

IMAGINING NATIONALISM ACROSS BORDERS: The Malay Identity of Border Communities in the Batam Archipelago

Fauzi*

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN) Sultan Abdul Rahman, Kepulauan Riau, Indonesia

*Correspondence author: Email: fauziabufairuz@gmail.com; Tlp. +62 896-4778-5168

KEYWORD	ABSTRACT
Nationalism, Border communities, Malay identity, Transnationalism, Batam Archipelago	<p><i>This study examines the construction of nationalist identity among border communities in the Batam Archipelago, Indonesia, focusing on the role of transnational Malay identity in shaping national allegiance. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities, transnationalism, and cultural identity theory, this research investigates how border residents navigate their dual affiliations to the Indonesian state and the wider Malay world. Employing a qualitative-interpretive methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and secondary sources. The findings reveal an ambivalent form of nationalism in which Indonesian identity is co-constructed alongside a broader Malay consciousness. Cultural continuity, kinship networks, and economic interdependence with Malaysia and Singapore reinforce a transnational sense of belonging that transcends formal state borders. While the Indonesian state maintains symbolic and administrative authority in the region, everyday practices reflect a fluid, negotiated nationalism shaped by regional proximity and historical ties. This study contributes to the literature on border studies and nationalism by highlighting the complexities of identity formation in Southeast Asian maritime frontiers.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

In the era of global mobility and transnational networks, the notion of nationalism is increasingly contested, especially in border areas where the state, culture, and identity intersect in complex ways (Hale, 2020). This paper explores the construction of nationalist identity among the Malay communities living in the Batam Archipelago, one of Indonesia's foremost border zones adjacent to Singapore and Malaysia. The region, characterized by high levels of transnational interaction and cultural hybridity, offers a compelling site to analyze how national identity is imagined, negotiated, and practiced across borders.

Nationalism, often theorized as an imagined political community (Sears & Anderson, 1994), has traditionally been grounded in the boundaries of the nation-state, where the coherence between political sovereignty, cultural identity, and territorial control is assumed to be stable. However, this framework becomes increasingly insufficient when applied to border societies, particularly in Southeast Asia's maritime peripheries, where state presence is fragmented and often symbolic rather than substantive.

The Batam Archipelago serves as a paradigmatic case of such liminal geographies—regions that are geographically peripheral but culturally central to transnational Malay networks (Muhammad, 2023). Its proximity to Singapore and Malaysia renders Batam not merely a frontier but a dynamic

zone of interaction, where borders are traversed as much socially and economically as they are politically. Inhabitants of Batam sustain enduring cultural, familial, and commercial ties with neighbouring countries. These range from multilingual fluency and intermarriage to religious pilgrimages, festive rituals, and everyday economic transactions conducted in multiple currencies (Long, 2022).

In this context, national belonging is not exclusively informed by state institutions or the ideological apparatus of the nation-state. Rather, it emerges through everyday practices and social relations that tie Batam residents to both Indonesia and the broader Malay world. The result is a layered, negotiated nationalism—simultaneously situated within the Indonesian polity and diffused across a shared cultural imaginary that resists strict geopolitical boundaries.

While Indonesia formally claims the Batam Islands as part of its sovereign territory, the daily lives of its border inhabitants are deeply intertwined with Malaysia and Singapore. These cross-border engagements are not incidental but are rooted in a long-standing historical continuum of maritime and cultural exchange in the Malay world (Faturachman, 2018). Kinship networks extend across national lines, with many families maintaining ties that facilitate regular visits, cross-border marriages, and mutual economic support. Religious practices, linguistic similarities, and shared festive customs such as Eid celebrations further reinforce a regional cultural identity.

Beyond economic transactions, these interactions are embedded in everyday life—residents often seek medical care in Johor Bahru, send their children to schools in Singapore, or manage family-owned businesses operating in multiple countries (Karim, 2019). Such practices reflect a transnational mode of existence where national borders are administratively real but socially porous. In this context, nationalism is not singular or exclusive, but layered and negotiated. People live with a sense of dual affiliation: one grounded in their formal Indonesian citizenship, the other in their enduring sense of belonging to the wider Malay world.

As such, this paper investigates how nationalism is constructed in a space where the ideology of the nation-state coexists and competes with a transnational sense of ethnic belonging, offering insights into the fluid and hybrid nature of identity in Southeast Asia's maritime frontier (Disyacitta, 2019).

