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# A Green Energy Frontier Long in the Making: From Tin to Solar Power in the Riau Islands, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** The Riau Islands in Indonesia, Southeast Asia are an emerging green energy frontier. This paper shows the long-term making of this frontier. Through qualitative research, I trace colonial machinations for the capture of agrarian and mineral resources, postcolonial Cold War manoeuvres for the procurement of oil, and the contemporary quest for natural gas, sand, and green energy. Processes of resource extraction have systematically sidelined people and place for capital accumulation, facilitated by the state. This has resulted in unrest, with the effect of boosting the heavy-handed state that is required to continually step in to control and settle the so-called frontier. As the world looks towards viable spaces for the generation of green energy, it is crucial to interrogate the long in the making sacrificial zones, particularly in the Global South, which are expected to produce our collective salvation from the climate crisis.

**Keywords:** energy, renewables, frontier, Indonesia, colonialism, Cold War

## Introduction

Rempang Island, measuring 16,583 hectares, is part of western Indonesia's Riau Islands Province.[1] Located a short ferry ride from the bustling city-state of Singapore, Rempang could not be more of a contrast. Its 16 villages are inhabited by fishers, and farmers who grow bananas, chillies, coconuts, and vegetables. Rempang also houses small enterprises like seaweed processing facilities, and chicken and fish farms that supply neighbouring islands like the Indonesian manufacturing and logistics hub of Batam, as well as Singapore.

From mid-2023, the 7,500 inhabitants of Rempang have been up in arms. Seemingly out of the blue, they have been served an eviction notice by the government, as it seeks to facilitate the latest site of the global green energy transition. The proposed Rempang Ecocity will be a mega-project spread over the entire island. Around 7,000 hectares will be dedicated to the Ecocity, and the rest will be protected forest, sans people. The Ecocity will comprise a solar panel manufacturing facility by China's leading PV panel manufacturer Xinyi Glass, related silica sand mining operations in and around Rempang, vast solar farms for the generation of solar energy, and linked industrial and habitation hubs. The main Indonesian developer of the Ecocity is PT MEG, which is part of Indonesian banking, real estate, manufacturing, and services conglomerate the Artha Graha Group (Dong 2023; Sud 2023).

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The majority of Rempang's residents reject *energi hijau* (green energy) that is likely to pass them by, and benefit the international businesses housed in Batam, and supply Singapore further afield. They are aware that the Indonesia and Singapore governments have already signed agreements for creating a green energy trading corridor between the two countries (Karyza 2024). The people of Rempang are determined to stay in their homes, in the villages that have nurtured them, and where their ancestors lie buried—"till death".[2] Concerns around life, livelihood, and land are propelling their spirited fightback against the proposed Ecocity. As one resident told me: "we have lived without electricity for the longest time. To break our protest, the government is threatening to cut off our electricity. Let them. We are not moving from here".[3] Another resident, demonstrating at a lookout site at the entrance of his village, set up to prevent government officials or Ecocity contractors from entering the premises, said: "how can they talk about green energy, when they will chop all the trees and crops and make everything barren?".[4]

For over two years now, large numbers of Rempang's people have demonstrated in their village squares, at government offices in Batam and the Indonesian capital Jakarta, and at major landmarks like the Barelang Bridge connecting Batam, Rempang, and Galang islands (Suhenda and Fadli 2023). They have also protested against the proposed Ecocity through the media, and through civil society organisations like environmental rights group Walhi Friends of the Earth and the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI). The residents of Rempang have even petitioned UN Special Rapporteurs against their impending eviction (United Nations Special Rapporteurs 2024). Under pressure from the government, and facing intrusions in their everyday life from Ecocity representatives (Sahputra 2024), by mid-2025, 162 families of the first five villages to be incorporated in Phase 1 of the proposed Ecocity had moved out of their homes. Of these, most were in temporary accommodation provided by the government, awaiting permanent homes in nearby Tanjung Banon which is supposed to accommodate all 16 displaced villages in one location. However, despite coercion and constant threats, 522 families have stood their ground and refused to move.[5]

The story of Rempang Ecocity, and locals' opposition to it, reflects territorial conflicts around the sites of green transition that are occurring across the world. Labels of green energy "aporias" (Stock and Sareen 2024), "murderous" green energy (Dunlap and Arce 2022), and "green grabs" (Franco and Borras 2019; Nhamo and Chekwoti 2014) headline the documentation of an unjust energy transition (Rouine and Roche 2022; Sovacool et al. 2019; Sud 2025). This unjust transition privileges the interests of capital, the state, and elite energy users, at the expense of users and inhabitants of the land that is needed to host green energy sites. A key reason why the interests of capital, the state, and elite energy users can be privileged is the devaluing and marginalisation of land and the way of life of existing inhabitants (Baka 2017; Gidwani and Reddy 2011). Thus, at Rempang, amid protest from locals and their refusal to leave their villages, Indonesia's Minister for Investment made a quick visit in August 2023. He was accompanied by an ominous cavalcade of army and police vehicles that I witnessed. At Sembulang village, which will be among the first to be relocated as it will host

the Xinyi Glass factory, Minister Bahlil said: "I come from a small village. I am not able to see all of you like this. This project will bring benefit to society … Let's look for a win-win solution". The military men accompanying the minister, as well as armed police personnel, and politicians from the Batam zonal authority (BP Batam) which controls Rempang, clapped; the residents of Sembulang looked on sullenly.[6]

Reflecting the views of the Indonesian minister was a senior corporate executive in neighbouring Singapore. He has business interests in Batam. The executive told me: as Singapore lacks space, and the Riau Islands "next door" have "abundant space" and are "basically Singapore's hinterland", it is a "no brainer" that green energy infrastructure should be located there.[7] An academic who works closely with Singaporean policymakers went a step further and said: "producing energy in Indonesia also places carbon emissions for renewables installation on their [Indonesia's] books … If there are emissions, they get the emissions, not us".[8] This is important to the small but ambitious island-state seeking to be a frontrunner in decarbonisation, with a target to reach net zero emissions by mid-century.

In the seemingly sympathetic wording of the Indonesian minister who cannot bear to see the residents of Rempang "like this", and wants to see Rempang Eco-city "benefit society", and in the reading of more distant Singaporean elites, Rempang is a frontier. Frontiers can denote a pioneering, cutting edge. Yet, in the conception of Rempang noted above, the frontier takes on a more traditional meaning of an extractable, marginal hinterland (Turner 1893). Here "cheap nature" (Patel and Moore 2018) is to be exploited by capital with the active facilitation of the state. While green energy is being deployed in a range of contexts, frontiers deemed "sacrificial" for the "greater common good" (Roy 2002) are at the forefront (Backhouse and Lehmann 2020; Castan Broto and Sanzana Calvet 2020).

