



Wendy Mee

# Cross-border Mobility

Women, Work and Malay Identity  
in Indonesia

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

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## Cross-border Mobility

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*Women, Work, and Malay Identity in Indonesia*

*Wendy Mee*

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This book is dedicated to my former PhD supervisor and mentor,  
the late Professor Joel S. Kahn

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# 1 Women, Mobility, and Malayness at the Border

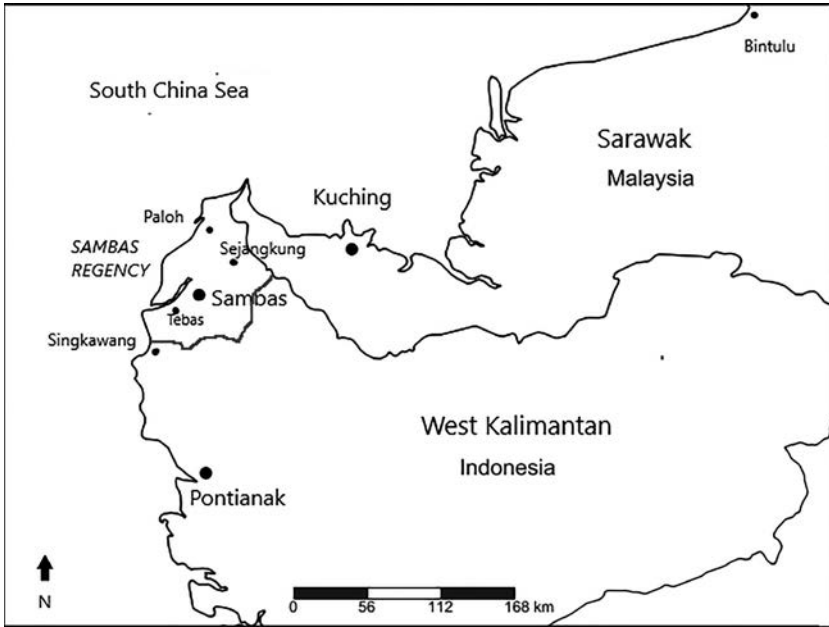
The border zones of Indonesian Borneo are undergoing a profound and relentless transformation. This 2000-kilometre border with East Malaysia may not attract the same attention as the borders of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore ‘growth triangle’, or those of the Upper Mekong ‘economic quadrangle’, yet it experiences similar processes of redefining the geography and political economy of borders. Over the past 20 years, the demilitarisation of Indonesia’s territorial border with East Malaysia and the politics of decentralisation have intersected with processes of rural livelihood diversification and socio-political aspirations of ‘development’ in ways that defy a single logic or rationality. In the border regencies of West Kalimantan, contested socioeconomic trajectories jostle to re-make the built, social, and natural environments. There is a palpable dynamism to these changes and the tensions they generate, as I observed in Sambas, one of the five border regencies in West Kalimantan (Image 1.1). Here, new roads cut through a landscape increasingly marked by swathes of oil palm. The town of Sambas encroaches on former rice fields, which now accommodate new housing estates and government buildings. Recent commercial and riverside developments give Sambas a metropolitan feel, while an historic wooden bridge has been replaced by one made of functional concrete and steel. On my first visit in 2007, a young tertiary-educated Sambas Malay woman described Sambas as a ‘cowboy town’—wild and undeveloped. By 2015, this same woman’s sister-in-law was pointing to a new hotel as evidence that Sambas was now *sudah maju* (‘developed’). Socioeconomic differences have also become more apparent as people pursue diverse opportunities through education, cultural resurgence, cross-border work, and professional employment.

This backdrop of change lies at the very core of this study. The hopeful narratives of socioeconomic improvement recounted by the Sambas Malay women featured in this book are simultaneously framed by perceptions of economic disadvantage and opportunity, political marginality and empowerment, and cultural peripherality and renaissance. Together, the possibility of betterment and awareness of marginalisation intertwine to shape Sambas Malay women’s desire for, and the direction of, work-related mobility. While sentiments of political and socioeconomic marginalisation are not uncommon in Indonesia (Haug, Rössler, and Grumblyes, 2016), local circumstances

give rise to distinct perceptions of marginalisation and specific mechanisms of redress.<sup>1</sup> In Sambas, the proximity to the territorial border with East Malaysia is pivotal to local understandings of marginality as well as to the designation of pathways through which this marginality can be overcome. In this study there is a strong temporal dimension to mobility—one that recalls Doreen Massey's (2013) 'progressive concept of place': living in a border zone influences women's aspirations of socioeconomic mobility. For some, proximity to the territorial border facilitated their ambitions for socioeconomic mobility through international labour migration; for others, the territorial border was viewed as an opportunity to capitalise on their proximity to Malaysian consumers. Socioeconomic mobility also entailed traversing a number of less tangible borders—of political empowerment, cultural recognition, education, and skills development, for example—which were strongly associated with the marginality of living at the border. How individual women responded to the socioeconomic opportunities associated with their border-zone location was a feature of their pragmatic, work-related orientations, which were derived from their membership in social groups, socioeconomic activities, and border imaginaries. The concept 'borderscope' is used in this book to encapsulate women's orientation to mobility as it relates to their border location, socioeconomic situation, and the work-related options available to them. Discussion of women's borderscopes is not intended to focus our attention on the study of the territorial border as such. Instead, as discussed below, 'borderscope' is used primarily as an analytical device for the exploration of the ethnocultural effects of women's socioeconomic mobility in the context of a border zone.

