

## An International Airport and The Border Security: Case Study<sup>i</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This article discusses an international airport as a border and national security apparatus. Through this qualitative study conducted at the Kota Kinabalu International Airport, it was found that the security controls practiced at the airport can be likened to a series of ideal boundaries. In order to facilitate more responsive answers, this study used visual method for the interviewing as well as indepth interviews. In addition, the study utilised the 'apparatus' concept approach to guide this study. This study found that an international airport acts as a border and as an apparatus for national security.

**Keywords:** border; security; apparatus; international airport; visual method

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## Introduction

Borders are said to influence processes that are integral to politics, economics and everyday life. Borders are important in the context of life, as they influence people's thinking and actions. Borders are capable of establishing and changing relations between nations and peoples by acting as gateways, and at the same time controlling movements (Ramlah *et.al.*, 2011). Therefore, borders are always two-sided, that is, they connect and divide (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013: 4). Border studies, especially those from after World War II, were very state-centred. The 1990s, however, saw the emergence of several theses on the borderless world, arguing that physical boundaries were no longer significant as the era of globalization progressed (Ohmae, 1990; 1995). For example, global technology, cyberspace, capital flow, the convergence of East-West politics, and inter-state integration have caused political boundaries to become obsolete. In a more extreme argument, the function of the state is seen as no longer relevant, and borders must be opened to facilitate human movement.

However, the event of the September 11 attacks on the United States in 2001 has drawn attention to the study of borders, which again focus on the importance of borders and countries (Paasi, 2019). Borders have been strengthened and reinforced. Moreover, in this view, national borders are not only confined to physical boundaries but, in line with the development of international communications and trade brought by the current globalisation, borders are everywhere (Balibar, 1998), even within the territory of a country (Kollosov & Scott, 2011). This shows that borders have been recognized as being institutions on their own (Paasi 1998), as institution to govern the extent of inclusion and exclusion, the degree of permeability and the laws governing trans-boundary movement (Newman 2003). Thus, borders are not given, 'they emerge through socio-political processes of border-making or bordering that take place within society' (Kolossov and Scott, 2013), 'they are enacted' (van Schendel and de Maaker, 2014), and social and political constructions (Newman, 2011).

One example of a border within a country is an airport (Moreland, 2011). This can be observed through the practice of security controls implemented at airports that resemble border features, and are even more sophisticated with biometric scanning and scanning of luggage. This can be seen, for example, the current issue of the global SARS-CoV-2 virus attack, better known as the Corona Virus, that has caused the Covid-19 pandemic, which has hit many countries. The virus has crossed borders from one country to the next. This situation has forced national borders to be tightened and almost all countries have closed their respective entry points to prevent its spread. One such entry point is an international airport. In this context, it can be seen that globalisation has not eradicated borders, but has created a *multiplication of borders* (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Therefore, in the context of the contemporary world, airports should be studied as borders considering their role as gateways to countries.

This paper aims to scrutinize border concepts in the contemporary debate of borders studies by using an international airport as a subject of discussion. In this regard, this article discusses Kota Kinabalu International Airport (KKIA) as a national border and as a security apparatus. This study first considers the concept of the airport in general as understood by the airport security authority and also from the perspective of the users - in this context, students of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS). Subsequently, the study outlines airport security measures carried out at KKIA, and finally examines the role of the international airport as an apparatus for national security.

## Literature Review

Current border studies reflect a continuation and change in scientific thought that contributes greatly to the social understanding of social space and methods of boundary study (Kosolov & Scott, 2013:1). Therefore, studies regarding borders are not dominated by one specific perspective, or universal, whether from critical thinking or not.

Borders play a role in determining the beginning and end of a situation. Not only can borders be defined as a dividing lines between countries but they can also be seen through various aspects such as culture, academia, language, gender and many others.