The task of this paper, undertaken over four sections, is to interrogate the making of Rempang as a green energy frontier. The paper's contributions are threefold. In the first section, which is a literature review, I deepen contemporary understandings of emergent green frontiers by reading these alongside critical social science on frontiers more broadly. This critical social science understanding leads me to the second section, where I historicise and denaturalise Rempang and the larger Riau Islands as a green frontier. Instead, I show how Rempang and the Riau Islands have been frontierised over time, and through repeated natural resource extractions, with only the latest stage being extraction for green energy. In sub-sections that follow, I discuss the Riau Islands' frontierisation through the capture of plant and metal resources under Dutch colonialism, crude oil in the postcolonial Cold War era, and natural gas, sand, and more recently green energy in the contemporary period.

Even as the paper demonstrates that green frontiers don't just emerge, but are systematically produced over time, the third section shows the continual maintaining of the frontier through the exercise of authority. Through primary, qualitative research, this section demonstrates how authority, both formal and informal, is exercised to keep Rempang and the Riau Islands on edge, while also deploying control over them. The deployment of control in the present, including through

spectacular coercive and regulatory means, announces the state in charge of its unruly frontier. This frontier is now ready to be handed over to capital for green extraction, as is the case with Rempang today. The conclusion brings together insights from the three preceding sections, to make a conceptual intervention. My inductive study, where theory is built from the data, shows energy transition to be more of a continuation. This is a continuation of domination by power and capital, even as the energy and resources driving this systemic continuity may differ over the ages. A frontier, seen as waste, and as ripe for change, becomes an apt canvas for making this counter-intuitive argument about stasis. At the same time, resistance to frontierisation, which features across the argument, also shows a continuity of unsettlement. The protesting residents of present-day Rempang are drawing on a long history of laying claim to their land, in the face of more powerful forces. The frontier, perpetually sought to be settled, is continually unsettled and in the making.

In structuring the argument, I am guided by Tsing's (2003:5102) research on frontierisation, where she tells us that "the Kalimantan frontier is not the enactment of a principle of commodification or conquest … The frontier is … a series of historically nonlinear leaps and skirmishes … The most helpful scholarship, then, is not to be found in abstract treatises but rather in historical descriptions and ethnographies". The paper consciously refuses to read Rempang's frontierisation off a script. This would amorphise place and people, and is itself a form of knowledge frontierisation. I see my task as providing a historically and politically rich account to show a green energy frontier being made, and contested.

Methodologically, the paper is based on qualitative research in Rempang, and the larger Riau Islands Province. I use secondary sources to build a picture of the Riau Islands in recent history. I then use primary research comprising interviews, group discussions, documentary sources, policy and media documents to explore frontierisation, especially for energy extraction and authority-making, in the Riau Islands today. Interviews have been conducted with government officials, energy executives, energy think tank personnel, environmental activists and defenders, and communities affected by incoming green energy projects in the Riau Islands. This includes the main Ecocity affected community in Rempang, as well as communities facing private land takeovers for ancillary green energy projects in neighbouring islands, as I discuss later in the paper.

In addition to the Riau Islands, data have been collected in Jakarta, Bali, and Singapore for a larger project that the paper draws on. The number of interviews conducted, either online or in-person, depending on the convenience of the interviewee, totals 104. I conducted most of the interviews with the assistance of a translator when required as I do not speak Bahasa Indonesia. However, Bahasa Indonesia shares words with both my spoken languages of Hindustani (with Arabic and Persian influences) and English. This allowed me to follow discussion, and cross-check translation, including with the use of online tools like DeepL.

In the set of interviews, 43 were conducted by a Rempang resident who has studied to degree level and speaks basic English. This resident is resisting the Ecocity but has good standing in the community and was also able to introduce me to families who have agreed to relocate in exchange for compensation and

alternate housing. I supplement and triangulate interview and documentary data with observation at sites of green energy development in Rempang, and the wider Riau Islands Province. Research for this paper has been carried out between July–August 2022 and July–August 2024, with three field visits. In keeping with the wishes of respondents, names and locations have been anonymised. However, names and locations of public figures or publicly known events have been retained.


**Figure 1:** Provinces of contemporary Indonesia (source: Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Indonesia,_administrative_divisions_-_en_-_monochrome.svg; CC BY-SA 3.0)


**Figure 2:** Rempang Island (source: Google Maps https://www.google.com/maps/@0.9575812,104.1338572,10z?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MDYxNi4wIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D; Map data ©2025 Google)

## Margins, Frontiers, and Energy Frontiers

Discussions of green energy incorporate the concept of frontiers. Scholars of green energy have rigorously analysed sacrificial landscapes inhabited by racialised or low-income communities that shoulder a disproportionate burden of environmental harms (Karam and Shokrgozar 2023; Scott and Smith 2017; Zografos and Robbins 2020). A critical green energy literature is also increasingly interested in the politics and political economy underpinning seemingly marginal green energy landscapes. Brock et al. (2021) analyse deindustrialised landscapes turning to green manufacture or renewables generation, while continuing to nurture anti-democratic, authoritarian politics. Hamouchene and Sandwell (2023) and Schuetze (2024) argue that neocolonial green grabbing is at play in strategically sensitive regions controlled by authoritarian power.

At a more granular level, the renewables literature records a range of authorities —the state, shadow state actors, brokers and musclemen being arrayed in "underperforming", "waste" places earmarked for green energy projects (Baka 2013). Faced with resistance from local communities, states may resort to manipulation of documents and rules, coercion, and repression to make way for these projects (Singh 2023; Stock and Birkenholtz 2021). Dispossession, including violent dispossession from land, water, commons, and livelihoods linked to these, can accompany renewables projects (Dunlap 2024; Howe 2015; Sellwood and Valdivia 2018). The deployment of lands deemed as underutilised or waste for green energy does not impact affected communities in the same way. Studies of large-scale wind power projects in Mexico (Torres Contreras 2023) and solar park development in India (Ghosh et al. 2023) have shown that larger landowners, and those with alternate livelihood options, may welcome renewables development, and associated compensation. However, those at the class, caste, gender, and racial margins of incoming renewables developments, stand to lose their existing livelihood and access to land and the commons. They may be thrown further into precarity.