In this study, the interplay of mobility and identity is ever present. Irrespective of the scope and direction of their socioeconomic ambitions, women's mobility is shown to have consequences that surpass the personal to condition the practice of, and meanings associated with, Sambas Malay culture and identity. While the significance of men's mobility to the constitution of the societies and people later identified as 'Malay' is well-documented, little attention has been paid to the consequences of women's mobility. This book stands as a contribution to the counterbalancing of this bias, through

1 Such perceptions result from people's routine experience of social inequality as well as the political construction of specific regions as 'peripheral' or 'backward', which are derived from colonial cartographies of 'Inner' and 'Outer Islands', and New Order classifications of marginality (Haug, Rössler, and Grumbles, 2016). Sentiments of neglect and disempowerment differ across Indonesia. There are, for example, distinctions in the expression of peripherality in upland locations (Grumbles, 2016; Li, 1999, 2014a; Tsing, 1993) compared to those resulting from demographic marginalisation (Long, 2016).

**Image 1.1 Map of Sambas Regency**

a study of the ethnocultural consequences of the socioeconomic mobility of Malay women from an Indonesian border zone.

## Mobility and Malayness

The central argument in this study is that, in the current era, women reproduce and create 'Malayness' through their mobility as migrant workers, translocal cultural producers, and agents of socioeconomic development.<sup>2</sup> My interest in the ethnocultural effects of women's mobility arose from

2 This analysis of the cultural effects of women's work-related mobility is framed in terms of women's constitution of Sambas 'Malayness', not as a study of who or what constitutes a Sambas Malay (see also, Milner, 2008, p. 16; Barnard, 2003). As Barnard and Maier (2004, p. ix) note, the words 'Melayu, Malay, Maleis' reference 'a confusing variety of configurations of human beings, locations, languages, customs, states, and objects' (see also, Vickers 2004, p. 27; Milner, 2008, pp. 9-10). As an ethnicity, 'Malay' is also a relatively new, modern form of identity—one that has hardened over time in response to colonial administrations, processes of ethnic nationalism, and nineteenth-century European classificatory systems (Alatas, 1977; Hirschman, 1986; Kahn, 1993; Milner, 1995, 2008; Reid, 2001, 2013; Shamsul, 2004; van der Putten, 2011; Nagata, 2011).

conversations with a wide range of Sambas Malay men and women about contemporary Sambas Malay identity processes. Here, I was struck by the degree to which Sambas Malay women were active in areas that had significant ramifications on the (re)creation of Sambas Malayness, even though they were rarely acknowledged as *budayawan* ('cultural specialists/writers') or *tokoh budaya* ('respected cultural experts')—designations that are typically used to refer to men in Sambas. Further evident was the degree to which Sambas Malay women's preferences, criteria of judgement, and orientation towards ethnocultural identifications and practices were shaped by their translocal encounters, including those associated with cross-border work, training and education, and cultural display. Persons, places, and practices deemed 'Sambas Malay' were continually reworked through women's engagement with 'wider systems of many beyonds'—as a consequence of women's mobility (Pigg, 1996, p. 192; Tsing, 1993).

The significance of men's mobility to the constitution of Malayness is well-documented in historical studies of Malay societies. Historians have long tethered the mobility of Muslim Malay-speaking traders and the peregrination of rulers and Muslim scholars to the emergence of people and polities that later came to be identified as Malay (Barnard, 2003; Andaya, 2008; Reid, 2001, 2013; Harper and Amrith, 2014; Ho, 2013; Mandal, 2012; Sutherland, 2004; Warren, 1981). In contrast, little attention has been given to the significance of women's mobility in the construction of Malayness. Even when Malay women are at times depicted as the mechanism through which non-Malay migrants are assimilated into Malay communities, it is surprising how the cultural mechanisms 'at the heart of this incorporative process' (Carsten, 1997, p. 4)—which enable households and communities to absorb outsiders—go largely unremarked. This stands in stark contrast to the scholarly celebration of male traders, Muslim scholars, and the openness of rulers in the construction of Malay polities.

In seeking to explain the 'general silence' about women's role in the development of Malay societies, Watson Andaya (2007, p. 114) argues that a reliance on classical Malay texts, such as *hikayat* ('historical epics') and *syair* ('poetry'), is partly to blame.<sup>3</sup> Such texts, she notes, focus on women's

3 The consignment of women to the margins of history is a blind spot in the historical study of Southeast Asian societies, according to Watson Andaya (2007). James Warren (1990, p. 162) makes a similar point, arguing that historians have ignored women and gender in their studies of Southeast Asians' working-class lives, patterns of social mobility, migration, and urban history (see also, Rimmer and Allen, 1990). One notable exception is the study of prostitution and concubinage. In the case of prostitution, extensive colonial records were kept as part of managing the sexual and economic health of the colony (Manderson, 1997; Warren, 1990), thus

reproductive role, particularly as it relates to kinship ties and genealogies within ruling and otherwise powerful households (see also, Andaya, 2008; Hashim, Tahir, Jalaluddin, and Mohamad, 2012).<sup>4</sup> Classical Malay texts do document the reign of several sovereign queens (Reid, 1988), as well as their support of Islamic scholarship (Hijjas, 2010). There are also representations in these writings of the queens and women of Malay courts as the ‘power behind the throne’ (Cheah, 1993). However, in general, these texts suggest a significant ‘trade in women’ (Hashim *et al.*, 2012, p. 35) and provide only minimal insight into women’s everyday involvement in trade and economic relations, political affairs, and Islam during the development of Malay society. This invisibility of women is echoed in studies of their roles as Malay cultural producers, including as writers of Malay-language literature. Malay women are more likely to be represented as the objects of instruction—as in the case of Islamic treatises and poetry written by men to teach the ideal behaviour of Muslim women—than the writers of such tracts (Hijjas, 2010; 2013).<sup>5</sup> Mulaika Hijjas (2010) warns that the absence of historical documents recording Malay women’s cultural outputs may reveal more about the attitude of colonial officers and chroniclers than about women’s actual involvement in cultural production. One example is the belated and rather generic reference found in the colonial record about Palembang women’s production of the culturally significant and expensive textile *songket*. Uchino (2005, p. 208) attributes this oversight to Dutch officers’ focus on commodities such as tin, pepper, and forest products (for similar observations on British Malaya, see Crinis, 2005, p. 25).

providing some data on the mobility of women. Systematic records of concubines were not kept, but we can assume that a not insignificant number of women were involved in this ‘dominant [colonial] domestic arrangement’ (Stoler, 1989, p. 637).

