengalaman komuniti sempadan melalui perbincangan kumpulan berfokus, tinjauan lapangan dan temu bual mendalam. Hasil dapatan kajian menyumbang kepada pemahaman keselamatan insan dari perspektif komuniti sempadan. Tesis ini mendapati bahawa persepsi ancaman dan ketakutan adalah berpunca daripada ancaman rentas sempadan termasuk pencerobohan tentera asing, kemasukan pendatang asing tanpa izin, aktiviti penyeludupan dan penyakit rentas sempadan. Perasaan ketidakselamatan merangkumi aspek ketidakselamatan personal,

ekonomi dan kesihatan yang didorong oleh faktor 'kerentanan sempadan'. Dalam pada itu, isu berkaitan hak tanah orang asal turut dikenalpasti sebagai ancaman dalaman terhadap keselamatan insan penduduk di Danau Melikin, Serian, Sarawak. Tesis ini turut menyimpulkan bahawa persepsi ancaman terhadap keselamatan insan adalah penting bagi tujuan pembuatan dasar yang mampu menambah baik keselamatan dan kehidupan masyarakat di sempadan. Perbincangan bersama komuniti sempadan membantu memberi gambaran sebenar konteks kehidupan mereka, sekaligus memperkasakan keupayaan mereka untuk mengenalpasti masalah dan solusi kepada masalah tersebut. Data daripada kajian ini juga dapat memberi manfaat kepada Kerajaan Negeri Sarawak dalam usaha meningkatkan kondisi keselamatan di kawasan sempadan. Secara keseluruhan kes kajian ini membuka ruang kepada kajian baru dalam isu keselamatan insan dan kerentanan sempadan.

CONTEXTUALISATION OF HUMAN (IN)SECURITY: A BORDERLAND CASE STUDY OF KAMPUNG DANAU MELIKIN, SERIAN, SARAWAK

ABSTRACT

The border areas separating the state of Sarawak (Malaysia) and West Kalimantan (Indonesia) have long been a security risk and a critical concern for the Sarawak state government. These areas are becoming a scene of cross-border crimes. Many cross-border crime cases are constantly reported to the relevant security agencies. While the call for securing national borders is widespread, the border communities' perception is often ignored. This thesis addresses the gap by reflecting the "voices" of border communities. The concepts of human security, border, and borderland were used to explore threats and their implications on human security. Besides, recommendations for prevention and protection from a bottom-up perspective have also been provided. Human security is valued as a part of the conceptual framework to illuminate an empirically grounded understanding of human insecurities in vulnerable areas, such as the borderlands. This study contextualises human (in)security through the lens of borderlands as an epistemological approach to understanding the complex security landscape of Sarawak's borderlands. The entire analysis thematically emphasises the value of people's experiences gathered through focus group discussions, field observations, and in-depth interviews in the border communities of Kampong Danau Melikin, Serian, Sarawak, near the border with West Kalimantan (Indonesia). The findings contribute to the current understanding of human (in)security by focusing on border communities' narratives and experiences. Accordingly, this thesis found that perceptions of threats and fears were caused by cross-border threats, including foreign soldiers' encroachment, illegal immigrants,

smuggling, and transborder diseases. People's sense of insecurity in terms of personal security, economic security, and health security is embodied in cross-border threats reinforced by "border vulnerabilities." On the other note, unjust treatment related to land rights has also been identified as an internal threat to security for the people of Danau Melikin, Serian, Sarawak. This thesis concludes that identifying threats to human security is fundamental for establishing a policy that can enhance people's safety and well-being. Engagement with affected communities is also essential to reflect more accurately on the context and conditions of their lives and empower them to identify their problems and the solutions to overcome them. Hence, the data is beneficial for the Sarawak state government to improve the existing security condition at the borders, reinforced by the deficiencies in border control. Ultimately, this case study reveals an essential avenue for future research relevant to human in(security) and border vulnerabilities.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

This chapter provides the rationale for exploring human (in)securities from the borderland lens. The arguments in this chapter demonstrate the limitations of empirical evidence on people's (in)security at borderlands and its relation to borders. The relation between these two matters is reflected in a participant's narrative:

We are living near the border… That is the main reason for our insecurity. We are exposed to danger. (P.31, male, farmer, November 2019)

Such narrative reflects a sense of insecurity that is being evoked and constructed from the perspective of borderlands. Border communities of Sarawak, living on the fringes of the Malaysia-Indonesia borders, face myriad security issues related to trans-border. The border area between both countries is well-known as a cross-border crime scene. Many cases (intrusion, human trafficking and smuggling of contrabands) are continuously reported to the relevant security authorities (GOF Sarawak, personal communication, January 9, 2020). These 'frontiers' are recognised as potential sources of insecurities not only to the state but also to the people (Jalli & Sualman, 2020).