A longstanding literature on margins and frontiers can deepen our understanding of green frontiers. The existence of margins underlies the making of a frontier. Margins can mark the geo-political and geo-strategic edge of prevalent world order (Nuttall 2010), with entire countries being regarded as "peripheral" (Barney 2009). Margins can also connote the spatial and political peripheries of a nation, with the national core being defined in relation to these margins. Modern nation-states often seek to transform "premodern margins" through "modern territorial interface" (Winichakul 1994:101). The frontier then becomes part of the project of national development, in spatial, material, and ideological terms (Fold and Hirsch 2009). This process of development may attempt to assert political authority at the "margins of the state" (Cons and Eilenberg 2019:8), where margins may denote only a shadowy state presence. The latter has been conceptualised as a zone of ambiguity, with limited law and order, multiple and competing sources of authority, and tenuous security (Das and Poole 2004). A key reason why the state engages with politically and socially restive margins is economic control, often in collaboration with capital. These margins are associated with untapped nature, ripe for capitalist investment and extraction. Speaking of Southeast Asia, Barney (2009:146) refers to some "last remaining forested landscapes where natural

resources have not yet been enclosed, extracted, and incorporated into circuits of production and consumption".

Analysing the extant literature, margins are not marginal per se. It is hard to imagine communities resident at so-called margins self-classifying as marginal. Margins are denoted by the state and capital, with the process of frontierisation deployed to open up these so-called margins to capitalist extraction, and statist authority. The making of a frontier can be fraught, in what the literature perceives to be "zones of unpredictability" (Tsing 1994:279). With the coming of statist and capitalist intervention to a margin identified for frontierisation, there are invariably contests over authority, both formal and informal (Rasmussen and Lund 2018; Watts 2017). There is also, typically, extractivism centred on the accumulation of cheap nature (Patel and Moore 2018). The institutional interventions of frontierisation tend to be met by, and must negotiate with, through, and around, populations rendered precarious and restive (Arnold and Pickles 2011; Hall et al. 2015; Lorey 2015; Sur 2021; Watts 2017).

I now turn to an exploration of how the contemporary push for green energy plays out at spaces rendered frontier. These are spaces rendered frontier over time, i.e. historically, and maintained as a frontier in time, i.e. in the present. I begin with the historical aspect. The historical making of frontiers is largely missing in the green energy literature that tends to focus on the contemporary, climate critical moment. Yet, for places deployed as green energy sacrifice zones, a reclaiming of history, including a history of frontierisation and extraction, is crucial for political awareness, and contestation.

## Becoming Marginal, Being Frontierised

The Riau Islands are at the edges of the imagination of many Indonesians. My queries about the Riau Islands in the politically and economically powerful mainlands of Java and Bali were met with: they are "too far", and "Singaporeans go there to holiday". Yet, Riau Islands were not peripheral till quite recently in history. Instead, they were part of the powerful Johor Sultanate (established 1528) that ruled across the south of present-day Malaysia, Singapore, parts of the large Indonesian island of Sumatra, and the Riau Islands. The Riau Islands were at the core of the Johor kingdom, territorially, but also in terms of economic relations. We know that international maritime trade in tin, and cash crops like pepper and gambier thrived in Riau's islands like Bintan, to the extent that labour from southern China had to be imported to support the economy. Cultivation of gambier, used in the tanning industry, spread to Singapore, following the settlement of some of Riau's gambier labour and entrepreneurs there (LePoer 1991). In 1687, it was reported that 500–600 trading ships could be seen on any day at the main Port of Riau at Bintan Island. These included ships from Siam (modern day Thailand), China, Aceh, Perak, Kedah, Portugal, and England, among others (Ricklefs 2001).

### *The Colonial, Agrarian, and Metal Frontier*

The history of the Riau Islands and much of Asia, Africa, Central and South America, and the Caribbean underwent a sea change from the late 15$^{th}$ century with

the Spanish voyages to the Americas for capturing resources and territory in lands deemed underutilised and uncivilised, i.e. frontier. This was followed by European mercantilist and territorial domination of what is known as the Global South today (Sud and Sanchez-Ancochea 2022). The most systematic and comprehensive colonisation in history largely ended only in the mid-20th century.[9] As part of Europe's colonisation of much of the world, the Dutch East India Company sought trade monopolies in many parts of what is now Indonesia (Neirabatij 1922).

For instance, in the West, the Dutch eyed the profitable mining and trade of tin, among other resources. A malleable and water-resistant metal, tin was in high demand in the world's ship-building industry at the time, besides being used as an alloy to produce bronze that has a range of metallurgical uses. Tin mines were located on the islands of Bangka and Belitung south of the Riau Islands, and in Singkep and Kundur in the Riau Islands. The Riau Islands were also a crucial entrepot for the tin trade, given its strategic location between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. In 1745–1760, the Dutch attempted diplomatic means to control the Riau Islands' tin trade. When this was resisted, coercion was unleashed. Vos (1994) records the first warships to ever be dispatched from a European state to Asia, targeting the Riau Islands in 1783–1784. While the trade in tin suffered due to relentless attacks, and the fortunes of the Dutch East India Company declined, the Dutch state became an established colonial power in the region. The centre of the Dutch East Indies was Batavia or modern-day Jakarta. From this central location, the Dutch attempted to control the vast Indonesian archipelago, including places like the Riau Islands which they termed the "Outer Islands", perpetually "on a slow boil" (Tagliacozzo 2000). The move from thriving agrarian and trading centre to a problematic space requiring repression and control is the start of the Riau Islands' marginalisation and extractivist frontierisation.

The Riau Islands as a colonial frontier supported Dutch trade in pepper, gambier, and tin, as well as coconut, fish, timber, and rubber (Andaya 1997). To protect their trade interests, the Dutch signed a treaty with one of the several factions of the Johor kingdom in 1818 to allow a garrison at the Riau Islands. The Dutch garrison could control and tax trade, including the lucrative international spice trade that passed through this crucial entrepot. The garrison was also considered essential to keep British influence in the region in check. The Anglo-Dutch treaty of 1824 paused simmering tensions between the Dutch and the British by ceding Malaya, including Singapore, to the British, and Sumatra and the Riau Islands to the Dutch (LePoer 1991). The resulting division in the titular Johor kingdom led to the much-reduced area under Dutch influence emerging as the Riau-Lingga kingdom, headquartered at the island of Bintan and extending to the Lingga Islands to the south. The Riau-Lingga kingdom largely maps on to the contemporary Riau Islands Province (see Figure 3).