4 There is also some evidence that even this limited significance given to women, on the basis of their high-status lineage, declined over time as increasing attention was given to patrilineal relations. For example, the two royal genealogies of Sambas demonstrate how references to the mother of Raden Sulaiman, later the first Muslim sultan of Sambas, became less important as a marker of status over time. In the first genealogy of the Sambas sultanate, *Asal Raja-Raja Sambas* [The origins of the rulers of Sambas], written around 1795, reference to the mother of Raden Sulaiman, Mas Ayu Bungsu, confers prestige and legitimacy on Raden Sulaiman’s claims to the throne, since she was the daughter of the former non-Muslim local ruler. In the second genealogy, dating from 1903, on the other hand, the maternal lineage is given little significance. Instead, in the *Silsilah Kerajaan Sambas* [Genealogy of the Kingdom of Sambas] the emphasis is on the royal family’s patrilineal ties to Islam and the royal family of Brunei (and through them the Prophet Muhammed) (Musa, 2003, pp. 126, 128). See also, Schulze (1991).

5 Watson Andaya (2013, p. 154) regards Mulaika Hijjas’ (2011) study of the romantic poetic epics composed by women in the court of Penyengat as a significant feminist contribution to the study of Malay literature.

The preoccupation with men's contributions to the development and character of Malay societies is also a feature of Sambas oral history. This is evident in a recent account of the history of the village of Sekuduk, located on a tributary of the Sambas River. Locals recount the founding of the village by the shipowner and trader Datuk Awang, who arrived by sailboat with his wife Datuk Kanian in the late eighteenth century (Maulana and Irawan, 2009). Datuk Awang and his sons made their livelihood as shipowners and traders sailing to ports in Trengganu, Sarawak, and Singapore. Within two generations, at least ten of Datuk Awang's male descendants had made the pilgrimage to Mecca—the first in Sekuduk to do so. Locals recount with pride that a later male descendant also lived in Mecca for seven years as the student of Ahmad Khatib Sambas (1802-1878), the Sambas-born founder of the Sufi order or *tarekat* Qadriyah-Naqsybandiyah (Maulana and Irawan, 2009). If the wives and daughters of this Sekuduk family were successful traders or otherwise significant to the consolidation of Muslim-Malay identities in Sambas, no surviving oral history records it. The written record also portrays Sambas Malay women as profoundly lacking independent mobility. Although Sambas Malay women are documented as migrating to the coastal areas of northwest Sarawak in the late 1800s, these were family-based migrations funded by local Malay *nakhoda* (independent shipowner-traders) who were interested in establishing coconut plantation, timber-logging, and boat-building industries (Ishikawa, 2010).

The inadequacy of focusing on the mobility of men in the development of Malay societies to the exclusion of women is captured in the image featured on the front cover of this book. This is a photograph taken in Tanjung Bugis in the town of Sambas, featuring a shop that sells second-hand clothes and other textiles smuggled over the border from Sarawak and Singapore. The name Tanjung Bugis ('Bugis Point') suggests that the area was originally settled by Muslim migrants from the island of Sulawesi. On close inspection, the shop is recognisable as a former *surau* ('prayer house'). The glass in the upper windows may be partly broken, but Arabic script in gold is still discernible. This repurposed prayer house in a neighbourhood established by Bugis migrants repeats the association between trade, migration, and Islam in the development of 'Malay' societies, but with one significant difference: the independent Malay traders who dominate the sale of second-hand clothing and textiles in Sambas are female. Not simply the wives of independent traders or the anonymous mechanism through which male migrants are absorbed into local communities, these cross-border traders—together with the other women described in this book—contest the omission of women's mobility in studies of the construction of Malayness. As shown in this study,



Malay women's mobility is a generative cultural force with broad relevance to the definition and practice of Sambas Malay culture and identity.

The disproportionate concentration on male mobility at the expense of female mobility has left half the story untold. This book represents a move towards redressing this imbalance by attending to the ethnocultural effects of Sambas Malay women's work-related mobility. In so doing, this research opens new ground in the discussion of Indonesian women's socioeconomic mobility more broadly. It was only in the 1980s that scholarship on Indonesia began to focus on women's mobility and question whether the typical understanding that 'women remained behind or went as an accompanying wife' (Lenz, 2005, p. 246) was the entire story.<sup>6</sup> There is now an impressive body of literature on the constraints, conditions, and opportunities associated with women's gendered mobility. Indeed, women's mobility is one of the most investigated fields of contemporary Indonesian scholarship. Despite this attention, however, there is still little discussion of the consequences of women's mobility for the construction of localised ethnocultural identities (such as their Balineseness, Sundaneseness, or Malayness).

### Indonesian women's mobility

The academic study of women's independent work and labour migration dates from the mid-1980s. This era saw new scholarship on women as traders and informal sector workers (Alexander, 1998; Murray, 1991) and as industrial workers in Indonesia's expanding export-oriented manufacturing sector (Florey and Healey, 2002; Grijns, Smyth, Van Celzen, Machfud, and Sayago, 1994; Mather, 1983; Silvey, 2000; Wolf, 1992). By the late 1990s, research on women's working lives incorporated studies of them as members of Indonesia's middle classes (Brenner, 1998; Nilan and Utari, 2008; Sen, 1998).<sup>7</sup>

6 In a review of the demographic changes in Sumatra from the 1930s to the early 1960s, William Withington (1967, p. 156) noted that Minangkabau labour migration involved 'large numbers of men and not a few women'. Drawing on census data for Jakarta, Withington observed that West Sumatra migrants have the highest sex ratio of any group coming from an area outside Java (with 782 women to 1000 men), and on this basis argued 'that the thesis of a predominantly male migration from West Sumatra has been overemphasised in the past' (Withington, 1967, p. 157).