Despite Malaysia's perseverance in improving border security, particularly the Sarawak state government, a clear and coherent view of the nature and priority of possible threats from a bottom-up perspective, which is the people and communities in the affected area, remains lacking. The traditional notion of security embedded in the protection of the state has proven insufficient in addressing most harms people

face, especially in vulnerable areas such as the borderland. The insufficiency is due to the restrictive neorealism theoretical paradigm with the state as a referent object of security.

The advent of external threats to the local communities was often overlooked until a cross-border incident, a kidnap-for-ransom, occurred at the borderland of Sarawak in December 2018. In light of this, the idea of human security is appealing and becomes the forefront of this study. Nevertheless, border vulnerabilities demand new ways of thinking about Sarawak borders by incorporating the "voices" of the border community in identifying insecurities at the borderland. This consideration is pertinent in examining the security situation in the Sarawak (Malaysia) borderlands near West Kalimantan (Indonesia).

Thus, this study conceptually builds upon the human security by viewing the notion afresh through the lenses of border discourse. While building on the understanding, this study seeks to investigate in-depth by deploying the concept of threat and vulnerabilities as a tool to grasp the human insecurities that border community experience. Empirically, the study also explores the border as a 'living space' and its ramification building upon Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, personal observation, and official documents analysis.

In addressing complex, interlinked human (in)security issues, the study is constructed from local perceptions related to 'where they live'. The complexity of borders as the primary setting is also discussed to investigate how people perceive the risks and threat possibilities that borders produce, how people confront or cope with the issues, and what prevention and protection strategies the border communities need for their security.

The study adopts human security as an analytical approach to explore and problematise (in)securities within a particular context (borderland). This study also demonstrates that the border perspective represents a useful analytical framework for understanding (in)securities at the borderlands. In this context, the border is perceived to be a portion of everyday life in order to comprehend issues encountered by people who live at the border regions (Doevenspeck, 2011; Idler, 2019). To comprehend sources of insecurity that exists within populations who live at the border, the human security method was used to investigate risks and susceptibilities that arise within borderlands. How human security is defined and contextualised is intrigued by the realities of issues that threaten the border community's safety and livelihood. By utilising human security, the study makes a case of borderland lens as an epistemological approach to studying human (in)security.

1.2   Human (in)security: Expanding the traditional security narrative

'Individual-centred' security was perceived by the United Nations (UN) as a crucial component that supports individuals' security. The shift that occurred from the state to individuals was the most evident transition in the research of security, which was strictly defined as territorial security. The development of risks has altered the existing security concerns and significance of a wide range of possible human security dangers. (Owen, 2008). The human security approach has attracted the attention of numerous academics and policymakers. Thus, the human security framework has been utilised to accommodate new security perspectives and referents (Lemanski, 2012).

1.2.1   Human (in)security: Threats and vulnerability

Human security was used to study reviews regarding reactions to insecurity, referents and characteristics of security dangers (Gasper, 2011; Newman, 2020). Security risks were first considered to have included threats and damages that would influence people in terms of their safety and integrity. The concept draws attention to a wide range of threats individuals and communities face and focuses on the root causes of identified insecurities. Thakur and Newman (2004, p.2) further asserted that the citizens of a state that are 'secure', according to the abstract and remote concept of traditional security, can be perilously insecure in terms of the threat to the lives of individual beings in everyday reality. People are perceived to have attained human security when they can recognise dangers to their own welfares and beliefs, the chance to express dangers to respective authorities as well as the ability to avoid or remove possible dangers.

By placing individuals at the centre of analysis, security threats (or insecurities) are recognised in terms of their ability to hamper people's survival (physical abuse, violence, persecution or death), their livelihoods (unemployment, food insecurity, pandemics, others), and their dignity (lack of human rights, inequality, exclusion, discrimination, others) (Tadjbakhsh, 2013). By recognising that any global list of possible threats to human security may be practically unlimited, Owen (2004, p.21) reminded that the relevant threats in particular regions or countries could be identified to a significant degree. Nevertheless, significant differences may exist in the degree of threats to human security in its individual regions, even within a single country, or single area (Djuric, 2009). As per Owen's (2008a) arguments, threats are often spatially determined where different areas afflicted other harms. Owen provides an example of a landmine as the only threat in a contaminated village, which may produce

little concern. In contrast, other places in the same region suffering from other threats may be less secure than those in other places with only one or two threats identified.

Threats and vulnerabilities as a concept were used to identify sources of human insecurities to the border community. In this study, threats are described as a *warning of something unpleasant, such as the danger that may result in harm* (Atienza, 2015). They are also defined as *anything or an event that can present a critical consequence to one's life and livelihood, whatever the source may be* (Newman, 2010). Thus, the notion of human security acknowledges all communities and states to identify the security threats. For example, Hoogensen (2016) has pointed out the importance of knowing the threats and vulnerabilities to human security encompassing multiple perspectives and 'voices' according to the people's utterances of their security concerns.