The Dutch made the Riau Islands into a colonial frontier, in order to exercise economic and territorial control over it. The islands' next phase of frontierisation was in the postcolonial period, in the shadow of the Cold War.

**Figure 3:** Riau-Lingga Kingdom (1824–1911) (source: Wikimedia Commons https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riau-Lingga_Sultanate#/media/File:Riau_sultanate_area.png; CC BY-SA 4.0)

## *The Postcolonial, Cold War Oil and Logistics Frontier*

Following Dutch reverses in colonised territories during World War II, and a robust movement for freedom, Indonesian nationalists declared independence in 1945. Sukarno became independent Indonesia's first president. Given a multi-ethnic, multi-religious territory, dispersed across more than 17,500 islands, national unity was enshrined in the country's founding principles. Yet, this unity has tended to be defined by Jakarta, which continued to be the postcolonial nation's capital, and the political-governmental core. From independence in 1945–2004, the Riau Islands were part of much larger provinces: Sumatra (1945–1948), Central Sumatra (1948–1957), and Riau Province (1957–2004). Decentralisation and democratic reform initiated at the start of the 21$^{st}$ century, combined with a movement for regional autonomy, saw the formation of Riau Islands Province in 2004. Yet, as before, key provincial leaders were appointed by the central government, which also controlled finances.

Like in colonial times, in the postcolonial period too, the Riau Islands, and the larger provinces they were part of, were tapped for their raw material. The Dutch had started exploring oil in mainland Sumatra from the 1870s. The Dutch Indies Mining Act (1899) monopolised mining concessions, cutting out the claims of communities and titular local rulers to Indonesia's growing oil wealth (Setiawan 2015). At the cusp of World War II, crude oil production in the Dutch East Indies was 7.4 million tons, with much of it being refined within the country (Arndt 1983). Refining capacity was severely damaged during the war, and rival countries like Singapore and Australia developed refining facilities post-war.

Most of Indonesia's oil mining, pre- and post-independence, had been done by oil majors like Shell and Standard Oil. Post-independence, left-leaning, nationalist President Sukarno attempted to re-balance oil revenues, with an agreement for

60:40 division of profits between the government and oil companies. In the shadow of the Cold War, a US-backed military coup that led General Suharto to power in 1967 put paid to that. Suharto's dictatorial New Order regime negotiated much more favourable terms for the oil companies, now dominated by US majors like Caltex, which later became Chevron (Arndt 1983). Furthermore, Indonesia increasingly became a crude oil exporting country, which then imported refined fuel from countries like the US, Japan, and Singapore. Importantly, the ebbs and flows of the oil economy were centred on the government in Jakarta. Thus, even if 6/7ths of Indonesia's oil revenues were coming from Riau Province by the mid-1970s (Esmara 1975), the beneficiaries were the oil companies and the central government, especially the generals who ran it (Arndt 1983).

While Sumatra was a major site of oil extraction, the New Order government took far-reaching steps to incorporate the Riau Islands, then still part of the larger Riau Province, into the thriving trade in Indonesia's flagship export: oil. It did so by redefining the course of one of the Riau Islands' constituent islands: Batam, which is just 12 nautical miles from Singapore. In 1971, the central government set up the Batam Island Development Agency (BIDA) by presidential decree. Batam was initially declared an oil logistics and trading hub, governed by BIDA, rather than by the provincial government. From 1974, to take advantage of its proximity to Singapore, Batam was designated a tax-free zone for logistics, manufacture, and export. By 1980, Indonesia and Singapore had signed a Batam Development Agreement, with the aim of boosting foreign investment. In 1991, again by central presidential decree, the jurisdiction of BIDA was expanded to cover the proximate islands of Rempang, Galang, Galang Baru, and 39 other smaller islands (Anggraeny and Ayu 2020). By 1995, Indonesia had proposed over 50 kilometres of highways and bridges connecting Batam with its southern islands, including Rempang (Peachey et al. 1998). In the mid-2000s, following the economic success of Shenzhen in China, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) were being built across the world. These generally provided ready infrastructure and significant land and tax incentives to capital for production and export. Large areas of Batam were designated SEZ in 2007. Governance coordination for the SEZ, and for the rest of the island that was still a Free Trade and Port Zone was shifted to a new centralised authority termed BP Batam (Anggraeny and Ayu 2020).

The Batam and Barelang zonal development, bringing together the islands of Batam, Rempang, and Galang, is at the heart of the Riau Islands' current developmental push, which also caters to land-scarce Singapore's manufacturing and energy needs. Collaboration with Singapore, and global finance capital that flows through Singapore, certainly developed Batam in terms of infrastructure, and manufacturing and service capacity. Compared with its neighbouring islands that still largely depend on farming and fishing, Batam is dotted with manufacturing hubs, shopping malls, real estate developments, and hotels catering to tourists and corporate visitors. Yet, how much of this development benefits the people of Batam, and the Riau Islands more broadly, is a question.

My interlocutors in Batam and Rempang, for instance, have found it impossible to secure jobs in the firms and factories of the SEZ. They indicate that labour

contractors that supply these businesses have links with communities in Sumatra and Java from where "obedient" labour is hired[10] (see also Parwez 2018; Tesema 2024). My interlocutors can at best work in the informal economy that supports the economic zones, say, in the roadside food business, or in small-scale retail and transport. Mazaan, who I have met on repeat visits to Batam, has switched multiple jobs in the three years I've known him. He worked at an internet and printing shop but was frustrated with intermittent electricity. He was then an apprentice in a restaurant on the outskirts of Batam, and helped a friend at a hawker food stall in Singapore. After being deported for overstaying in Singapore, he was struggling with a home bakery in a small island near Batam.[11]

The subordination of the local population to the needs of capital is visible in different aspects of Batam's functioning. From its inception, the Batam free trade zone allowed for duty-free import of goods intended to be used and processed on the island, including for export. Furthermore, investors in Batam were allowed to be contractors of projects on the island, and fully repatriate the profits (South China Morning Post 1994). Typically, capital from Singapore, which may channel international finance, is invested in the manufacturing parks and hubs that dot Batam. This includes the well-known Batamindo Industrial Park, spread over 320 hectares, which was set up in 1990. Batamindo is a collaboration between the state-backed Singapore Technologies Industrial Corporation (now SembCorp), Singapore's Jurong Town Corporation, and Indonesia's Salim Group that has been described as the "business pillar of Suharto's Indonesia" (Borsuk and Chng 2014). The Salim Group continues to be powerful in post-Suharto Indonesia. Cheap land, cheap labour, and tax incentives are what make Batam and Batamindo particularly attractive to Singaporean capital in Indonesia's frontierised "wild west", in the words of one commentator (Phelps 2004).