7 Amongst the groundswell of studies on women, work, and mobility in Indonesia, few address their socioeconomic status and political influence amongst Indonesian Malays. More frequent are studies of the matrilineal Minangkabau and the Javanese. Kerlogue (2000, p. 336) speculates that one reason for this was Dutch colonial anthropologists' interest in exploring groups with cultures that were considered more distinctive, in contrast to the cultural 'melange' typical of Malay societies.

Feminist scholarship on Indonesian women's work and labour mobility experienced a further development in response to the rapid feminisation of international labour migration experienced in Indonesia from the 1990s. This is reflected in the burgeoning scholarship on women's transnational labour mobility, particularly that associated with domestic and care work.

Studies of female transnational labour migration document the forces and infrastructures that sustain the feminisation of Indonesian labour migration, such as the modes and brokerage of regular and irregular labour recruitment, and the political economy of international migration, including international legal frameworks and bilateral agreements (Chin, 1998; Ford and Lyons, 2011; Ford, Lyons, and van Schendel, 2012; Kassim, 1997; Lindquist, 2017; Rudnycky, 2004). This scholarship also provides important insights into how women interpret the conditions of, and seek to exercise agency over, their migration experiences, including responses to the abuse and exploitation of labour migrants, the negotiation of family relations, and the transnationalisation of discourses and activism on human trafficking and human and labour rights (Abdul Rahman, 2005; Butt, Beazley, and Ball, 2017; Hidayah, 2018; Khoo and Yeoh, 2018; Rahman, 2009; Rother, 2017; Silvey, 2006). In relation to cultural matters, these analyses typically move from a discussion of the local socio-cultural gender relations that inform women's negotiation of migration and remittance practices (Chan, 2017; Elmhirst, 2000; Silvey and Elmhirst, 2003; Wolf, 1992) to questions of nationality, as the migrant's national identity is 'thickened' (Loveband, 2004)—or becomes preminent—within transnational migration processes of recruitment and employment. While there is some discussion of the relationship between work-related mobility and women's national and religious identities (Constable, 2010; Loveband, 2004; Silvey, 2006, 2007), analyses of the cultural dimensions of women's mobility tend to concentrate on the subject of the migrant herself (Warouw, 2008; Williams, 2007).<sup>8</sup> This includes issues such as: the migrant's changing reputation in the eyes of her community (Bennett, 2008; Idrus, 2008); labour migration as an aspect of young women's transition to adulthood (Chan, 2017; Naafs, 2012); coping strategies (Prusinski, 2016); and the acquisition of new dispositions (Mee, 2015). Bypassed in all of these discussions is the examination of the consequences of women's labour mobility for the broader cultural identifications and practices of the local ethnocultural community to which the women belong. This issue is explored in the current study, which investigates the wider ripple-effects of Sambas

8 For a discussion of the relationship between migration and religiosity in Asia more generally, see Brown and Yeoh, 2018.

Malay women's labour migration and other forms of socioeconomic mobility on the practices, values, and cultural elements identified as 'Sambas Malay'.

Another flourishing area of scholarship in the past two decades concerns the political mobility of Indonesian women. Feminist scholarship has produced significant research on the topic of Indonesian women's political agency and how it is changing with increasing social and economic mobility. For example, a number of studies have highlighted women's contributions to feminist, labour, Independence, and nationalist movements in Indonesia (Blackburn, 2004; Budianta, 2002, 2003; Ford, 2008; Taylor, 1997). Other studies have focused on the role of middle-class Muslim women in shaping Islamic practices (Gede, 2004) and education (Smith and Woodward, 2014), their involvement in religious, secular, and political organisations (Blackburn, Smith, and Syamsiyatun, 2008; Brenner, 2005; Robinson, 2009; White and Anshor, 2008), as well as the effects of these in terms of women's own subjectivities as Muslims, feminists, and/or cosmopolitans (Rinaldo, 2013; Robinson, 2008). A number of studies focus on how women's agency shapes state-civil relations (through legislation, for example), the composition of political parties, and the direction of social development projects (Dewi, 2015; Sakai, 2010). However, as with the scholarly discussion about women's labour mobility, only limited consideration has been given to the implications of women's political mobility for localised ethnocultural forms of identification. Indeed, the discussion tends to be framed by an implicit methodological nationalism (Beck and Sznaider, 2006), one that situates the nation-state as the most relevant crucible in which to evaluate the intersection of women's socioeconomic and political aspirations, constructions of gender, and (trans)national cultural flows such as religion, feminism, human rights, and development. In later chapters, I explore the ethnocultural effects that educated and professional Sambas Malay women desire to exert on local Sambas Malay society as a result of their engagement with, and translation of, ideas related to political reform, Islam, education, and development. Apparent in this later discussion is the degree to which women's national, professional, and religious commitments do not stand apart from or transcend their identification as Sambas Malay and their investment in Sambas Malay society.

There is one area of scholarship in which localised forms of identity *do* constitute the principal setting: the literature on decentralisation and the introduction of far-reaching regional autonomy legislation in the post-New Order era. Regional autonomy has transformed the political and cultural landscape of Indonesia; it was also implicated in changes to the boundaries and political and demographic profiles of the Sambas Regency (see

Chapter Two). As many studies attest, such regional autonomy has fuelled often-violent expressions of ethno-territorial claims and cultural identity politics (Davidson, 2009; van Klinken, 2007). Much of this scholarship draws attention to the public role that men have assumed as local power brokers and traditional leaders. From this perspective, regional autonomy is shown as posing specific threats to women, whose agency may be limited by patriarchal communal structures and unequal gender norms (see, for example, Setyawati, 2008, p. 71; Yuliani, 2010). However, power is not the monopoly of men, nor are women only the victims of power. We should therefore ask not only how Indonesian women negotiate the local cultural-political transition associated with regional autonomy, but also how they are implicated in the production of such processes. These are questions Lugina Setyawati (2008) addresses in her discussion of the Association of Concerned Riau Malay Women. Established in 2003 in Pekanbaru and with a membership comprised primarily of Malay women from academia and government institutions, this elite women's organisation put its weight behind initiatives designed to preserve and 'perfect' the Malay *adat*.<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Long (2013, pp. 11-16) provides a further example in the poetess and mayor of Tanjung Pinang (Riau Island Province) Suryatati Abdul Manan, whose poetry directly addresses the question of what it means to be Malay in the context of heightened cultural politics and anxieties associated with Malay identity.<sup>10</sup> Long (2013, p. 67) also documents the struggle of Maznah, an elderly Malay woman, to have her manuscript on the history on the Galang River published: while Maznah knew herself to be a historian and guardian of spiritually-charged knowledge, her manuscript was dismissed by the Department of Tourism—as if an old commoner housewife could know anything!