### ***Borders in Airport***

Uses of the meanings of borders are also differentiated by academics to show the variations of meanings that are used in describing given situations. This matter was shared by Brunet-Jaily who divided the meanings of borders into four structures: borders, boundaries, borderlands and frontiers (Brunet-Jaily, 2009). In addition, borders are also seen as controls used to separate unwanted entities from entering into a territory. Apart from that, borders are not confined to the boundary of a region alone, but as Balibar (1998), Kossolov and Scott (2013) have shown, borders are everywhere within a territory. One of the most obvious examples of a border is an airport.

This became more noticeable after the September 11 incident which saw an increase in tightened security at airports. In that context, customs, immigration, and airport and aviation security became central to national security. For example in 2007, the British Prime Minister Gordon Brown made clear the need to restructure border controls to curb crime and violence. His statement was included in the 2007 official cabinet report. The report specifically states that the border security objectives are legitimate travel and trade facilities, namely security from threats and criminal pressures, whether illegal transfers, violence, or attacks on the border protection tax policy itself, the international transport network and people who use and work in it. Basically, that report is to identify airport security as protection for national borders, and affirms that the protection of facilities and aircraft is the major debate related to national security, emigration, terrorism and also crime (Laing, 2008). Therefore, it can be seen that the failure of security in an airport or transit zone could endanger national security and, at the same time, the people of the country.

### ***The Concept of 'Apparatus'***

An airport can be interpreted as a centre that contains many facilities and at the same time, serves as a gateway that has the potential to cross the border, as it is located in the center of the country (Lloyd, 2002). The position of a country's airport is said to be strategic and is regarded as the heart of the country where its operations can have an impact on the country's sovereignty. especially in terms of security.

According to Foucault and Haince, the concept of 'apparatus' can be understood as a system of relations developed between discourses, institutions, architectural forms, decision-making, law, administration, scientific expressions, philosophy, morals and philanthropy (see Moreland, 2011: 3). Taking this concept of 'apparatus,' an airport in this context contains a set of rules governing bio-political operations such as immigration, customs, police and the

like. An apparatus is the set of rules that helps to manage a space (Moreland, 2011: 3). Accordingly, the apparatus in this context is a way of regulating the relationships inherent in airports, particularly those that are directly related to questions of safety. This can be seen through the agencies involved in organising relationships and activities at airports, including the control of movements of goods and people (Laing, 2008).

Therefore, this concept of apparatus is applicable in this study to explain the airport being used as a border security measure and a symbol of the sovereignty of the country. This is because the processes carried out at the airport are seen to resemble the ideal properties of borders.

## **Method**

This qualitative study looks at KKIA as a case study. Interviews were conducted with two airport security officials (the Operations Manager, Malaysia Airports Berhad and the Assistant Director of Customs at KKIA) representing the authorities, and with 10 UMS students (four local and six international students, some of the latter being short-term mobility students) who are airport users. In-depth interviews were conducted with the airport security officials, while graphic elicitation interviews were undertaken with the UMS students. Visual method, which in the context of this study graphic elicitation interviews were chosen to enable the UMS informants to explain their ideas and to convey the layers of their experiences that are sometimes difficult to express in spoken words (Gauntlett, 2007). These students were asked to visualise the airport and its contents.

Through the visuals created by these informants, the researchers would be able to assess and better understand the informants' perspectives about the airport as a border and a national security 'apparatus'. This was evidenced in the sketches by those informants who drew images of security personnel as the main content of the airport. In addition, this study also used observation methods, in particular to obtain direct information about the security measures taken by airport security personnel. The researchers were fortunate to have been given the opportunity by the customs authorities to conduct a live review of the screening process or scanning of luggage carried out by them in the baggage confinement area for newly arrived bags and for those being loaded onto the planes.

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***Invisible Boundaries***

As previously stated, borders are not limited to physical lines that separate one territorial entity from another. In fact, borders also come in abstract, invisible but very powerful forms that influence thinking and shape how a person behaves. O'Dowd (2010) explains that 'invisible boundaries' are interactive installation designs that highlight the existence of

borders of unseen social personalisation and how we influence one another on a daily basis. His study found that the increase in online social networking has led to a distortion of personal and public perspectives about cyberspace from the reality of true life. Meyer (2014), on the other hand, states that 'invisible boundaries' are borders that divide our world into new situations to the extent that they are considered to be the norm from what is expected. This happens especially when we communicate each day with people in other countries through cyberspace media such as email or telephone.