## *The Contemporary Energy Frontier*

The Riau Islands as a colonial, and then postcolonial, frontier has largely served the interests of big capital: a Dutch colonial trading company and its backers, US and global oil corporations, and internationally networked Singaporean business interests and their Indonesian enablers. In each of these cases, big business has been backed by the regulatory and coercive power of the state, colonial and postcolonial. The East Asian financial crisis of 1997 and the resultant economic uncertainty boosted a pro-democracy movement against the 30-year dictatorship of General Suharto. Democratisation and the era of reform initiated with the downfall of Suharto in 1998, also brought with it moves towards greater autonomy for Indonesia's provinces. Riau Islands Province was carved out of Riau Province in 2004, but Jakarta appointed a Javanese governor, a former head of the Batam Island Development Authority (BIDA), to the headship of the new province from day one (Andaya 2021).

Contemporary Riau Islands Province continues to be a frontier of global capital, backed by the centralised, top-down Indonesian state. When oil production started dwindling at the turn of the century, big oil exited. "They had extracted enough", according to a consultant with the sector.[12] Indonesia's largest oil

producer Chevron handed over its operations to state-owned Pertamina in 2021. While the Riau Islands is now only a minor conduit in the global oil trade, it is still central to the trade in energy. From 2003, the 468-kilometre undersea Grissik-Batam-Singapore deep-sea pipeline has carried gas to Singapore. Grissik is a town in South Sumatra Province. The pipeline that takes natural gas from Grissik to Singapore, runs alongside islands around Batam's shore. The gas trading project is classified as a National Strategic Project of the Indonesian government. This allows for accelerated infrastructure development and government and business-friendly land acquisition where needed (Aji and Khudi 2021). The state initiated the infrastructurally complex pipeline project with a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB 2002).

While the state puts its might behind National Strategic Projects, they can be owned and operated partly or fully by private capital. This is the case for the Grissik-Batam-Singapore pipeline. The owners are state energy company Pertamina, American energy major ConocoPhillips, Malaysia's Petronas, China National Petroleum, and Spain-headquartered Repsol. In 2021, ConocoPhillips sold its stake to Indonesian energy major MedcoEnergi. The energy from Indonesia supplied to Singapore is crucial for that country's economy. In 2019, 95.3% of Singapore's electricity production was from natural gas, with natural gas also supplying its industrial, transport, and city gas sectors (Yep 2019). Natural gas export has brought substantial revenues to Indonesia. For instance, the initial gas supply deal from South Sumatra via the Grissik-Batam-Singapore pipeline was for 20 years (2003–2023) and has recently been renewed. The initial deal amounted to US$9 billion, for the supply of 2.27 trillion standard cubic feet of natural gas (The Star 2022). While central government and business in Singapore and Indonesia may have benefited from this deal, as have the citizens of Singapore and businesses in Batam, who are assured electricity supply, the story is quite different from the frontier of the Riau Islands.

Around ten islands adjacent to Batam, including Bulang, Sekupang, Belakang Padang, Kasu and Pemping, host the final section of pipelines for Singapore's gas supply (ADB 2002). This amounts to 31 square kilometres (Sharma 2003). These islands, and the seabed and sea ecology that their residents depend on, were subject to an environmentally destructive process of pipeline building in 2002–2003. Construction involved the destruction of mangroves, which are a carbon sink, host marine ecologies, and are a bulwark against cyclones. It also involved the dredging of the seabed and excavating of hilltops on islands hosting pipeline terminal stations. Around 150,000 trees were apparently planted by the contractor on the hilltops to compensate for the tropical rainforests that were destroyed (Sharma 2003).

Field visits to the affected islands revealed a sense of dejection among the populace about the major international energy project that was passing, quite literally, under their feet. Fishworkers complained about reduced fish catch due to dredging and mangrove destruction. They commented on the "*polusi*" (pollution) created by the pipeline project, and expressed a sense of helplessness. A middle-aged fishworker on Dara Island said: "yes, the fish catch went down with sand work. But we cannot do anything. We can pray to God: please help us".[13]

At the same time, this fishworker said: "even though sand dredging creates many problems, I still live here". A sense of belonging to a place as home can be read into this statement. It explains why, despite repeated extractions, projects like the one at Rempang are resisted.

It is not just residents who see extractive frontierisation projects around them with cynicism. Local village officials who are drawn into these projects by central government diktat are also sceptical. Officials I met on Muhasu Island near Batam admitted convincing their constituents to allow the gas pipeline to be built in their living environments. However, now they appear cynical about not having received any benefits from the pipeline—other than compensation for families whose land was directly encroached. The officials are scornful of a gas pipeline that lights up Singapore, whereas they continue to get limited electricity.[14] The officials point to neighbouring islands that receive electricity from 6pm till 12 noon, and Mundu Island that gets electricity from 4pm to 7am. They suggest that future solar projects in and around their islands will be a repeat of the gas story: "Benefit for [central] government and Singapore. No benefit for people".[15]

Underlying the channelling of plenty to a global economic and financial hub, and the continued extraction and poverty of the lands enabling this prosperity, is frontierisation. Even carefully worded Asian Development Bank documents discuss the pipeline project and its impacts as the "routes selected have generally avoided habitations and structures of any great economic, social or cultural value" (ADB 2002). A process of unseeing the "other", made possible by colonial and postcolonial extractivist frontierisation, allows for the repeated use of tropes that devalue the Riau Islands and many places like it across the world. This unseeing and devaluing of the supposed frontier fundamentally continues the colonial and then postcolonial developmental hierarchy of superior and inferior, or worthy and useless. My argument in this paper is that this hierarchy has been continuously reinforced over time, from projects of colonial frontierisation to programmes of contemporary energy extraction at this frontier long in the making. The division of islands 12 nautical miles apart into a low carbon energy hub, and an energy-scarce carrier of pipelines, is the colonial, postcolonial, and contemporary frontier writ large.