Highlighting that a sense of human insecurities may also stem from vulnerability is crucial. In the context of this human security study, vulnerability is outlined as *exposure* and as the channels (spatial) through which threats potentially cause harm (Busumtwi-Sam, 2008). Threat is directly related to *exposure* in this context, which is commonly a function of geographical location (Busumtwi-Sam, 2008; Idler, 2019). People who live near rivers in low-lying flood plains, for example, are more likely to be affected by a major flood sooner and more unexpectedly than those who live at higher elevations further away (Busumtwi-Sam, 2008). This is an example of a vulnerability that has resulted in human insecurity in high-risk areas (which is location-specific). These geographical attributes combined with *weaknesses* in border security management (Aas & Gundhus, 2014; Idler, 2019) contributes to peoples' insecurities.

The state's vulnerability is immeasurable and the state is unable to safeguard each location all the times. Based on this rationale, a thorough examination that involves the detection of risks and susceptibilities when investigating the effect upon individuals' lives must be in place. Hence, governments can comprehend issues that exist among people who live at the borderland and develop solutions in order to prevent threats to human security.

Therefore, any policy or framework related to human security should address the capacity to identify threats and vulnerabilities based on people experiences and perceptions and has the capacity to avoid these threats when possible (Tadjbakhsh, 2007). When the approach is applied, attention focuses on existential and emerging threats and risks to the communities' security and well-being, especially those living in the 'vulnerable' areas such as a borderland.

1.3   Border and borderland perspective

In International Relations, borders are expressed as border markers that focus on sovereignty, national security, customs and immigration controls, fences, walls, and national military troops (Paasi, 2009; Ullah & Kumpoh, 2018). In some cases, borders prevent the entry of undesired elements, such as people, goods, arms, or drugs (Newman, 2003). Hence, borders are frequently associated with establishing a security perimeter for controlling entry into the territory of a sovereign nation (Paasi, 2009). Borders also reflect the popularised frontier view, particularly from a state-centric perspective, highlighting the remoteness, under-development, and dense forest landscapes (Eilenberg, 2011).

While the term is used interchangeably, borderland is defined as an area of land close to the border between two countries, where territories are subordinated to a specific national regime and are therefore subjected to the norms of the specific political system (Wastl-Walter, 2020). Borderland is also characterised by its symbiotic relationship with borderlands in the adjacent states (Martinez, 1994, p.8). In this sense, borders were also seen as peripheral, empirical-physical phenomena. These lines manifested the 'end' of a state's territorial power and located in a specific context known as 'borderland' (Paasi, 2009). Donnan and Wilson (2010) stated that borderlands have often been perceived as dangerous places where illegalities are common in the popular imagination.

However, globalisation has converted many border zones into crucial conduits of trade and contact and raised the salience of some as regions of social conflict and insecurities. Borders and borderlands are no longer merely a territorial division among states. These spaces now are viewed as a challenge to traditional state governance and the communities. Today, borders and borderlands face new pressures from heightened human mobility, economic interdependence (legal and illicit), and perceived challenges where states grapple with a host of non-traditional threats (Simmons, 2019). For example, at the Liberian-Ivorian borderland, border security means controlling Ebola spread and addressing governance gaps that allows crime to flourish. On the other hand, Vietnam faced challenges in cross-border criminal activities, particularly drug trafficking that threatened human security. The insecurities were partly due to the border proximity and the porous borders between Cambodia, China, and Laos, consequently enabling the trafficking of illicit drugs into and through Vietnam (Hai Luong, 2020).

Research has begun to reveal what these contextual changes on security concerns mean for people living near the borders. Millions of people worldwide live in border communities (Simmons, 2019). According to Simmons (2019), although almost 25 per cent of the world's population or approximately 1.87 billion human beings (2016) live within one hundred kilometres of an international land border, the border has often been dismissed as peripheral spaces. Moreover, an analysis involving more than nine hundred worldwide border crossings on land in existence in 1995 showed that the population density within a five-kilometre radius of these entry points had increased dramatically, from about 211.6 persons per square kilometres in 1990 to 275.5 in 2010 (Simmons, 2019).

In some parts of the world, border zones have been sites of insecurities as transborder violence has become the Security Council's (UN) growing border concern. For example, international borderland zones can be a resource for rebel and extremist movements (Buhaug & Gates, 2002), especially when sympathetic ethnic ties directly across the border fuel the rebellion (Gleditsch, 2007). Illicit activities in and around border regions are significant and possibly growing. By its very nature dividing two separate nation-states with different administrative and regulatory regimes, the border generates opportunities that invite illicit actions, such as smuggling, illegal immigration, and armed insurgency (Eilenberg, 2011; Adesina, 2019; Idler, 2019). On the other hand, the perceived risks and dangers emanating from border zones and crossings have proliferated (International Organisation for Migration, 2017; Adesina, 2019; Hlovor, 2020). Consequently, border communities face unique challenges innate to the boundary itself, while interior populations, who live far from the border environment, are probably shielded from such stresses (Newman, 2011).