The present study combines an interest in the cultural politics of decentralisation with the ethnocultural effect of Indonesian women's work-related mobility to evaluate how elite and non-elite Sambas Malay women contribute to the production of Sambas Malay cultural and identity processes. In the

9 *Adat* or *adat-istiadat* are general terms referring to customary practices and social norms that are considered 'traditional', those bequeathed by *nenek-moyang* ('ancestors'). Though the word *adat* comes from Arabic, it is typically used to refer to customs that are particular (if not unique) to local ethnocultural groups, not those that are generally shared by Muslims. During the Dutch colonial period, legal scholars developed a complex set of debates on *adat* laws and rights that continue to influence contemporary indigenous movements in Indonesia (see Arizona and Cahyadi, 2013, pp. 46-51).

10 Suryatati Abdul Manan has also been a controversial figure, with critics disputing her Malay identity because she was adopted by Malay parents. However, her position as a *Malay* mayor underlines the fluidity and openness of Malay identity, which does not rest on blood or biological ties but on the adoption of Islam and Malay habits.

context of the new regency of Sambas (further discussed in Chapter Two), this book examines how women, in their capacity as migrant workers, traders, craftswomen, activists, and civil servants, (re)constitute Malayness in Sambas. The book contributes a more gender-balanced analysis of the effects of socioeconomic mobility for ethnocultural continuity and change—a question seldom asked regarding Malay women’s mobility in the past, or indeed of Indonesian women’s mobility more generally. Our understanding of the ethnocultural effects of Indonesian women’s mobility is further deepened by considering women’s mobility within a border zone. Socioeconomic mobility takes on special significance in a nation’s periphery, one that is best captured by applying a border optic.

### Women’s borderscopes of mobility

It was the prominence of the territorial border in Sambas Malay women’s narratives of mobility that initially directed me to consider the intersection of mobility and identity processes at the edge of the nation. Women’s location within a border zone had direct consequences on women’s mobility and thus on the resulting identity processes. The significance of this geo-political context led me to employ a ‘border lens’, an approach that not only aligns with the geography of Sambas but also provides a useful conceptual device for understanding Sambas Malay women’s socioeconomic mobility in general as ‘border crossing’.<sup>11</sup> Sensitivity to place need not return us to a notion of fixed spaces inhabited by bounded communities. Instead, it can provide a topography for the movement of peoples, cultures, and trade and the resulting fluidity and relational quality of cultural, community, and political categories (Sillander, 2016). Given Sambas’ location on an international border, such considerations lead us to the field of border studies, an arena that views borderlands as an analytically- and empirically-rich terrain for

11 Other studies of Southeast Asia advocate different conceptual lenses to analyse spatial or geographical elements. For example, in relation to the history of the seafaring migration and trade that is characteristic of archipelagic Southeast Asia, Eric Tagliacozzo (2009, p. 99) calls us to study the region in ‘oceanic terms’. Adrian Vickers (2004) deploys the concept of the ‘pasisir’ to situate the study of Malay language, literature, and identity in a trans-archipelagic field, while others have advanced concepts like ‘Zomia’ (Scott, 2009; van Schendel, 2002) and ‘convergence zones’ (Tenzin, 2017) as a way to challenge state-centric peripheralisation of borders and provide alternative readings of Asian social formations. Closer to home, in Kalimantan, Sillander (2016, p. 106) makes the case that collective identifications are acutely attached to locality; for example, ‘a typical Borneo pattern’ is for the names of ethnic groups to be derived from toponyms or place names—as is also the case with the category ‘Sambas Malay’.

the study of the flow of people, culture, and capital (Wastl-Walter, 2012; Wilson and Donnan, 2012).

Two broad sets of research interests can be identified in the field of border studies.<sup>12</sup> The first, grounded in a critical political geography, focuses on the proliferation of borders, which are understood as mechanisms of economic and political control, exclusion, and inclusion (Jones and Johnson, 2014; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007).<sup>13</sup> The second takes its lead from Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel's seminal paper 'Towards a Comparative History of Borderlands' (1997), placing the border at the centre of analyses of contemporary social processes in order to investigate the social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics that operate within regional fields. This second approach combines an interest in the mobility of people, capital, and goods with a recognition of the fluidity of identity politics and the mutability and porosity of territorial borders. Special significance is given to the perspectives of the residents of border zones in order to understand borders and borderlands as 'lived space *challenged and inspired* by international boundaries' (Dean, 2012, p. 222, emphasis in the original). Not viewing them as lived spaces, Dean (2012) continues, risks reproducing the dominant discourses that naturalise nation-state borders (van Schendel and de Maaker, 2014, p. 4). This book sits within this latter, broadly ethnographic study of people's cognitive and imaginative construction of borders, and the values they attach to these understandings.

One aspect of this is an interest in how changing political and economic relations give rise to new cross-border structures and meanings related to borders. In general, my research is informed by other Southeast Asian studies that explore the nature of borderlanders' livelihoods (Huijsmans, 2019; Ishikawa, 2012; Schoenberger and Turner, 2008; Singh, 2017; Sturgeon, 2012; Taylor, 2007, 2016; Walker, 1999) and consider the dispositions and orientations of borderland inhabitants (Chou, 2006; Eilenberg, 2012c, 2014; Ford and Lyons, 2011, 2012; Gaber, 2018; Kalir and Sur, 2012; Lindquist, 2009).