Having demonstrated the continual and deliberate marginalisation of a place in the service of capital, this paper now turns to the enablement of this frontierisation by the state, and authority that is disordered, and then spectacularly ordered.

## The Disordered, Then Ordered Frontier

States have for long worked in the service of capital (Jessop 1999; Miliband 1969). That the state has facilitated capital in the Riau Islands over time, is not a unique feature of a frontier long in the making. What is unique, and what I want to focus on in this section, is the making dissonant of authority—of the state, and more broadly. It is this dissonance and unruliness that typifies the frontier, as the literature reviewed above in the first section also tells us. At the same time, capital accumulation does not happen in chaos. The opening up of a frontier to capital

requires disordering of how things are normally done, to eventually introduce newer norms and rules (Rasmussen and Lund 2018). The disordering and making unruly of the Riau Islands, and its subsequent ordering, often with a heavy hand, is a continual part of the recent history of frontierisation. This section briefly speaks to the disordering and ordering of authority in the Riau Islands under colonisation and in the postcolonial Cold War era. It then turns to the contemporary period.

To lay out some working definitions, I see authority as the ability to exercise power over a people and place, and the power to make and implement rules that govern life in that place. Authority rests in the state at its most formal and institutionalised form. Classic definitions tell us that the state is characterised by control over violence, through which it gains the legitimacy and power to govern its territory (Weber 1978). Authority exercised over territory, with violence or the ability to unleash it, produces order—a systematisation based on regularities, which shapes how things are done around a place (Foucault 1970; Graeber 2015). At the same time, order can be disordered and made unruly when authority is challenged or fragmented. In the argument that follows, I spotlight the making unruly of the Riau Islands through multiplicity and fragmentation of authority—both formal, i.e. of the state or rulers, and informal, or that which is exercised in the shadows of the state (Das and Poole 2004).

Informal authority practised by actors and institutions in parallel to the state, or in cahoots with actors and institutions within the state, is a routine part of the exercise of power in all societies[16] (Gupta 1995; Jaffe 2024; Roy 2009; Sud 2021). Indonesia is no exception, as a rich literature tells us (Aspinall and van Klinken 2010; Berenschot and Dhiaulhaq 2023). At a frontier in the making, fragmented formal authority, and the informalisation of authority, come to dominate how things are done. That is, fragmentation and informalisation become the (dis)order of the day. Heavy-handed authority that is then typically deployed to create order out of unruliness invites capital for development. This further aligns authority with capital, and further marginalises frontierised populations.

## *The Unruly Colonial and Postcolonial Frontier*

As the Dutch and British powers were trying to establish trade and territorial influence in Southeast Asia in the 17$^{th}$ and 18$^{th}$ centuries, their officials decried native savagery. Savage, unruly pirates, for instance, are said to have roamed the Malacca Straits, jeopardising trade (à Campo 2003; Tagliacozzo 2000). Around the Riau Islands, powerful traders who resisted Dutch attempts to control trade were also branded pirates (Ota 2018). Yet, piracy and state-sponsored privateering at sea had been practised widely in Southeast Asia over time, including by the Dutch and British themselves. This was to undermine the trade routes, incomes, and power of local kingdoms, or even European contenders. In the 17$^{th}$ century, vessels of the Dutch East India Company regularly raided plantations and settlements in the Eastern Malay Archipelago. This was to damage the existing economy of spice production and trade, and establish a Dutch monopoly (Eklof Amirell 2015).

After the Anglo-Dutch division of the Johor kingdom in 1824, the Dutch took over the trade and military powers of the Riau-Lingga kingdom. Yet, they continued to face challenges, including possibilities of rebellion from Riau-Lingga elites who were being advised by religious Ulema leaders. By 1911, the Dutch had withdrawn even the titular powers of the Riau-Lingga rulers. Not for the first time, they had to resort to warships to control the rebellious, "outer lands" (Nor and Dahlan 2018). The heavy-handed colonial apparatus was justified as a mission to civilise and control the savage—be it unruly pirates, incompetent titular rulers, or interfering religious leaders. A territory that had been made disordered, was thus turned towards a colonial order of mining, plantations, and trade monopolies, underpinned by violence.

After independence, Indonesia's leftist President Sukarno, who was also a central figure in the Non-Aligned Movement of postcolonial countries attempting to stay equidistant from the US and USSR, was a direct target of America's Cold War undermining. His government finally fell to a military coup in 1965, abetted by Western powers including the US and the UK (Lashmar et al. 2021). The fall of President Sukarno was accompanied by the murder of 500,000 to as many as three million Indonesians seen as communists. Mass graves from the time are still being discovered, including in the Riau Islands (CNN Indonesia 2017). By 1967, General Suharto, the leader of the military coup, had been designated president. The 30-year dictatorship of Suharto was beholden to US state and oil interests.

The postcolonial, Cold War frontier remained "on a slow boil" through the Suharto years, while funnelling massive profits to Western oil companies, and Indonesian elites. Indonesian oil is a typical resource curse story for the larger economy and society, as it sparked environmental and political conflict. Protests against land takeovers, water contamination, and wastewater disposal lodged by local communities against Chevron, for instance, have been routine in Riau Province (Global Atlas of Environmental Justice 2022; Juhasz 2010). These protests have tended to be clamped down with a heavy hand by bringing in the police, local strongmen, and even the infamous Mobile Brigade Corps (Brimob), formed for special operations, counterterrorism, and riot control.

As it has been frontierised in the service of capital, unsurprisingly, the Riau Islands and surrounding regions have been plagued by rebellions on land and sea, anti-communist Cold War machinations, and community unrest. This restive frontier has had to be kept in check by the heavy-handed state. The central state—colonial and postcolonial—and global capital have worked to carve out order and authority out of contrived disorder. This continual carving of order through repressive authority at the frontier is an ongoing feature of frontierisation. This is evident as I turn towards an analysis of authority, order, and disorder in the Riau Islands today.

## *Ordering the Contemporary Energy Frontier*

The frontier as a space of extractive collaboration between state and capital cannot be taken for granted. It must be continually maintained. Rempang Ecocity is the latest iteration of the Indonesian central state's wresting of top-down order in

a multiplicity and messiness of politics and authority. I elaborate on this messiness of politics by discussing the multiple governmental authorities, competing claims to the land, and informal authority figures that have had to be controlled, and visibly so, by the state at the frontier.