Complex interactions among non-state groups (extremist, cross-border criminals) occur at borderlands globally. For example, the Southeast Asian region is still rife with intra-state conflicts, which is the major security issue facing the region. Muslim separatist movement involving Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Government of Philippines in the Southern Philippines caused spillover effect through the borders of (Sabah) Malaysia (Askandar, 2005). Similarly, the separatist movement in the Southern Thailand provinces also consequently create insecurities along the Malaysian border, specifically the State of Kelantan. Therefore, borders and borderlands are gaining salience as threatening spaces (Adesina, 2019; Idler, 2019), rendering borders and their (in)security a growing rather than a receding concern. These concerns have led to several important questions:

i.   Are border zones, especially borderland themselves, perceived as spaces that generate threats to people's security?

ii.   Does border affect local communities living near it?

iii.   What sorts of external threats, real or perceived, resonate deeply within the border space?

1.3.1   The borderland lens: An epistemological approach

The conceptual underpinning of this study starts with border and borderland as a context in exploring human (in)securities. Borderland represents a peculiar point of research interest from a geographical and border security perspective that helps shape the direction of research within human security in this study. Henceforth, the researcher focuses on viewing borders and borderland literature to frame and produce the study criteria.

From a state perspective, borderland is a vulnerable region that is primarily unruly, and the borderline as a territorial sovereignty marker is the feature that deserves attention (Idler, 2019, p.3). Borderlands have long been the site of violence due to either government incapacity or disinterest in peripheral regions (Adesina, 2019; Idler, 2019). Borderland lawlessness, or the ambiguous space between state laws, provides fertile ground for activities deemed illicit by one or both states, such as smuggling and tax evasion (Tagliacozzo, 2001).

Borderlands also manifest distinct social, political and economic structures shaped by their geographic location (Van Schendel, 2005, p.385). Nil Hansen (1981) defined borderlands as sub-national areas where economic and social life are directly and significantly affected by their proximity to an international border. The definition is useful, although ambiguous as what constitutes 'significantly affected' and 'proximity' is not defined and how these affect border populations. Notably, borderlands can extend from a very short up to a very considerable distance into the hinterland of the border depending on a variety of factors, including everyday or seasonal life patterns, topography and transport infrastructure. Nevertheless, borders highly matter in these places daily (Van Schendel & Maaker, 2014; Zeller, 2015).

Newman (2011) and Idler (2019) asserted that borderlands are areas in close proximity to an international boundary and are usually disadvantaged in terms of their location as the farthest point and are marginal to the core areas of the states. These vulnerable spaces become the nexus between conflict, crime, and politics, where they are at their most dynamic. They are places of opportunity but also of heightened risk and threats. Borderlands play a crucial role in today's conflicts, whereby communications, crime, and ideas flow constantly across these (Idler, 2018).

For example, the specific geography of borderland intensifies insecurity due to its characteristic of transnationality and distance to state centres (Idler, 2019, p.251). The limited knowledge about borders and security complexities is alarming which the impact to the security of the people living near the borders is considered. Henceforth, the borderland life must be comprehended to address security issues in the area. Borderland features and security landscape help researchers and relevant parties comprehend the complexities and the effect more broadly.

1.4   Contextualisation of human (in)security: A borderland perspective

This study uses the term 'human security' broadly and focuses on (in)securities people felt subjective or experienced objectively. As previously acknowledged, a key consideration in constructing human (in)security involves contextualisation. Human (in)security must be rooted in people own perspective, experiences, and knowledge. Contextualising human (in)security entails utilising a people-centred methodology that works through and with people to specify what security and insecurity mirror and how this view translate into strategies or initiatives that enhance peoples' security and well-being.

In this study context, the researcher does not limit insecurities under the seven human security dimensions (UNDP, 1994) that were discussed further in Chapter Two, but allows peoples' concerns and focus on emerging from a specific setting (borderland). Human security acknowledges that insecurities vary considerably across different settings, space and time, therefore, promotes the search for contextualised solutions that appropriately respond to each situation. Hence, the key tenet in this study is the contextualisation of human (in)security that recognises experiences and perspectives of (in)security are not similar for all people. The causes and intensity will

be different, not just across instances of conflict but also within the context of spatiality[1] (Owen, 2008a; McDuie-Ra, 2009).

At the core of human security, as a conceptual paradigm, is a notion that the narrative of human security should be grounded more firmly in the lived experience of insecure people and consider the political, social and economic realities of countries (Luckham 2009, p.3). The examination of existing literature on human security subjects reveals the limitation in research effort regarding perceptions and experiences in framing a more contextual policy on human security which is scarce in the borderlands. This situation is true, as the insecurities vary across countries and communities (Alkire, 2003). Security or lack of security depends on the communities' surroundings. By acknowledging the notion, what human security as a whole entail from the border community lens can be truly understood. A fundamental insight from border studies, and from which this study proceeds, is that the location of certain places plays a crucial role in defining their (in)securities. This study takes due cognisance of the importance of location, which refers to the borderland region, and how does the 'border' affect the human security of the people living in or near it.