This idea of invisible boundaries can also be used to explain airports as borders. Laing (2008) sees an airport as a micro-border that is placed within the physical border of a country. Invisible boundaries is a situation where physical boundaries are diverted to different points and create non-physical boundaries in the city centre located at airport transit zones. Airports serve as invisible boundaries that play important roles in ensuring the safety of countries. Laing (2008), explores how countries push their boundaries beyond their physical borders. Visa decisions made at embassies and the transfer of passenger information by airlines that allow countries to filter passengers before they enter transit zones create invisible boundaries even before passengers reach the airport. Airline officials also make invisible boundary decisions during the check-in process.

This is exactly the explanation given by En. Awang Mali bin Awang Anak, the Operations Manager of Malaysia Airports Berhad at KKIA, concerning individuals playing a role in maintaining security at the airport, during interviews with researchers. According to him, the airport is an 'invisible boundary' that exists without the knowledge of those who use it directly or indirectly. He said security controls at the airport indicate the existence of an invisible border like offshore and onshore borders. Passengers who have already been permitted to enter the airport are automatically recognised as fulfilling the conditions and eligibility to allow them to enter the country via physical boundaries. He stated:

*"...Sempadan di airport ini nampak macam ... apa ni invisible. Maksud dia tak nampak sangat. Tetapi actually ada sempadan dia. Sempadan dia itulah yang menjadi kawalan di dalam tu. Sebab penumpang yang melalui jalan udara ini dia tidak akan diperiksa di darat. Tapi dia sudah lepas pemeriksaan di darat tu kalau dia flight sini sempadan imigresen post macam di Pontianak dan juga di kawasan Limbang Sarawak kan, di sana di dekat apa tu... dekat Sipitang sana tu, kapal akan berlepas sana jadi sempadan dia di sini, pemeriksaan dia sebenarnya di sini sudah boundaries Sabah Sarawak. Tapi dia punya pemeriksaan sampai di Kota Kinabalu. Bermakna, indirectly sempadan untuk keselamatan ini dan juga rakyat yang tadi itu berada di Kota Kinabalu. Ahh dia punya itu lah proses pemeriksaan itu, actually sempadan sudah bermula awal tetapi untuk memastikan bahawa*

*mereka ini memasuki sempadan yang sebenar, diorang kena berada di airport lah di kuarantin dulu sebelum sah untuk masuk ke negara tu."*

(En. Awang Mali, 3 December 2019)

The idea of an airport consisting of invisible boundaries was also expressed by other informants. Puan. Yusni Izani, Assistant Director of Airport Customs, explained that the work of the Customs was more about controlling the movement of goods than that of humans. However, Customs, together with other key agencies including Immigration, Airport Security and Aviation, are central to the security of invisible boundaries at the airport. Collaboration among all security forces should be strengthened at all times, not just in emergencies. She said that this is essential to prevent any miscommunication between the security forces from different departments. The importance of maintaining security in the physical environment of Civil Aviation and limiting the accessibility to borders is often discussed in contemporary studies. According to Bigo (2002), the issue of security "is the result of the creation of the continuum of threats and general unease in which actors exchange their fears and beliefs in the process of making a risky and dangerous society."