This study contributes to the growing literature on border studies, transnationalism, and Southeast Asian identity politics by focusing on the lived experiences of the Batam Malay community. Specifically, it addresses two key research questions: (1) How do border communities in the Batam Archipelago construct their nationalist identity? (2) What socio-cultural and economic-political instruments do these communities employ in the process of imagining nationalism?

Employing a qualitative-interpretive methodology, this research captures the voices and narratives of local residents whose identity negotiations reflect the broader tension between state-imposed national frameworks and everyday transnational realities. Through this analysis, the paper seeks to illuminate the ways in which Malay identity functions as both a cultural anchor and a transnational medium through which the people of Batam articulate their sense of national belonging.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in three interrelated theoretical frameworks that inform the analysis of nationalism and identity formation within borderland communities: (1) Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities, (2) transnationalism and border studies, and (3) cultural identity theory.

First, Benedict Anderson's (2006) seminal work *Imagined Communities* posits that the nation is

essentially an “imagined community” (Sears & Anderson, 1994). In this view, national identity is not a natural or innate characteristic but a socio-historical construct shaped through various symbolic and institutional instruments, such as mass media, education systems, and collectively disseminated historical narratives. Anderson emphasizes that members of a nation will never know most of their fellow citizens, yet they perceive themselves as part of the same community through a deep sense of solidarity and belonging (Bailey, 1984).

This theoretical lens provides a compelling basis for understanding how communities residing in archipelagic regions like Batam—geographically proximate to Singapore and Malaysia—imagine their national belonging. In Batam’s context, attachment to Indonesian national identity is not solely forged through the presence of state institutions like schools, government offices, or national symbols, but also through everyday practices that encompass language use, local culture, and collective memory—elements that often transcend the formal boundaries of the nation-state (Smith, 2015). Historical connectivity, ethnic kinship, and transnational economic practices shape how Batam residents interpret what it means to be “Indonesian,” even as their social and economic relations extend into other national entities across Southeast Asia (Escobar, 2016). Thus, nationalism in Batam emerges as a fluid and dynamic phenomenon, wherein national identity is continually negotiated through the interplay between locality and globality, center and periphery, and statehood and everyday life (Fanon, 2011).

Second, the frameworks of transnationalism and border studies offer a critical avenue to explore how state boundaries are not merely crossed but are simultaneously reconfigured through everyday practices. This approach challenges the notion of the nation-state as a closed and static entity and instead highlights how individuals and communities actively construct social, economic, and cultural networks that surpass formal territorial borders. In this regard, Blanc et al. (1994) advance the concept of transnational communities, which maintain dual or even multiple affiliations with more than one nation-state. They argue that identity, citizenship, and national belonging are not fixed but are instead fluid, dynamic, and often ambiguous—especially for individuals engaged in cross-border mobility.

This condition is especially pertinent in examining the socio-cultural dynamics of Batam, a strategically located Indonesian island near Singapore and Malaysia. Batam is not merely a geographic periphery of Indonesia, but a transnational social space where state borders are continually negotiated through its residents’ daily practices. Cross-border interactions such as commuting to Singapore for work, shopping in Johor Bahru, or investing across national lines are accompanied by familial ties and ongoing cultural exchanges. These practices render nationality not as a singular or absolute experience, but as overlapping and contextual (E.T. Hall, 1976). The identity of Batam’s inhabitants is shaped not only by Indonesian state policies and narratives, but also by broader social, cultural, and economic networks that traverse and rearticulate national boundaries. In this light, Batam exemplifies how borders are not merely lines on a map, but contested social terrains filled with tensions, negotiations, and new possibilities for the construction of identity and citizenship.

Third, cultural identity theory as articulated by Stuart Hall (2013) and other postcolonial scholars views identity not as an essential, fixed, or inherent trait but as a discursive construction that is always in process—constantly shifting and negotiated within specific historical and social contexts. Hall rejects the idea of identity as a stable “true self,” arguing instead that it is produced through representation, narrative, and cultural practice within fields of power. Cultural identity, in this framework, is a position taken both subjectively and collectively, often marked by the tension between the desire to preserve authenticity and the necessity to adapt to changing socio-political conditions (Guarnizo et al., 2003).