Essentially, a state has a primary responsibility of protecting its citizens from internal and external threats to their livelihood. In view of the fact that adequate knowledge on human security at the borderland of Sarawak is currently lacking, this research recounts the experience of the communities living near the border of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The study begins with understanding that human security issues are highly context-specific. Threats to human security vary considerably across and within countries, hence its scope differs from one community to another (Alkire,

---

[1] Related to the distance; states that are proximate to one another in spatial and geographic manner (Starr, 2005).

2003; McIntosh & Hunter, 2010). Therefore, an in-depth analysis of human security threats and how the communities perceive human security from the border perspective is desirable.

1.4.1 Human security in Malaysia: Malaysia border

People's Security: The proliferation of ideas as well as the global security environment has brought about the transition from state-centric security to a people-centric security approach. The prosperity, welfare and rights of Malaysian citizens entrenched in the Federal Constitution must be protected and guaranteed by the government. At the same time, the nation's rights must also be embraced and upheld by the people with full patriotic fervour and a sense of responsibility towards national security and sovereignty (Core Value 8: Malaysia National Security Policy, 2019).

In the face of current global challenges, Malaysia needs to respond to numerous security threats that potentially pose challenges to its sovereignty and survival. Malaysia's security and threats perception have been influenced by physical factors of Malaysia's strategic geopolitical features where Malaysia is sharing land and maritime boundaries with almost all its Southeast Asian neighbours (Abdullah, 2011).

Most notably, the conventional thinking on security focuses predominantly on national security (refers to the state being free from any threats, be it externally or internally) are inadequate to examine multiple forms of vulnerability and risks that people face. In the Malaysian context, the people-security was mentioned in National Security Policy (2019). Unfortunately, the policy has not provided a detailed explanation of what 'people-centric' security defines. In Malaysia, the expansion of threats under the rubric of non-traditional threats, such as illicit drugs, religious extremism, poverty, economic disparity, disasters, viral pandemics and transnational

13

crimes, falls within the framework of comprehensive security instead of human security (Teh & Ngu, 2016)

As long the approach is top-down (elite-driven), the government will remain continuously playing the role of the security provider (Teh & Ngu, 2016). Hence, non-traditional threats such as economic crises, food shortages, health pandemics, human trafficking and environmental degradation are critical and must be addressed in the human security context because they affect peoples' security multidimensionally.

Malaysia generally comprises two territories, namely West Malaysia (Peninsular Malaysia with 131,585sq kilometres) and East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak with 9,210,080sq kilometres). It shares land borders with Thailand, Brunei and Indonesia and maritime borders with the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Thailand and Indonesia (Harun, 2009). Like any other border, Malaysian borders can be categorised into two types, legal crossing point and illegal crossing point (refer to Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Land crossing points

Land Crossing Point	
Legal Crossing Point	• Official – through Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security (ICQS) Complex. The official land crossing of Peninsular Malaysia: Padang Besar and Wang Kelian in Perlis; Bukit Kayu Hitam and Durian Burung, Kedah; Pengkalan Hulu in Perak; Bukit Bunga, Rantau Panjang and Pengkalan Kubor in Kelantan. The official land crossing for Sarawak and Kalimantan, Indonesia: Tebedu-Entikong.
	• There are also unofficial land borders crossing between Sarawak and Kalimantan (Serikin near Kuching) and Bario (Kelabit Highland).
	• The legal cross point along the border can be considered porous due to a lack of integrity and technology by the border enforcement agency.

Table 1.1 (Continued)

Land Crossing Point	
Illegal crossing point	• The established illegal crossing points by transborder organised crime have been used for human trafficking, illegal immigrants, and smuggling activities along Malaysia-Thailand and Malaysia-Indonesia borders, which exist in developed areas and jungle fringes at the border. • The illegal border cross points along Malaysian borders shows the porosity and vulnerability to threats.

Source: Noor Azmi et al. (2019)

More often than not, Malaysian borders are porous to risk or threats due to the geographical factor of Malaysia, which is located in the centre of South-East Asia. The threats encountered by Malaysia are worsening due to the 'spillover' effect and 'push and pull' factors of neighbouring countries (Noor Azmi et al., 2019). With a wide and long border, Malaysia's security is vulnerable to various threats, which are not only limited to traditional military threats but also other non-traditional threats, including transnational crimes (illegal immigrants, human trafficking and smuggling of prohibited goods) (Noor Azmi et al., 2019). For example, the issues of Thailand and the Philippines government at the southern part of their regions involving the Muslim communities have been a long and unresolved conflict until now. The severity of the issue was evident through the serious kidnapping activities by the Abu Sayyaf group of Southern Mindanao in the area of Sabah since 2000 and the incursion by the terrorist army of the Sulu Sultanate into Lahad Datu, Sabah in 2013.