Meanwhile, airports are seen as invisible boundaries as their security control points are seen to be constantly monitored. According to another informant, an international student from Brunei, this is because:

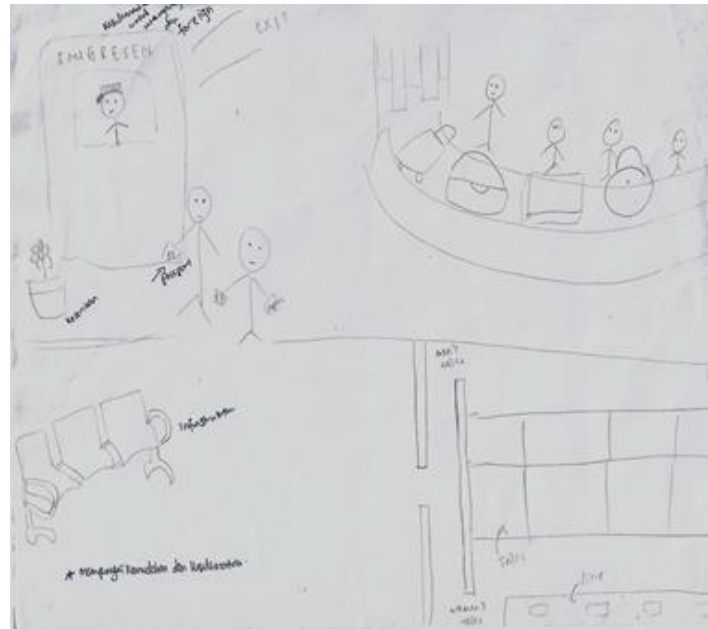
*"... Ahh In my opinion.. it's for the sake of the pople inside the airport. Sebab... kalau kawalan security tidak ketat, orang yang akan first kena ialah orang yang berada di airport. Contoh kalau ada penjenayah yang kena adalah orang-orang yang ada di airport. Kalaulah, security proses tidak ketat, means senang-senang saja penjahat masuk dalam flight bawa barang-barang yang terlarang. Pisau... Dadah. Jadi orang yang akan first kena adalah orang yang di dalam airport dan orang yang di dalam flight."*

(Aisyah Aina Binti Minggu, international student from Brunei 25 November 2019)

This was also explained through the sketch drawn by this informant, which shows that the security control of the movement of people and baggage are among the first things that come to her mind (Figure 1). For her, the existence of security is highly important in an airport.

Thus, the study found that the airport is a border that can be described as containing invisible boundaries which play an important role in ensuring the security of the country. The security processes in invisible boundaries are comparable to those practiced at physical borders either at sea or on land. The study also found that the border which exists at the airport is for the benefit of all, wherein the processes of security checks at the physical boundary are no longer major issues. This is due to the invisible boundaries at the airport which serves as the gateway, and has its own security control system that involves the

cooperation of many security organisations. Thus it can be said that airports play an important role in maintaining national security through their invisible boundaries.



**Figure 1.** A sketch of the airport by informant Aisyah Aina Binti Minggu, an international student from Brunei

### **Exclusive Gateway**

The airport is regarded as an exclusive gateway, because it has various security procedures that are carried out systematically, which differ from other foreign entry processes. This is because the airport is considered to have a far more sophisticated and secure system that is trusted by all passengers who wish to enter the country. This was affirmed by a user of the airport:

*"...Ia, walaupun dia leceh sikit. Pernah bawak twizzer terbawak la.. tu pun suruh keluarkan. Dia akan tunggu sampai ko keluarkan barang tu. Aku lebih percayakan sistem flight di airport la berbanding tempat-tempat lain la"*

(Cherbreena Audrey, 1 Disember 2019)

According to this informant, she trusted the security system at the airport more than border security control systems at the other ports of entry. From her own experience of traveling to various countries, she felt KKIA was more reliable in terms of security as it was both systematic and strict. This was in contrast to her experience when crossing a border through a harbor or a military control post.

*"...kalau passing border post tu kalau by car memang rumit lah. Sebab masa kita orang pergi Thailand aritu banyak proses pastu banyak undergo yang kastam"*



*punya pemeriksaan. Kalau by flight tak lah biase je. Feri pon tak, biase je macam flight jugak.”*

(Cherbreena Audrey, 1 Disember 2019)

This shows that the airport is an exclusive border platform as it can be trusted by passengers. Personal safety and life are important considerations for every visitor to a country. Hence, having a high level of securitisation causes visitors to feel safe to come into the country. This will indirectly increase the number of visitors to the country and thus stimulate the country's economic growth. Furthermore, the airport is also considered an exclusive entry point for the country, as visitors are from many different countries but still undergo the same security process. If a person does not show valid travel documents, then that person is not eligible to be in the country. Thus, it can be seen that the airport serves as an exclusive gateway to enter the country that functions as an instrument of national border control.