With the formation of Riau Islands Province in 2004, the provincial rather than central government first inked a deal with PT MEG, the Indonesian business that is the face of Rempang Ecocity. The provincial government signed a memorandum of understanding with PT MEG to develop up to 5,000 hectares of Rempang Island for tourism. The preservation of the villages and cultural heritage of Rempang was to be guaranteed according to this agreement (Walhi 2023). The Rempang tourism project never took off, but in 2023, President Joko Widodo and his accompanying team inked a series of agreements during a strategic visit to China. Among these agreements was a plan to develop Rempang Ecocity, a joint venture between BP Batam, PT MEG, and China's Xinyi Glass. In declaring the Ecocity a National Strategic Project, that is, a key infrastructure development needing to be completed at speed for the betterment of the nation, the central government showed its willingness to get around crucial environmental and land legislations. They also bypassed local consultative processes and provincial governance structures. Top-down decrees may be seen as spectacular regulatory instruments, i.e. arrangements designed to create awe and impact, and to cut through the hum of routine government.

The declaration of the Ecocity as a National Strategic Project that can bypass provincial authority and the government's own regulatory procedures, severely curtails the rights of Rempang's people. They face "rightlessness" in the face of state diktat (Berenschot and Dhiaulhaq 2023). As I outlined at the start of this article, the *fait accompli* of the National Strategic Project for green energy generation was presented to the residents of Rempang in 2023, with just months to relocate. Despite having the will of the state imposed on them, villagers in Rempang have held out. They have drawn on the law, their historical and emotional links to the place, and the fecundity of the land that must not be lost to solar panels. For instance, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) that is assisting the communities of Rempang has accused the Ecocity's government partner BP Batam of abuse of power. Their officials have been forcibly measuring and marking land in the Ecocity affected villages. This was even before the presidential regulation according special strategic status to the Ecocity project was issued.[17]

While drawing on legal recourse, residents make historical claims to the land. For instance, they took me to their ancestral graves and told me their lived histories. A protesting villager at Kaseer village in Rempang pointed across the sea in the direction of the old Riau-Lingga capital of Tanjung Pinang. He said: "where did the Johor kings get their armies from? From our villages. The people of Kaseer were in their armies".[18] Villagers have also set up community gardens at lookout sites where they guard against Ecocity or BP Batam representatives entering their villages. They willingly share produce from these collective spaces, to showcase the quality of local crops.[19] Protesting villagers I spoke to are convinced of their customary entitlement to the land, even though legal aiders supporting them

confirm that they do not have the official "old village" or *kampung tua* title. Nevertheless, it seems strategic that the residents of Rempang are making multi-dimensional claims to the land: historic, legal, emotional, and claims linked to its fecundity and livelihood potential. This is not a shoehorning into a regime of property alone, which would be the ultimate domain of the state (Tilley 2020).

It is this noisy and disobedient populace, assisted by civil society organisations, that the state seeks to control when it calls the military to break up protests, or when it threatens members of civil society organisations.[20] When residents put up protest posters all over their villages, with words like "STRONGLY REJECT RELOCATION. DON'T DISTURB OUR SEA AND BEACH LAND #saverempanggalang #savefishermen #savefarmers" and "BP Batam Go Away", BP Batam officials tear the posters down. The overbearing state also puts up a large, lit-up billboard REMPANG ECOCITY atop a hill, for all the protesting villagers to see. Residents consider damaging the board in retaliation, but back off with the realisation that the hill is controlled by the army.[21]

The spectacular and visible order-making of the top-down state at Rempang and the Riau Islands is aimed at competing governmental authorities like the provincial administration, ordinary citizens with claims to the land, as well as informal authority figures and institutions. I demonstrate the latter point through informal authority figures in the sand trade. Islands near Rempang that are proximate to Singapore—the world's largest importer of sand—have been repeatedly tapped, oftentimes illegally, for sand from the Riau Islands. Hundreds of millions of tonnes of sand have made their way from Riau Islands to Singapore over many decades of so-called land reclamation. Approximately 26% of Singapore, including iconic spaces like Marina Bay Sands and the luxury beach and resort area of Sentosa, are built on land made with imported sand (Asia Sentinel 2023; Mahmud 2022). Between 1997 and 2002 alone, Indonesia exported 53 million metric tonnes of sand, mostly to Singapore (Gokkon and Lahay 2023). The amount of sand traded illegally is likely to be much higher than that suggested by officially available figures. Some 80 small islands in the Riau archipelago are believed to have shrunk significantly due to legal and illegal sand export (Tweedie 2018). The biggest losers in this process have been fishworkers, and others dependent on coastal land and waters, including my interlocutors in the Riau Islands.

Apart from formal, state authorities, a range of informal actors facilitate the lucrative sand trade in the Riau Islands. For instance, on islands off the coast of Batam, I came across numerous mentions of politician Amaan. His face stares out of posters and banners announcing Indonesia's National Day, the religious festival of Eid, and football matches. For the people of Zaru, one of the villages where Amaan is influential, apart from being a local politician linked to powerful players from the national ruling coalition, he is also the area's most important sand trader. He has made entire islands disappear in a matter of days.[22] These islands are not normally inhabited, but abut inhabited islands, providing sources of water, wood, and access to fishing grounds. Sand theft from these islands has direct implications for the quality of life and livelihood of Riau Island inhabitants. Unlike the beleaguered residents of Rempang Island, residents of Zaru and neighbouring villages have title to their land as they officially occupy *kampung tua*.

Yet, these residents depend on the environment more broadly for their existence. It is this wider environment encompassing coast, sea, forest, and common land that is threatened by rampant sand trade between the Riau Islands and Singapore.[23]

Sand trader cum politician Amaan is now rapidly buying up land on the smaller islands around Rempang. My informants are convinced he is gearing up for the Ecocity, which may expand onto his lands, or demand vast amounts of sand for solar PV panel manufacture.[24] Sand is the source of silica, and the islands in and around Rempang have the highest-grade silica sand coveted by the solar industry worldwide. Amaan is one of many informal authority figures that crisscross the landscape of Rempang and the Riau Islands. The state authorities that are involved, say, in the administration of the Grissik-Batam-Singapore gas pipeline, or the functioning of BP Batam, are aware of the informal authority figures around them. The Grissik-Singapore pipeline, for instance, passes near the islands where Amaan operates. He has even been involved in building consensus for the pipeline among villagers. It is common knowledge in the villages where he operates that he is a sand trader, with the complicity of authorities in the provincial government and BP Batam. The central state banned all sand trade between 2003 and 2023 to clamp down on figures like Amaan, and ostensibly to protect the environment. Yet, the illegal trade in sand carried on, building fortunes for Amaan and his accomplices, including in the state.[25]