This approach is crucial to analyzing how Malay communities in Batam construct and articulate their identities. While they are formally Indonesian citizens, their identities are also shaped

by broader cultural and historical affiliations with the transnational Malay world, encompassing regions of Malaysia, Singapore, southern Thailand, and Brunei Darussalam. In everyday life, these communities sustain languages, customs, and cultural symbols that link them to a wider transnational Malay identity, while simultaneously operating within the administrative and legal framework of the Indonesian nation-state.

Consequently, Malay identity in Batam cannot be understood narrowly as a singular national form; rather, it is a hybrid and layered identity—a subjective position continually shaped through the interactions between Indonesian nationalism and cross-border Malay cultural solidarity. The borderland setting amplifies this hybridity, placing these communities in a space of intense circulation of ideas, goods, people, and cultural symbols that expand the horizons of identity. Within this context, Hall's theory of cultural identity enables us to view Malayness in Batam not as static or purist, but as a socially constructed identity that undergoes ongoing negotiation, recontextualization, and rearticulation within power relations between center and periphery, and between national and transnational spheres (K.R. Hall & Reid, 1994).

Together, these theoretical frameworks provide a powerful analytical lens for examining the ambivalence, hybridity, and negotiations embedded in the construction of nationalist identity in Batam. They also support the interpretation of empirical findings concerning cultural affiliations, state presence, and economic interdependence within the borderland context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative-interpretive research design to investigate the construction of nationalist identity among border communities in the Batam Archipelago (Anggito. & Setiawan, 2018; Anggito & Johan Setiawan, 2018). The methodological approach is grounded in the belief that social reality is subjectively constructed and best understood through the meanings and interpretations that individuals assign to their experiences. As such, the focus of the research is on the narratives, symbols, and practices through which people articulate their national and cultural identities (Zed, 2008).

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with local residents of diverse backgrounds, including variations in age, ethnicity, gender, and occupation. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a rich and representative range of perspectives from different parts of the archipelago. The interviews explored respondents' understandings of nationalism, their social and economic interactions with neighboring countries, and their cultural affiliations with the broader Malay world. Complementing the interviews, participant observation was conducted in several villages and urban centers across the Batam Islands. The researcher immersed themselves in local social settings, such as religious festivals, community gatherings, and marketplaces, to observe how national and transnational identities are performed in everyday life. Field notes were recorded to capture these observations (Bungin, 2012).

Secondary data were also utilized, including government reports, local newspapers, academic publications, and historical documents relevant to the socio-political development of the Batam Archipelago. These sources provided contextual background and supported triangulation of the interview and observational data. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and significant themes within the data. This analytical technique involved coding the transcripts and field notes, categorizing the data into thematic units, and interpreting their meanings in relation to the research questions. The analysis was guided by relevant theoretical frameworks, particularly Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities and literature on transnationalism and border identity. To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study employed member checking and peer debriefing. Selected interviewees were invited to review summaries of their interviews to verify accuracy, and academic peers were consulted to review the interpretations and conclusions.

drawn from the data (Lisa et al., 1967).

Overall, the methodological framework allows for a deep and nuanced understanding of how border residents in Batam construct, negotiate, and experience nationalism in a context shaped by cross-border flows, cultural continuity, and economic interdependence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ambivalent Nationalism in the Borderlands

Fieldwork findings reveal the emergence of an ambivalent form of nationalism, whereby the inhabitants of Batam articulate loyalty to the Indonesian state while simultaneously embracing a broader, transnational Malay cultural identity that links them historically and culturally to Malay communities in Malaysia and Singapore. This ambivalence is not perceived by local residents as a form of betrayal or contradiction, but rather as a complex and inherent reality embedded in their everyday lives. On one hand, their status as Indonesian citizens grants them legal rights, administrative protection, and access to state institutions. On the other hand, their identity as Malays is understood as a cultural inheritance and a form of ethnic solidarity that transcends the boundaries of the modern nation-state.

This phenomenon becomes even more apparent when examined through the lens of transnationalism. Empirical data—gathered from interviews and participant observation—indicate that Batam residents maintain active familial and economic ties with relatives in Johor, Singapore, and even Kelantan. For instance, a respondent working as a dock laborer shared that his mother is originally from Johor, his father from Bintan Island, and he regularly sends remittances to family members in Malaysia. These cross-border practices demonstrate that national boundaries are not absolute barriers but rather spaces that are continually negotiated—and even leveraged—to reinforce ethnic and economic networks. In this context, nationalism is no longer understood as singular or exclusive, but as a form of dual, functional, and situational attachment (Feldman-Bianco, 2018).