The airport is an exclusive border because, considering the function of contemporary airport boundaries, it focuses on the phenomenon of border control through security initiatives that draw on political, technological, and economic resources to regulate who and what enters or exits the country. It is an exclusive gateway due to its unique functions and features that do not exist in any other border. This is because the airport is both a physical and symbolic site of complex social, political, and economic activities through its involvement with the apparatus of security. In turn, it can be seen as an economic protector whereby the airport is an exclusive gatekeeper, because economic processes at international airports involve the means of maintaining border control through customs tariffs and duties which are collected on particular benefits of moving in and out of airports and into sovereign space. The border is a political membrane where people, goods, wealth, and information must pass to be considered acceptable or unacceptable to the country.

Therefore, borders are agents of national security and sovereignty, and physical records. It can be said, security practices are one of the forces that shape the function of the airport as a border, and the border as an agent of security. This is strongly associated with economic processes (Wilson & Donnan 1998:9). In addition, the airport is also one of the places that will be the main target for terrorist threats. Therefore, it is very important for each agency to know the steps that need to be taken in the event of a crisis such as terrorism, and others. As such, there are some rules and restrictions that are the main procedures at an airport and these can be directly linked to the sovereignty of a country.

As an exclusive gateway, an airport is indeed a target for irresponsible parties to jeopardise a country's sovereignty, compared to the physical borders of other countries. This is because the airport is an institution that many people trust to connect them from one country to another. If not for international airports, flights would only take place domestically



and airports would not be considered as exclusive gateways. KKIA as one of the international airports, however, is considered an exclusive airport.

### ***Airport Security Technology***

As we know, there are a variety of sophisticated security technologies used at the airport that make it safer and more secure while maintaining its boundaries. This is based on interviews with informants including the airport authorities and users of the airport, such as with those above, and the following mobility student from Indonesia:

*"...Aaaa sekuritanya di airport itu benar-bener ketat karna sebelum kita masuk ke airport kita terus di check dan sebelum masuk ke boarding kita harus check lagi kan. Jadi keamanan dan keselamatannya benar-bener terjamin untuk di airport."*

(Iva, mobility student from Indonesia, 2 December 2019)

This informant who is an airport user clearly agrees that KKIA security technology is very sophisticated and safe, especially for individuals through body checking and baggage tracking. Security technology is very important in the anthropological study of borders. According to Gates (2005), researchers in this field study the scope of biometric surveillance technology, control regime and inspection policy. According to Salter (2004), border studies researchers are increasingly recognising security as part of borders.

Meanwhile according to Wilson (2012), biometrics is a study which examines who can access themselves to another country or who cannot gain access another country for specific reasons. Thus, there are three ways of tracking - through the iris of the eye, through fingerprints, and through the face. Puan Yusni Izzani stated:

*"...semua barang yang melalui sempadan akan di scan; jika terdapat barang terlarang mutlak, kami akan hancurkan dan tidak akan dapat dipulangkan."*

Thus, the airport not only controls the movement of people in and out, but it also controls the security of goods in and out of the country. Meanwhile, Airport Security Manager En. Awang also explained that the security section performed screening for passengers free from dangerous goods. He stated further:

*"...Sebelum masuk ke bahagian 'aside area', yang selepas pintu masuk screen tu kami panggil 'aside area'. Hanya orang yang pakai pas atau boarding pass sahaja yang dibenarkan masuk, jadi peranan sebagai keselamatan lebih kepada untuk detect, memastikan penumpang bersih dari barang-barang bahaya. Oleh sebab itu, kita ada screen exiting mesin, dia boleh detect barang dari segi metal tetapi kalau dadah pula bergantung dari kreativiti kepada pegawai itu. Tapi mana lebih kepada dangerous, seperti letupan barang-barang bahaya jadi itu peranan MAB. Selepas itu baru pihak imigresen and yang ketiga airline punya peranan."*