12 Both fields share a rejection of state-centrism and territorialist epistemology (Brenner, 1999), subscribing to a constructivist conceptualisation of borders as 'spatialised social relations' (van Schendel, 2004, p. 4) that are dynamic, unstable, and contested (Brambilla, 2015, p. 15).

13 For example, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013) argue that the proliferation of borders at all scales is designed to take advantage of the movement of people, capital, and goods. Such borders include not only traditional territorial borders, but the establishment of special economic zones, the borders between different labour regimes, and novel forms of political exclusion. Similarly, Jones and Johnson (2014) focus on the rescaling and expansion of border enforcement. Of particular note is how border enforcement no longer rests in the hands of state agents at the border, but now encompasses a variety of state and non-state actors who patrol the border within the state's territory (see Cooper, Perkins, and Rumford, 2014).

More specifically, this analysis is strongly aligned with studies of borders that share similar properties to those of the Sambas/Sarawak border. This is not the 'bloodied terrain of the borderlands' (Castañeda, 2007, p. xiv) associated with the *malquiladoras*/assembly plants along the US-Mexico border or the violent political intimidation of the India-Bangladesh border, for example. It is, instead, a 'low profile' territorial border (Singh, 2017, p. 117) marked by minimal inter-state conflict and permeable boundaries.<sup>14</sup> As such, the Sambas/Sarawak border provides relatively safe border-crossing for both people and goods, including forms of cross-border traffic that are, technically speaking, illegal, but which are facilitated and condoned by local norms, perceptions of neglect, and physical distance from the centre.

Much has been written about the sense of peripherality that is associated with residing in borderlands and frontiers. Li captures the essence of such feelings when she writes of Central Sulawesi highlanders: 'decades of neglect had made them sceptical that the roads, schools, and other benefits promised by government officials would actually be delivered' (2014a, p. 13). As she continues, such neglect does not mean that these regions are ignored: 'Frontiers are not only characterised by lack. They are simultaneously coveted places, envisaged by various actors as sites of potential' (Li, 2014a, p. 13). Similarly, Sambas residents complain that their needs have been ignored by the government, even though the region was long a focus of economic extraction for the central government, military, and related business cronies. As van Schendel and de Maaker note, borders are positioned as spaces of 'neglect, constraint, fear, opportunity and freedom' (2014, p. 5). In contexts of limited incorporation into the nation, border residents' 'licit' sources of authority emerge and strengthen as perceptions of marginalisation are drawn upon to justify formally illegal practices as 'just, reasonable or simply more profitable' (Bakker and Crain, 2012, p. 109). In turn, various state actors (military personnel and custom officers, for example) actively underwrite such licit practices in consideration of both local customs and self-interest.<sup>15</sup>

14 This is not to suggest that there has been no violence associated with this border. Chapter Two provides an account of violent episodes along the border in the 1960s, while the forced expulsion of Madurese from Sambas at the end of the 1990s can be viewed as a form of 'citizen borderwork' (Rumford, 2013) and the foundational moment of the new post-New Order Sambas Regency.

15 This is not necessarily an either/or situation, as borderlanders may move between compliance with state laws and subversion of state legitimacy. As Horstmann and Wadley aptly note, 'A good deal of the time, the good [border] citizen and the outlaw are one and same, sometimes at different times, sometimes simultaneously' (2006, p. 9). See also, Jones, 2018; Boyle and Rahman, 2018; and Sur, 2012 for a related discussion of entangled sovereignties on the India-Bangladesh border, which is characterised by far higher levels of state-sanctioned violence than the West Kalimantan-Sarawak border.

The presence of competing norms and alternative sources of authority at the border is linked to the recognition that ‘ways of imagining power and space’ at the border may ‘differ from “heartland” practise’ (van Schendel, 2004, p. 50). Michael Eilenberg (2012c, pp. 45-46), for example, borrows O.J. Martínez’s (1994) concept of a ‘borderlands milieu’ to characterise one such local imagining of space, that of the Batang Lupas Iban of the West Kalimantan/Sarawak border. For the Indonesians struggling to survive on Riau’s Batam Island, and who pin their hopes on successfully crossing to Singapore for work, this territorial border is charged with emotions not shared by Indonesians who reside elsewhere (Lindquist, 2009). In this study, I have found it productive to conceptualise women’s local perspectives on the territorial border in terms of ‘borderscopes’. The analysis of women’s borderscopes is critical to this study for two reasons. First, women’s borderscopes orient the direction of their cross-border mobility in important ways. Second, the work-related pathways and trajectories that are the consequence of women’s borderscopes result in women’s acquisition of new subjectivities, consolidation of specific ethnocultural social relations, and engagement with a range of cultural forms and practices identified as Sambas Malay. I argue that it is these outcomes that reveal how women’s mobility is integral to the wider processes constituting the category ‘Sambas Malay’.

The term ‘borderscope’ shares conceptual terrain with other non-positivist conceptualisations of the border, such as ‘borderscapes’—a term associated with the critical political geography of borders (see Brambilla, 2015; Perera, 2007; Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007). In contrast, I use the suffix ‘-scope’ to signal my primary interest in investigating how women construct and understand the borders that matter to them. As a noun, ‘scope’ indicates possibility, choice, and opportunity, as well as space, range, span, or reach; as a verb, it carries the additional meanings ‘to estimate’, ‘to plan’, ‘to assess’, and ‘to evaluate’. This cluster of meanings is remarkably apt for considering the contexts, conditions, and consequences of women’s socioeconomic mobility at the borderlands, encompassing the possibility, choices, and opportunities of women’s decision-making and agency in relation to mobility, while also acknowledging the likelihood of restrictions of circumstance and location to the span, range, and reach of their mobility. We are thus drawn to consider how women—within the constraints and circumstances of their lives—perceive, evaluate, and pursue pathways of mobility that entail a—at least metaphorical—crossing of the territorial border.