Sabah's international border with the Philippines is extremely porous as the vast and open sea zones demarcate it. Sabah's long borders, comprising 14,400 kilometres of maritime boundaries and 2,019.5 kilometres of land borders across three countries- Sarawak, Kalimantan and Mindanao, is hard to control (Dollah et al., 2016). The porousness of the border has partly contributed to illegal cross-border activities,

posing severe threats to the state and border communities. Cross-border crimes accelerate due to the influx of illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries. Many of them are involved in smuggling, kidnapping, terrorism, illegal fishing, and human trafficking. The activities of kidnapping and demanding ransom and armed intrusion have threatened Malaysian security and affected the people's security.

On the other hand, Malaysian and Indonesian borderlands are more vulnerable and expose more threats. With a population of 230 million people with similar language, religion and tradition, illegal immigrants of Indonesia are undisputedly a threat to Malaysian security (Shawaluddin et al., 2010; Noor Azmi et al., 2019). In other words, Malaysian borders, especially with Indonesia, are porous to threats and have led to questions on its vulnerabilities and issues of efficiency of border enforcement agencies (Noor Azmi et al., 2020).

1.4.2 Contextual background: Unravelling Sarawak borderland and the security dynamics

Sarawak is one of the Federation of Malaysia states. It is located on the Island of Borneo, bordered by Brunei in the north, Sabah in the northeast, Indonesia in the south and the South China Sea in the west (Refer to Map 1.1). Despite being the largest state in Malaysia, Sarawak is sparsely populated, with numerous vulnerable groups living in isolated communities. Sarawak comprises a land area approximately 1.7 times West Kalimantan and takes up 37.5 per cent of Malaysia's total land area (Lord & Chang, 2019). Sarawak is the largest Malaysian state with 124,450 squares kilometres, with 2.9 million people (as of 2020) from twenty-seven different ethnic groups (Sarawak State Planning Unit, 2020). Sarawak is divided into 12 divisions, with Kuching as the capital of Sarawak (The Official Portal of Sarawak Government, 2021).

Each division is divided into district (total of 28) and sub-district (Refer to **Appendix 1**).

Source: Official Portal of Sarawak Government (2021)

Map 1.1   Sarawak map

Sarawak borderland presents a crucial case study of human (in)security for two primary reasons. First, the borderlands of Sarawak and West Kalimantan are constantly reflected as problematic (Bala, 2002; Ishikawa, 2010; Eilenberg, 2011; Jalli & Sualman, 2020). The issues of illegal crossing along the border are not new for the local communities living along the border as they have relatives living on both sides (Bala, 2002). Second, human security related to borders issues does not receive sufficient government attention. Increased crime on the border, smuggling of goods and drugs and human trafficking have compromised the sovereignty and security in the border state (First Infantry Division Sarawak, personal communication, January 13, 2020). Due to these, there are pertinent need to identify the imminent threats to human security and ways to prevent cross-border threats and protect the border communities. The Sarawak case is relevant for bigger picture studies on human (in)security and its link to borders.

Historically, in a part of Borneo (Sarawak and Kalimantan), the idea of a permanent boundary line as the ultimate expression of territorial sovereignty first made its appearance during the 19th and 20th centuries as part of colonialism legacies (Ishikawa, 2010). Sarawak-West Kalimantan borderland has long been a social interface between paired political systems: the White Rajahs of Sarawak and the Dutch colonial government, the post-war British colonial administration in Sarawak and Indonesian West Borneo, and independent Malaysia and Indonesia. In reality, the space around the border becomes a unique field, a threshold that accommodates a series of social, economic and cultural flows from one national arena into another (Ishikawa, 2010, p.5). Before Sarawak joined the formation of Malaysia in 1963, these communities had been crisscrossing the border to visit their relatives (Bala, 2002, Ishikawa, 2010). Nevertheless, many border communities living along the border areas have to decide either to become Malaysians or Indonesians after the formation of Malaysia.

Ever since Sarawak joined Malaysia, its borderlands have posed a concern for the State Government, especially regarding cross-border security issues. The region, located on the border between newly independent states, became a political frontier and the frontline of strife. The situation was intensified during the aggression by '*Konfrontasi*' (confrontation) against Malaysia, which worsened the situation along the border. The '*Ganyang Malaysia'* (Crush Malaysia) campaign has created tensions between both countries. Together with volunteers and rebels, the Indonesian army units began making incursions across the West Kalimantan-Sarawak border (Ishikawa, 2010). The Lundu district (Sarawak's border), for example, has experienced political turmoil in the post-colonial period, especially during the *Konfrontasi* in the 1960s.
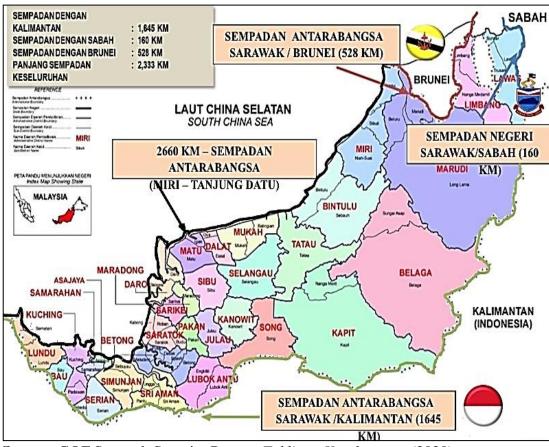
During the *Konfrontasi*, Malaysia allied forces and Indonesian soldiers fought in the Malaysia-Indonesian border areas (Ishikawa, 2010, p.70).