As mentioned above, there are three security screenings that must be followed by each passenger before boarding and after disembarking from their aircraft. In terms of baggage, however, screening will be carried out by Customs to ensure that passengers do not carry any prohibited items. According to En. Awang, tracking down wanted fugitives who might try to enter the country is conducted through the first process of three screenings, and the Immigration Department would also detect such persons through documentation. In addition, there is also Special Branch of the Police Force who work on crime prevention. As for international risks, there is a link between Interpool and the local police, and the role of Malaysia Airports Berhad is to assist.

Typically, aviation security personnel are trained with the knowledge, skills and experience in the field of aviation security. This is because all aviation security officers have undergone three-phase intensive training within six months of the open interview, screening and selection process. In addition, there is a second authority that provides views on airport security technology, that is, from the Customs side. In examining the security procedures carried out by Customs at the airport, the Customs authorities are responsible for inspecting imported and exported goods, inspecting the luggage of passengers arriving or entering the country, making balances of checklists, regulating the movement of goods out of or into free-zone areas, performing freight and customs duties, performing preventive tasks such as spying, raiding, patrolling and searching of vessels or vehicles and assisting in normal administrative tasks.

Some of the most publicly visible airport security processes by the Customs authorities involve conducting inspections of the goods carried by passengers, such as luggage and so on. According to Puan Yusni Izani, there are two sections for Customs, Domestic and International. At International Arrivals, there is a security process in place whereby passengers must line up to have the items they carry scanned before entering Malaysia, and this section is also divided into two, namely, Self-Declared and Green Lane. Puan Yusni said:

*“...Kalau disini prosedur dia, penumpang akan beratur kita akan scan barang. Kita sebenarnya ada satu bahagian yang dipanggil ‘self-declare’ dimana mereka akan buat declaration sendiri, dorang cakap dorang ada bawa barang everything yang bercukai everything. Yang sebelah tu kita panggil ‘green lane’, yang tu kalau kita yang jumpa kita akan ambil tindakan lanjut lah. Jadi kita scan kita jumpa barang, kita akan minta dia buka, kita akan tengok samaada dia memenuhi kita punya barang-barang yang dikecualikan duti dan orang-orang yang dikecualikan duti kita akan minta dia bayar duti...”*

Figure 2 shows the Self-Declared section where passengers who bring in taxable goods enter. As stated in the Customs Law, taxable items are alcoholic beverages exceeding 1 litre, tobacco exceeding 225 grams or 200 grams of cigarettes, new clothing exceeding 3 pairs, new shoes exceeding 1 pair, food provisions exceeding RM 150.00, mobile devices for personal

care or hygiene that use electricity or batteries exceeding 1 unit and all other non-stated items, excluding tires and tubes, valued at more than RM 500.00.

Customs also play a role on behalf of other departments, for example, by confiscating plants and fruits subject to approval by the Agriculture Department in Malaysia before being allowed into the country. In this case, there are several processes to be taken by Customs and the Malaysian Agriculture Department, such as seeing the permit carried by the passenger and the plant being inspected by the Agriculture Department. This is to protect the country from diseases and epidemics that can be caused by pests on plants that are brought in from outside. These laws also benefit agriculture in Malaysia from being destroyed by outside pests. This was stated by Puan Yusni Izani:

*“...Tapi dalam masa yang sama juga barang-barang yang intern of kastam kita aka tahan bagi pihak jabatan lain. Contohnya, tumbuh-tumbuhan dengan buah-buahan. Sebab dia tertakluk di bawah jabatan pertanian sebab untuk mejaga pertanian di Malaysia, ada penyakit-penyakit, wabak dan kumbang-kumbang dari oversea yang masuk ke Malaysia merosakkan tanaman Malaysia. Jadi dia kena dapatkan permit di jabatan tersebut...”*