The concept of borderscope, therefore, does not discount the materiality of the territorial border for those who reside in its vicinity or the real



implications the border has for those who traverse it for employment and trade. 'Borderscope' is intended to signal how the notion of the border incorporates conceptualisations of broader economic, political, and cultural relations and ambitions. A critical aspect here is the temporal qualities attached to the territorial border, particularly how living near a border is associated with time lag, stagnant development, and backwardness. Women's borderscopes of mobility thus have specific temporal registers that reveal how geographical locations are 'bordered by both territory and time' (Hurd, Donnan, and Leutloff-Grandits, 2017, p. 1; see also Massey, 2013). In the imaginary of the border and its crossing, women's borderscopes are animated by the 'memories and narratives', 'hopes and fears that anchor' Sambas Malays to a given territory (Hurd, Donnan, and Leutloff-Grandits, 2017, p. 1). As residents of a border zone, women's borderscopes are grounded in a shared 'cultural landscape' (van Schendel, 2004, p. 3) of disadvantage. This is not to argue that women's responses are undifferentiated; indeed, how women operationalise this appreciation of their border-zone location is quite variable and results in a range of borderscopes that condition their mobility both imaginatively and physically.

This study documents three distinctive borderscopes of mobility pertaining to different social strata of Sambas Malay women: the 'territorial borderscope' of predominantly rural, working-class women; the 'borderscope of marginality' of educated, white-collar women; and the boundaries of a regional Sambas Malay culture—or 'translocal Malay borderscope'—defined by female cultural producers. As these categories demonstrate, Sambas Malay women reference a range of borders and mobility trajectories in their borderscopes of mobility, not all involving a crossing of the adjacent territorial border. From this perspective, women perform important and varied 'border work' in their designation of and engagement with the specific borders that they deem relevant to their socioeconomic aspirations. Such border work results in their (re)production of borders, both concrete and intangible, as objects that give shape and direction to socioeconomic mobility. Border work is therefore a constitutive process of women's borderscopes of mobility, one that is powerfully fashioned by women's individual social locations and forms of socioeconomic mobility. Women's border work, as an expression of their borderscopes, also provides a useful analytic perspective for investigating the ethnocultural effects of women's work-related mobility. This is evident in Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six, which examine the border work attending women's different borderscopes to highlight the consequences of their socioeconomic mobility for the (re)inscription of Sambas Malayness.

The multiplicity of borderscapes described in this study parallels the scholarly recognition that multiple borders exist at the border—what Rumford (2012) terms ‘multiperspectival borders’. Borders are not simply ‘historically variable geographical imaginations’ (Harper and Amrith, 2012, p. 1); instead, a number of different and competing values and meanings are attached to a border at any one time (Wilson and Donnan, 1998, pp. 21, 24). In addition, borders have long been recognised as gendered and generating different effects for women and men in terms of citizenship and migration status (Benhabib and Resnik, 2009; Donnan and Wilson, 1998; Gregorič Bon, 2017; Oso and Ribas Mateos, 2013; Stalford, Currie, and Velluti, 2009). Malini Sur (2012) compares how ‘ecologies of licitness’ pose disparate risks for female cross-border traders and male cross-border labourers on the India-Bangladesh border—a compelling example of how gendered constellations of power at the border differently enable and condition the mobility of women and men. Gender is not only a critical dimension in the study of borders, but also of mobility (Uteng, 2006). Gender-differentiated patterns of mobility are central to the reconstitution of gender relations, such as when women’s restricted spatial mobility reinforces ‘a home-bound femininity’ (Sheller, 2008, p. 285).<sup>16</sup> For this reason, this book describes how the gender norms that organise Sambas Malay women’s socio-spatial mobility operate in relation to the territorial border. We can see how the gendering of the border precedes women’s mobility when we consider the influence of variables such as a woman’s stage of life, the types of cross-border livelihoods available to women, and gender norms that condition women’s spatial mobility. Raghuram and Piper (2012, p. 530) observe that migrant women’s construal of borders accounts for some of the dynamism of borders. However, they also add, ‘it is not only women who move across borders, but also borders that move around women’ (2012, p. 544). This ‘movement’ of borders is certainly evident in Sambas, where in the past two decades both the characteristics of the border with Sarawak and the borders of the regency have changed (see Chapter Two). Viewed from this angle, the borderscapes of mobility detailed in this study represent women’s interpretation and negotiation of the gendered opportunities for mobility that they associate with a territorial border that is in flux.

16 Having said this, mobility and immobility are ambiguous markers of gender status. For example, immobility may be a cultural expression of political power (Waterson, 1993, p. 170). Further, mobility should not be celebrated as an expression of a woman’s capacity to determine the circumstances of her life: it may be forced, viewed with ambivalence, or generate anxiety (see, Lindquist, 2009).

## Outline of the book

The primary focus of this book is to provide an analysis of Sambas Malay women's desire and determination to pursue pathways of mobility that not only move beyond the perceived disadvantage and marginality of Sambas' borderlands, but also insert them in wider processes of identity construction that reinstate and reshape the category 'Sambas Malay'. Just as the directions of women's mobility are diverse, the cultural forces that arise from women's mobility and that are broadly relevant to the definition and practice of Sambas Malay culture and society are likewise diverse. An analysis framed in terms of women's borderscapes of mobility is therefore a means to examine the variegated ethnocultural effects of the work-related mobility of a range of Sambas Malay individuals who are active across a spectrum of productive activities.