Over the years, border security issues have become more pertinent, especially in areas where *rat trails* and *elephant trails* are rampant. From Ba'kelalan in the North Sarawak to Tanjung Datu in the South Sarawak, *rat trail* and *elephant trails* have been used for smuggling contraband items such as liquor, cigarettes, gas cylinder, human trafficking and other crimes (Ishikawa, 2010, p.81; Jalli & Sualman, 2020). People from Indonesia crossing legally from West Kalimantan would travel via Entikong. Nevertheless, the larger group of illegal migrants would use alternatives, such as Aruk-Biawak (Sambas) or Jagoi Babang-Serikin (Bengkayang), or other famous 'illegal routes' at Kampong Raso, Lundu, Tong Nibong and Kampong Mongkos (Serian) (GOF Sarawak, personal communication, January 9, 2020). *Rat trails* and *elephant trails*, which have been unmanned for a long time, are utilised by people from Indonesia to enter Malaysia illegally. These concerns, which persisted over issues of immigration, smuggling, and crimes for a long period, compelled the Federal Government and Sarawak State Government to carefully monitor the Sarawak border areas (First Infantry Division Sarawak, personal communication, January 13, 2020).

Border security and management has been on Malaysia's political agenda since the passage of the Malaysian Border Security Agency Act 2017. This Act provides for the establishment of the Malaysian Border Security Agency to secure the Malaysian land border against smuggling or other illegal activities and related matters. In recent years, and even more so since the pandemic, the Malaysian government has strengthened border security measures and increased staff, resources and funding for border enforcement. Currently, the Sarawak government is willing to work with the federal government to establish more border posts between Malaysia and Indonesia.

This is in line with Budget 2023, which allocates RM1.1 billion for the development of border enforcement in Sabah and Sarawak, together with RM20 million for the empowerment of local communities in border enforcement (Ministry of Finance, 2023).

Generally, Malaysia-Indonesia has two types of border areas: 1) the land border of Sarawak and Kalimantan and 2) sea/small island (with Riau, Kalimantan and Sulawesi). The people of Sarawak and Kalimantan (Indonesia) share 1645 kilometres of land borders, specifically 966 kilometres with West Kalimantan (Refer to Map 1.2).

Source: GOF Sarawak Security Report, *Taklimat Keselamatan* (2020)

Map 1.2   Sarawak (Malaysia) land border with Kalimantan (Indonesia)

Sarawak borders are equipped with eight official border crossings which knows as Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security (ICQS) mainly in Biawak (Kuching Division), Tebedu (Kuching Division), and Lubok Antu (Sri Aman Division) (Refer to Table 1.2). Nevertheless, there are many unofficial crossing points (GOF Sarawak, personal communication, January 9, 2020).

Table 1.2   Legal border crossing in Sarawak

No	Division	Land (Border Post)	Sea (Port)	Air (Airport)
1.	Lundu	ICQS Biawak	Dermaga Sematan	-
2.	Bau	Immigration Post Serikin	-	-
3.	Kuching	-	Dermaga Pending Pelabuhan Senari	Kuching International Airport
4.	Padawan	Immigration Post Padawan	-	-
5.	Serian	ICQS Tebedu Immigration Post Bunan Gega	-	-
6.	Sri Aman	Immigration Post Batu Lintang ICQS Lubok Antu	-	-
7.	Sibu	-	Pelabuhan Rajang	Sibu Airport
8.	Mukah	-	Pelabuhan TanjungManis	-
9.	Bintulu	-	Pelabuhan Bintulu	Bintulu Airport
10.	Miri	Immigration Post Bario ICQS Sungai Tujuh	Pelabuhan Miri	Miri Airport Mulu Airport
11.	Limbang	ICQS Tedungan ICQS Padaruan ICQS Mangkalap ICQS Merapok Immigration Post Ba'kelalan	Dermaga Limbang Dermaga Lawas Dermaga Sundar	Limbang Airport Lawas Airport
Total		14	10	7

Source: Lord & Chang (2019) and GOF Sarawak (2020)

There are 32 villages in Sarawak that are linked to 55 villages in the area via 50 routes in West Kalimantan. Ten villages in Sarawak and 16 villages in West Kalimantan have recently consented to serve as inter-state border crossing stations (known as *Pos Lintas Batas*). The 16 cross-border stations serve as entrance and departure points for border areas of Sarawak and West Kalimantan (Faisal Karim, 2015). Ibans, which is the largest ethnic group in the state of Sarawak, reside at the hilly-forested regions at this section of the border. In contrast, across the border of the province of West Kalimantan, the Ibans constitute a small minority, primarily residing in five sub-districts along the border (Eilenberg & Wedley, 2009).