Moreover, from the perspective of cultural identity theory as articulated by Stuart Hall, it can be argued that the identity of Malays in Batam does not occupy a binary position between “Indonesia” and the “transnational Malay world,” but instead exists within a complex space of articulation (Colpani, 2022). The identity of being both “Indonesian” and “Malay” can coexist and mutually reinforce one another depending on the context. In relation to the state, for example, Batam Malays often present themselves as loyal citizens of Indonesia, as evidenced by their participation in elections, acceptance of national symbols, and compliance with administrative regulations. Yet, in the realms of culture, language, and religion, Malay identity serves as the primary source of social legitimacy and cultural expression. The Riau Malay dialect is still used in daily interactions; traditional rituals such as *tepung tawar*, *kenduri arwah*, and *majlis berzanji* remain widely practiced; and maintaining relationships with religious and cultural figures from Malaysia is viewed as a means of reinforcing their Malayness.

Thus, nationalism in Batam is neither exclusive nor hegemonic in the manner imagined by modern nation-state models. Rather, it aligns more closely with what has been described as *vernacular nationalism*—a form of nationalism articulated from below, grounded in lived cultural experience, local history, and cross-border interaction (Leenhardt, 2017). In many cases, Batam residents do not view being Malay and being Indonesian as mutually contradictory identities, but rather as overlapping and complementary layers: one administrative and legalistic, the other cultural and emotional. This suggests that prevailing conceptions of nationalism must be recontextualized when applied to borderland and transnational communities such as Batam, where the boundaries between “us” and “them” are neither clearly defined nor stable.

The Role of Cultural and Kinship Networks

The continuity of cultural traditions and kinship networks proves to be a vital force shaping and modulating nationalist sentiments in borderland areas such as Batam. Field data reveals that cross-border familial ties and cultural practices are actively maintained, even within the framework of modern nation-states that demand exclusive loyalty to a singular national identity. Respondents frequently describe routine activities such as visiting relatives in Johor and Singapore, participating in shared religious events like *maulid nabi*, *kenduri doa selamat*, or family *haul* ceremonies, and using mutually intelligible Malay dialects as ways to sustain a vibrant cultural connectivity. These practices demonstrate that Malay ethnocultural identity remains deeply rooted, transcending the geopolitical boundaries constructed by modern nation-states.

These kinship networks function not only as emotional and cultural spaces but also as social infrastructures that support transnational practices. One informant, for example, stated that he could easily stay with his brother in Johor for several weeks to work temporarily, then return to Batam. Such mobility is often informal and unrecorded by the state, yet it profoundly shapes how residents imagine their place, identity, and affiliation. In this regard, the concept of the nation as an “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006) becomes demonstrably flexible: communities are imagined not solely through state institutions and national symbols, but also through daily experiences shaped by language, customs, and kinship relations that extend across borders.

From the lens of transnationalism theory (Blanc et al., 1994), these practices reflect how cross-border attachments are not merely economic or temporary but constitute cultural and affective dimensions of community life. Cultural continuity—manifested through language, religion, rituals, and familial ties—functions as a key mechanism in preserving a sense of identity that transcends formal citizenship. In this context, the emergence of a pan-Malay consciousness is not the result of ideological propaganda, but of enduring social practices passed down through generations.

Stuart Hall’s (1990) theory of cultural identity is especially relevant here: identity is not constructed exclusively by state apparatuses, but through discourses and practices situated within specific historical and social contexts. Thus, when Malay communities in Batam continue to uphold linguistic and cultural traditions shared with their relatives in Malaysia and Singapore, they are not simply “rejecting Indonesia”; rather, they are constructing a more nuanced form of cultural identity—one that reflects the geographical, historical, and sociocultural realities of the Malay world as a region that has never been fully confined within national boundaries (Andaya, 2008).

Consequently, these cross-border interactions revive—or even preserve—the notion of the Malay world as a broad cultural community whose networks transcend the administrative divisions of modern nation-states. For many Malay residents of Batam, shared language, religion, customs, and bloodlines are the primary foundations for imagining communal belonging. Loyalty to Indonesia does not necessarily negate a wider solidarity as part of a culturally kindred Malay community.