The book is based on research conducted in Sambas beginning with a brief visit in late 2007. Most interviews and the main ethnographic observations occurred during two periods of fieldwork, each four months in length, in 2008 and 2009. Additional fieldnotes were gathered on shorter visits in 2010, 2012, and 2015, as well as during visits to Brunei in 2009 and to Sarawak in 2009 and 2015.<sup>17</sup> This seven- to eight-year period was a crucial time for political transitions in Indonesia, including the consolidation of the new regency of Sambas. Borders—both international and internal administrative—had a privileged place in these developments. Chapter Two charts the historical, political, and economic factors that have materially and discursively produced these borders. As will become apparent, there is an important relationship between fluctuating socioeconomic and political relations in Sambas and changes in the meanings attached to its boundaries. The border work of the Dutch colonial and later Republic of Indonesia governments have been pivotal for not only Sambas Malays' experiences of marginalisation, but also their attribution of significance and meaning to territorial and administrative borders. In this context, regional autonomy and the accompanying reimagining of borders act as potent influences on women's expectations and the directions of their mobility. Chapter Two surveys these and other important socioeconomic and political factors to provide a background for subsequent chapters' analysis of Sambas Malay women's mobility.

Against this backdrop, Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six consider the book's central research question: How does Sambas Malay women's mobility

17 Further details on the study's research methods and information on interviews conducted are provided in Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six.

reconstitute the practice of, and their identification with, Sambas Malay culture and identity? Each of these chapters focus on one of three borderscopes that orient specific categories of women's mobility: the territorial borderscope; the borderscope of marginality; and the translocal Malay borderscope. All three borderscopes represent significant employment or livelihood strategies as well as the socio-cultural orientations of three different categories of Sambas Malay women, namely, cross-border traders and labour migrants; professional, white collar workers; and cultural practitioners and entrepreneurs.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the territorial borderscope has risen in importance over the past three decades to become an important focal point for the mobility of rural and working-class Sambas Malay women. This borderscope channels women towards cross-border economic activities in response to both personal motivations and their families' socioeconomic status. Their mobility is shaped by family relations, labour histories, a range of labour migration agents, government institutions, and formal and informal border pathways. The cultural and identity implications of these women's mobility, as channelled by their borderscope, centre on specific effects for marriage and kinship—relations that are integral to Sambas Malay *adat* practices. The association between Sambas Malayness and rurality is also fortified when these women invest their cross-border earnings and remittances in village-based economic activities.

The significance of non-territorial borders, especially those that define Sambas as economically and politically marginalised, come to the fore in Chapters Four and Five. Sambas Malay women from a higher social class—a result of further education and professional occupations—are oriented toward crossing and challenging the borders that retard Sambas' socioeconomic and political advancement. While the territorial border remains a feature in these women's borderscope, it is predominantly viewed as a marker of socioeconomic disadvantage and the marginality that they associate with living at the periphery of the nation. It is this marginality, rather than the border as such, that they desire to 'cross'. Chapters Four and Five depict the reformist agendas of Sambas Malay public sector and NGO workers. Despite differences in their approaches to combating the disadvantages and marginality experienced by Sambas Malays, the work of both groups is oriented toward improving livelihoods, women's rights, and other economic and political measures. Apparent here is the extent to which these women exploit the mutability of conceptualisations of Sambas Malayness in line with their objectives and adjudication of what is best for Sambas Malays. The cultural and identity implications of their interventions

are evident in areas such as *adat*, Islam, livelihoods, and rurality, simultaneously displacing and reinstating the internal Sambas borders associated with the urban/rural and educated/less educated divides.

The translocal Malay borderscope explored in Chapter Six introduces female Sambas Malay cultural producers and entrepreneurs. These cultural producers exhibit an openness to adapting and modifying cultural practices as an expression of their belief in the perennial value of Sambas Malay culture. According to this borderscope, women's mobility is tethered to a sense of locality, descent or inheritance, but could extend to engage with other Indonesian regional and 'Malay' cultural forms and processes. For these women, the critical borders first delineate Sambas Malayness as an *adat budaya* ('regional traditional culture') within Indonesia and second, situate Sambas Malays within the borders of a Malay World. Both inter-regional and intra-Malay exchanges present opportunities for these women to review and modify their own cultural practices. Their translocal Malay mobility heightens their enthusiasm for a Sambas Malay cultural heritage and, paradoxically, motivates them to innovate 'traditional' practices. The analysis of women's participation in inter-regional and intra-Malay cultural exchanges also reveals the centrality of female cultural producers in the bordering practices that constitute and reconstitute the different scales of Malay cultural identification.

Chapter Seven returns to questions raised in the earlier discussion of mobility as gendered in order to consider some general observations on Sambas Malay women's gendered mobility. In general, my informants looked favourably upon the expanded opportunities and horizons that spatial mobility could bring and expressed pleasure in travel (see also, Carsten, 1998). This should not blind us to the fact that for some of these women, their experience of cross-border mobility was coloured by ambivalence and could lead to a rejection of return journeys. Furthermore, the transformative effects of women's independent mobility on normative gender roles could be relatively minor. In Chapter Seven, I reflect on the gender dynamics associated with women's mobility by considering three Sambas Malay cultural attributes: kinship, gender segregation, and what I term women's 'soft sequestration'. These normative gender relations, paradoxically, both enable and constrain women's mobility. Nevertheless, there is some indication that the gender norms governing women's physical mobility are loosening as their socioeconomic mobility deepens.

The concluding chapter describes some broader implications of the intersection of women's cross-border mobility and the constitution of Sambas Malayness. Importantly, the study offers a rejoinder to the historical

association between male mobility and the constitution of Malayness by documenting the ethnocultural effects of Sambas Malay women's contemporary mobility. Here, the study provides a range of voices from the periphery that are not often heard, particularly the voices of non-elite women whose aspirations and mobility contribute to Sambas Malay identity processes. The women in the study reveal a range of cultural identifications and levels of intentionality in these processes: some women's engagement with Malayness is best characterised as incidental, while others' involvement is conscious and directed at causing particular outcomes. Whether intended or unintended, the Malay women's mobility has consequences for an everyday or ordinary ethnicisation (Milner, 2008). In making this argument, this study also contributes to the revision—or recentring—of the border, in recognition of borders' generative and productive importance. Finally, the socioeconomic and cultural productivity of Sambas Malay women's borderscopes of mobility suggests that feelings of marginality cannot be taken as *prima facie* evidence of actual peripherality, given how women's sensibilities invigorate cultural innovation and economic change.