**Figure 2.** Customs inspection for self-declared goods  
(Source: Fieldwork)

Unlike the Self-Declared section, the Green Lane section is for goods that are not taxable and passengers' baggage will be scanned for prohibited items before exiting (Figure 3). If a passenger is found to have prohibited items in this section, the Customs will take appropriate action. Puan Yusni stated:

*“...Yang sebelah tu kita panggil green lane, yang tu kalau kita yang jumpa kita akan ambil tindakan lanjut lah. Jadi kita scan kita jumpa barang, kita akan minta dia buka, kita akan tengok samaada dia memenuhi kita punya barang-barang*

*yang dikecualikan duti dan orang-orang yang dikecualikan duti kita akan minta dia bayar duti...”*



**Figure 3.** The Green Lane  
(Source: Fieldwork)

Figure 4 shows the scanning machines for items brought in by international passengers before they enter the country. These machines can detect all the objects in a bag or baggage. If the Customs officers find an object that is prohibited or violates the law, they will immediately confiscate it and it will not be returned. If, however, the goods are permitted under certain conditions, the Customs will ask the passenger to make a declaration. In this case, the Customs authorities will check the permit for the goods carried by the passenger. But if the passenger does not have the proper permit, the Customs authority will be required to provide the passenger with the opportunity to resolve the matter within 30 days. If the passenger carries the permit, they must still pay the compound charge on the goods carried. In addition, the Customs authorities will also charge tax on such goods carried by the passengers, in accordance with the law.



**Figure 4.** Scanning machines  
(Source: Fieldwork)

This was explained by Puan Yusni:

*"...Sebenarnya kita tak terus rampas, barang-barang larangan mutlak yang kita terus rampas dan kita tak akan pulangkan. Tetapi kalau yang larangan bersyarat kita akan minta declaration. Kastam cek ada permit dan everything ngam dengan barang yang dibawa kita akan lepaskan. Kalau dia ada cukai kita akan tuntutan cukai dululah. Kalau ada barangan dibawa masuk tapi tiada permit, kita bagi 30 hari untuk dia dapatkan permit atau kalau tiada duit mahu bayar kita bagi dalam tempoh tu. Tapi dalam tempoh 30 hari itu sahaja, datang bawa permit atau bayar kompaun tu, kastama kan pulang semula barangan..."*

These security measures undertaken by the Customs are intended to keep our country safe and secure from threats from outsiders, as well as insiders themselves from bringing in goods that threaten the country or even an individual.

### ***National Security and Sovereignty***

The airport is the one of the first institutions or organisations to focus on foreign nationals. One informant, Aisyah Aini from Brunei also pointed out that if the design of the airport, the facilities it provided and its services were bad, this would have an impact on the country's security and reputation. Thus, the concept of an airport is viewed widely, whereby it is said that the airport is a rigid or strict place that is a symbol of national sovereignty. This is because if the security system or service at the airport itself is implemented as if in a vacuum or is looked down upon, it will have an impact on the country.

"...the reason why the airport is a symbol of national sovereignty is because, foreigners' first impression on that one particular nation was actually based on

that nation's airport. So, if the airport design and facilities and their services are bad, then the foreigners would feel awful to be in that country. Vice-versa, if the airport design and facilities are good then the foreigner would feel good to be in that country eh, to be in that nation."

(Aisyah Aina Binti Minggu, 21, international student from Brunei)

According to Moreland (2011), more local or "unofficial" sovereignty exists autonomously, especially in border areas where individuals can simultaneously be government agents and their own agents. In terms of the concept of the airport from its users themselves, in particular looking at the sovereignty of a country, one of the informants, Anisa Dian Islami a mobility student from Indonesia, agreed that the airport is a symbol of national sovereignty as it involves the processes of security systems which are necessary through the use of filters, multiple entrances and public access. It can be seen that through these processes, the airport has a rigid or strict system that affects the country. She provided clear comparisons between various countries, such as Malaysia and Taiwan, and stated:

*"...bersetuju sih, airport merupakan simbol kedaulatan negara kerana iya merupakan laluan orang masuk ke dalam malaysia dan juga tempat orang keluar dan iya juga harus ada sistem keselamatan misalnya sesuatu orang masuk bawa bom, narkotik. Selain itu, sih airport itu satu filter untuk menapis, Jika tiada filter itu memudahkan orang tiada dokumen masuk dan itu merugikan dalam sebuah negara, tapi misalnya ii taiwan lebih rigid sih kerana harus melihat nilai akaun segala agar dapat menanggung jika ada beralaku pada mereka dong ..."*

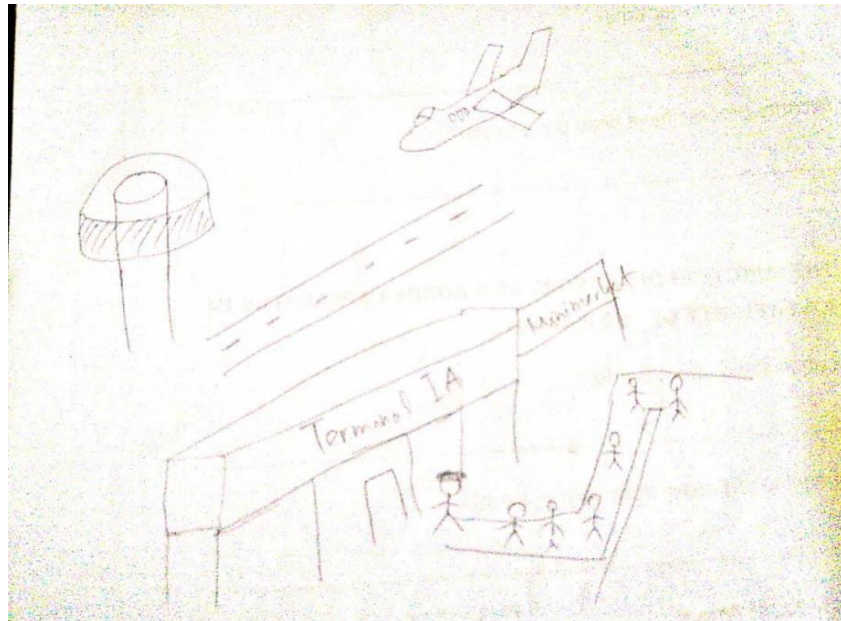
Similarly, another airport user from Indonesia argued that the airport is a border place of transportation which also involves the security process inside the airport itself:

*"...Pengangkutan yang bagi saya cukup bagus dengan proses keselamatan yang ada walaupun rumit tetapi kemudahan yang disediakan lebih bagus berbanding dengan stesen kereta api..."*

(Mohd Iqbal Firmansyah, 20, international student from Indonesia)

His idea of the airport as a place of border transportation is also reflected in his sketch about the concept of the airport (Figure 5).





**Figure 5.** A sketch of the airport by Mohd Iqbal Firmansyah, an international student from Indonesia

In his sketch, people coming into the airport are also met by a security personnel at the entrance to the departure terminal. Thus, the idea of security and national sovereignty are still reflected in his thinking, concerning the airport as a place of border transportation.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that borders can be seen not only physically as lines separating different countries, but more broadly as the embodiment of boundaries of meaning. This further reinforces the argument that borders exist everywhere and that their existence is multiple. The airport itself shows that these borders can not only be shown on a map, but that the border processes can be seen through the security controls practiced at the airport. These security controls operate as invisible boundaries that protect the airport as an exclusive gateway to the country. Advanced security technology monitors the flow of people and goods crossing the airport which operates as a border. Thus, the airport is an apparatus that protects the security and sovereignty of the nation. Airports are located inside countries, but not normally on physical national boundaries. KKIA is situated within Kota Kinabalu, the capital city of the state of Sabah, Malaysia's northernmost state on Borneo Island. As such, KKIA is an international border of Malaysia that is not on the border.



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