Economic Interdependence and Border Fluidity

Economic factors also play a significant role in shaping the nationalist consciousness of Batam residents. Daily economic activities—ranging from large- and small-scale trade, cross-border labor, to medical tourism in Singapore and Malaysia—have structurally and symbolically linked Batam with its neighboring countries. Many respondents describe how foreign currencies, especially the Singapore dollar, are widely used in local transactions, particularly in service sectors and port-based trade. This not only reflects the economic integration of the region but also reveals how the line between “national” and “foreign” becomes increasingly blurred in everyday life. In local markets, food products, clothing, and electronic goods are largely imported from Johor and Singapore, indicating that consumption itself has become a key aspect of the transnationalization of daily life.

This condition directly impacts how national identity is imagined. Rather than feeling symbolically tethered to the distant political center in Jakarta, many Batam residents feel more connected—economically, socially, and even emotionally—to their immediate neighbors across the strait. One interviewed merchant remarked, “We’re closer to Johor and Singapore than to Jakarta. Even shipping goods is faster to those places.” Such statements reflect a form of *national detachment*—a situation where emotional and economic ties to the central state (Jakarta) are weakened due to the more immediate relevance of cross-border connections in everyday life. Here, nationalism is not rejected but displaced—from a centralized national imagination to a more functional and contextual regional attachment.

Within the framework of transnationalism theory (Schiller, 2005), this phenomenon illustrates that Batam residents live within what is known as a *transnational social field*—a cross-border social space that enables them to construct identities and social, economic, and cultural networks not confined to a single nation. Their national awareness is shaped not only by state narratives but also by recurring and sustained economic practices that transcend national borders (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). This intersects with the notion of *everyday nationalism*—the ways in which nationalism is interpreted, negotiated, or even contested through daily practices such as consumption, labor mobility, and access to healthcare services.

Moreover, what Benedict Anderson termed the “imagined community” undergoes a transformation in Batam: the community is no longer imagined solely through state-centered narratives, but through lived, recurring interactions within a more proximate geocultural space (Sears & Anderson, 1994). As such, for many Batam residents, the experience of being “Indonesian” is a formal, administrative one—linked to national ID cards, laws, and elections—while their deeper lived experiences are shaped through economic, linguistic, and cultural relations with their nearest neighbors across the strait.

Malay Identity as a Unifying Discourse

The construction of Malay identity in a borderland context such as Batam operates not solely within the domain of ethnicity but also as a discursive field of negotiation between the state, cultural memory, and colonial legacies. In this regard, Homi Bhabha’s concept of the *third space* (1994) becomes highly relevant. The *third space* is a symbolic arena in which meaning and identity are neither fixed nor binary (e.g., national vs. transnational; Indonesian vs. Malay), but rather continuously negotiated and rearticulated through social interaction and discursive practice. Batam, given its strategic location in the straits and its historical ties to Johor-Singapore, exemplifies a living *third space*—a site where national borders and identity are subject to constant redefinition (Bhabha, 2006).

Within this space, Malay identity is not merely inherited as tradition, but rather reproduced as a *hybrid identity*—one that emerges through the interweaving of colonial and postcolonial discourses, modern nation-states, and longstanding ethno-cultural solidarities (Hilmy, 2018). This hybridization does not render Malay identity a diluted or weakened form; instead, it reflects a resilient and adaptive force capable of navigating both national and global structures. Residents of Batam, for instance, can confidently identify as *Orang Melayu Riau* while simultaneously expressing cultural affinity with *Orang Melayu Johor* or *Orang Melayu Singapura*, without perceiving such affiliations as undermining their Indonesian national identity. In fact, it is precisely within these liminal relationships that identity is creatively assembled.

A respondent from a local cultural community remarked: “When we meet Malays from Singapore, we immediately recognize their language and gestures. It feels like we’re the same people. But we still hold Indonesian ID cards.” This statement illustrates hybridity in practice: national identity functions as a formal legal framework, while Malay identity serves as a cross-border emotional and cultural affiliation. In Bhabha’s terms, this is an example of how national and cultural

meanings are not entirely absorbed by the state, but are constantly “slipping,” “repeating,” and “disrupted” through encounters with the *Other*—in this case, fellow Malays beyond national boundaries (Bhabha, 1994).