The economic basis of people in rural regions is essentially according to their way of living in terms of agriculture and forestry, which is mostly constituted of paddy cultivation in the hill regions (Eilenberg, 2011). Dayak (Iban) people regularly cross the border in both directions for trade. Most border crossing is on foot and occasionally, motorbike. Villages located along the Sarawak-Kalimantan borders have been frequently obscured due to their geographical remoteness and limited access to development facilities and amenities (Sulehan et al., 2013).

The differences between the two countries (borderlands) are viewed as related to the physical and economic conditions, thus looking at spatial context in exploring human (in)security is important; different country/area facing different socioeconomic and security issues. For example, common problems of borderlands, especially in Indonesia (West Kalimantan), are accessibility (isolation), facilities, infrastructures, transportation and telecommunication. Compared to the Malaysian (Sarawak) side, the border areas are much better equipped by roads (transportation and accessibility), electricity, job opportunities, and access to health treatment. Nevertheless, some areas

are not (See Table 1.3). Thus, many Indonesians prefer to cross the border, mainly for

economic purposes (Muazir & Hsieh, 2013).

Table 1.3   Borderland profile

Sarawak and West Kalimantan Borderland Profile			
Regency/division	**Sarawak**		**West Kalimantan**
District	12		5
Sub-district	40		14
	26		174
Regency/division/district that are connected	**Division**	**District**	**Regency**	**District**
	Kuching	Bau, Lundu	Sambas	Paloh, Sajingan Besar
	Samarahan	Serian	Bengkayang	Jagoi Babang, Siding
	Sri Aman	Sri Aman, Lubok Antu	Sanggau	Entikong, Sengkayam
	Kapit	Kapit, Belaga, Song	Sintang	Ketungan Hulu, Ketungan Tengah
			Kapuas Hulu	Putussibau, Kedamin, Puring Kencana, Empanang, Badau, Batang Lupar, Embaloh Hulu
The total area of districts (square kilometres)	Covering an area of 124,449.51 square kilometres Covering nearly 37.5% of the country's landmass		Covering an area of 146,807 square kilometres (nearly 8% of the country's total landmass)
Topographic conditions	Sarawak is divided into three regions: coastal lowlands comprising peat swamp, narrow deltaic and alluvial plains, a large region of undulating hills ranging to about 300 metres and the mountain highlands extending to the Kalimantan border.		Mostly plain land over 200 metres above sea level with challenging terrain conditions, many watersheds, only a small part of highlands
Total population in districts	2, 907, 500 (2020)		4,395,326 (2010)
General livelihood and economy	Agriculture, forestry, livestock fishing, trade, manufacturing, retail		Agriculture, fishery, trade activities, retail, labourer natural resources dependency (forestry)
Infrastructure conditions	Mostly has been able to meet the level of consumption/need even there are some village/rural areas road has not been well maintained, poor linkages because of geographical condition.		Mostly limited, with low accessibility and isolated in facilities, infrastructure and transportation and telecommunication

Sources: Muazir and Hsieh (2013), Lord and Chang (2019), The Official Portal of Sarawak Government (2021).

Before the existence of border formation surrounding Malaysia, smuggling was considered as a socio-cultural and economic activity permeable among people of borderland areas. Smuggling activities from West Kalimantan (Sambas) to Sarawak were already taking place in the 1950s, mainly illegal rubber and timber sales. Rubber sheets were transported by foot on *rat trails* from Sambas leading to Serikin or Biawak (Sarawak). People living closer to the border were involved in timber smuggling. Nevertheless, the smuggling activities declined during and after the *Konfrontasi* period in the 1960s. The border areas were heavily patrolled on both sides, and many smugglers were arrested (Ishikawa, 2010, p.83). Since the formation of Malaysia, cross-border trade between two countries has become illegal and called smuggling. Hence, the border becomes a place where the interaction between both sides become complex.

More recently, there was a tendency for the states to perceive border areas as 'problematic' because international borders, especially between less developed and more developed regions, are often regarded as gateways and homes to migrant populations and cross-border crimes and, most likely, illegal entries (Muazir & Hsieh, 2013; Jalli & Sualman, 2020). With the establishment of the ICQS checkpoint (as an official border crossing) and border post, the authorities can keep track of the back-and-forth movement between Sarawak and Kalimantan. Nevertheless, many movements are not reported with the existence of *rat trails* as illegal entry (Bala, 2002; First Infantry Division Sarawak, personal communication, January 13, 2020).

With the long and complex borders of the states, this situation is particularly challenging to safeguard the security of the borderland communities along with Sarawak (Malaysia), near the Kalimantan (Indonesia) land border. The proximity and porous border between the two countries have allowed the trans-border movement of