Furthermore, such hybrid identities allow Batam residents to articulate subtle forms of resistance—*soft resistance*—to singular, homogenizing national narratives. By affirming Malayness as a foundational cultural identity, they demonstrate that being Indonesian does not necessitate erasing historical legacies, social networks, or solidarities that transcend modern political borders (Levitt & Schiller, 2004). Here, the notion of *cultural hybridity* serves not merely to record cultural mixtures, but to critically analyze how identity becomes a site of power and resistance—often in complex and non-confrontational forms.

Ultimately, the discourse of Malayness in Batam can be understood as a form of *vernacular cosmopolitanism*—a rooted cosmopolitanism that emerges from locality while fostering cross-border dialogue. It exemplifies a fluid, intelligent, and context-sensitive form of nationalism: one that adheres to legal frameworks while also nurturing cultural roots that connect to the broader Malay world. In an era increasingly fragmented by parochial nationalism, such identity practices offer hope for a more open, reflective, and interculturally grounded form of national belonging.

The Symbolic Presence of the State

Despite the significant influence of transnational dynamics on everyday life in Batam, the Indonesian state remains symbolically and institutionally present through military installations, government offices, public services, and large-scale infrastructure projects. This presence asserts the nation-state’s claim to sovereignty over its border territories and enacts what Timothy Mitchell (1990) refers to as the *state effect*—the representational process through which the state appears as a tangible, autonomous entity, despite being constituted through the very social practices of its citizens.

Institutions such as immigration offices, military checkpoints, and public schools serve not only administrative functions but also operate as reminders of state authority and formal citizenship. Flag ceremonies in schools, nationalist slogans in public spaces, and symbols such as the Garuda and the red-and-white flag at Batam’s international port are visual representations that construct the illusion of a powerful and stable state apparatus. However, as noted by Gupta and Ferguson (1997), the relationship between citizens and the state is not solely top-down but is shaped through daily practices that are often ambiguous and contradictory.

Interviews with local residents reveal a common narrative: while they acknowledge their status as “Indonesian citizens,” they often feel more emotionally, economically, and culturally connected to Singapore or Johor. A local entrepreneur explained: “If the kids get sick, we take them to Johor. For shopping, we go to Singapore. But our ID cards are still Indonesian.” This statement highlights the divergence between formal administrative loyalty to the nation-state and the practical, affective affiliations formed through cross-border interactions. The state is present, but not always central to the daily lives of its citizens (Carrier et al., 1999; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

Moreover, the state is frequently perceived as bureaucratic and unresponsive. In several instances, public services from the central government are described as slow or inefficient compared to facilities available in neighboring countries. This perception reinforces the sense of the state as a “distant” entity, while interactions with Malaysia and Singapore are experienced as more immediate, functional, and economically advantageous. The tension between *presence* and *distance* thus illustrates a layered and negotiated nationalism rather than a singular, unified one.

In this context, the Indonesian state’s presence in Batam functions more as a juridical affirmation of territoriality than as the primary foundation of social and economic life. While the state’s nationalistic project remains, it becomes a contested terrain, continually negotiated by

residents living within a border reality. Nationalism, therefore, emerges as an unfinished project—perpetually reconstructed through the interplay of state symbols and transnational dynamics that shape identity and everyday practice.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that nationalist identity in the Batam Archipelago is constructed through a complex negotiation of cultural, economic, and geopolitical factors. The findings challenge conventional understandings of nationalism as a territorially bounded and state-centered concept. Instead, nationalism in Batam is experienced as an ambivalent, lived reality shaped by transnational Malay identity, everyday economic practices, and longstanding familial and cultural ties with neighboring countries.

Malay identity emerges as a central axis through which border residents articulate both cultural continuity and political belonging. It acts as a transnational connective tissue that transcends the boundaries of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Rather than being in conflict with their Indonesian nationality, the residents of Batam reconcile their Malayness and Indonesianness in pragmatic and dynamic ways. The symbolic and institutional presence of the Indonesian state continues to play a role in affirming national sovereignty. However, this presence is often overshadowed by the material and emotional proximity of Malaysia and Singapore, which remain integral to the daily lives of the community. This condition exemplifies how border residents engage in a constant redefinition of identity that both accommodates and subverts the national paradigm.

Ultimately, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of nationalism as a fluid and contested construct in maritime Southeast Asian borderlands. It calls for a rethinking of policies and theories that treat national identity as static, advocating instead for approaches that recognize the plurality, hybridity, and negotiated nature of identity in border contexts. Future research could further explore how these identity constructions evolve over time, particularly in the face of shifting political, economic, and technological landscapes.

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