At the frontier that is perpetually in the making, authorities that function in the shadows of the state assume state-like functions around the extraction of resources and the deriving of benefit from these. This is a routine feature of Indonesian governance that is not centred on a singular, ordered state (Aspinall and van Klinken 2010). This is also a routine feature of hybrid and shadow state relations across the world (Jaffe 2024; Sud 2021). At the same time, at the frontier deemed unruly, the formal state must rein in what could be perceived as spillovers from its authority. To be in control, and to be seen as in control by capital it seeks to attract and populations it seeks to check, the formal state centred on the executive, aided by its coercive arms, must time and again exercise its top-down authority. This authority needs to be exercised publicly, spectacularly, and coercively, to re-assert order, especially at the restive frontier. This is why, again and again at Rempang and the Riau Islands, we see colonial violence involving warships and military troops, postcolonial military clampdowns on communists, military protections provided to the oil logistics economy, and now violent military and police repression of protest around Rempang Ecocity, along with prominent regulatory declarations from the centre at Jakarta.

The state's assertion of order does not mean that protesting villagers fall in line, or that shadowy, informal authorities like Amaan cease to exist. Yet, the state's acts of assertion over unruly politics and unruly people have underlined its importance. The central, coercive, heavy-handed state appears as an imperative at the supposed frontier as it opens, yet again, for capitalist extraction. The frontier that has been continually rendered unruly necessitates the heavy-handed state, just as it warrants repeated projects of capital to tame and develop it.

## Conclusion

Rempang Ecocity does not exist yet. Its land acquisition is incomplete, mainly because of stiff resistance put up by the majority of Rempang's residents. This is still a green energy frontier in the making. The purpose of this paper has been to show the lineage of Rempang and the Riau Islands as green energy frontiers. Rempang and the Riau Islands are not unused or underutilised lands that can simply be channelled to the latest hot commodity, which happens to be renewables in the current moment. Instead, these are productive and coveted lands that have been struggled over for centuries. The paper has shown the lineage of capital's desire in Rempang and the Riau Islands' changing economies of agrarian and minerals production during pre-colonial and colonial times, industrial manufacturing and oil logistics in the postcolonial period, and proposed green energy manufacture and generation in the present time. Dutch colonial capital; US-led Cold War capital; Singaporean, Indonesian, and international manufacturing and logistics businesses; and now China-led and Indonesian conglomerate-supported renewables capital has set its sights on Rempang and the Riau Islands as the supposed waste frontier they can tap for value.

In the process of cheapening and devaluing Rempang and the Riau Islands in order to extract resources and value from them, capital has been steadfastly supported by authority—informal authority, and in spectacular and top-down coercive fashion, formal authority. Throughout this tapping of the frontier for capitalist extraction, Rempang and the Riau Islands' people and place have been decreed useless and dispensable. And throughout, the paper has shown rebellions against this rendering waste. We have seen this in colonial piracy and princely rebellions against the Dutch order, postcolonial movements for political assertion and autonomy, and contemporary pushbacks against sand extraction and incoming green energy projects. In this continuity of state and capital rendering a place frontier, and pushbacks against frontierisation, however unequal these might be, the paper argues for continuity rather than transition to be the overarching frame defining Rempang's fraught moves to the green economy.

In showing a green energy frontier in the making through processes of continuity rather than significant change, I have radically argued against the prevalent notion of renewables depicting a much coveted "transition". In doing so, I speak to emerging literatures that make a similar argument about the renewables economy, seeing it as an incremental addition to a growing fossil fuel based capitalist production system (Hanieh 2024). I also speak to scholarship pointing to structural continuity in the renewables economy with colonial and neocolonial relations. This literature particularly alerts us to green colonialism currently unfolding in parts of the Global South (Hamouchene and Sandwell 2023). Furthering these critical discussions, my argument of continuity rather than transition at a green frontier highlights structural durability in the extractiveness of capital, and the coercive top-down authority exercised by the state. However, in showing a lineage of struggle, I also point to an endurance of resistance and laying claim to land that has always been not-frontier, but home, livelihood, and identity to the people of Rempang and the wider Riau Islands.

This paper has been based on a relatively small spot in a vast world. Yet, the story of Rempang and the Riau Islands as a green energy frontier long in the making ought to resonate broadly. In the global push for green energy, this paper tells us to watch out for people and place who are expected to, yet again, make space for global capital. The histories of their lands matter, the politics they face and live through matters, and their struggles and pushbacks matter, wherever in the world these might be unfolding.

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## Data Availability Statement

The historical aspects of this article draw on publicly available secondary research. The contemporary aspects are based on primary sources, including newspaper articles, civil society reports, and government documents, which are linked or cited in the article. Interview data have been provided by sources on the condition of anonymity and are therefore not available publicly. The author may be able to discuss the broad findings from interview data with interested parties.

## Endnotes

[1] See Figure 1 for a map of Indonesia's contemporary provinces, and Figure 2 showing Rempang within Riau Islands Province.
[2] Resident, village Mulu, Rempang, interviewed July 2024.
[3] Resident, village Cai, interviewed July 2024.
[4] Resident, village Caizu, interviewed July 2024.
[5] Personal communication with protesting Rempang residents, April 2025.
[6] Minister Bahlil's speech at Sembulang village, 13 August 2023; video circulated by Save Rempang Movement members on WhatsApp.
[7] Executive, Singapore, interviewed August 2022.
[8] Singapore based energy researcher and policy consultant, interviewed July 2022.

[9] The effects of this colonisation carry on till date, as do colonial outposts in South America, Southern Africa, the Pacific, and West Asia.
[10] Community organisers, interviewed August 2023.
[11] Fieldnotes, July 2022, July 2024.
[12] Interviewed in Jakarta, August 2023.
[13] Interview, Dara Island, August 2023.
[14] Interviews with residents, Muhasu and Glemring Islands, August 2023.
[15] Interview, village officials, Muhasu, August 2023.
[16] Think, for instance, of the power broker, middleman, muscleman, or lobbyist who works in or alongside the corridors of power in small-town Southeast Asia, as well as in Washington, DC or London.
[17] Discussion with YLBHI member, Rempang Island, August 2024.
[18] Interview at protest site, Kaseer village, Rempang, July 2024.
[19] Fieldnotes, July 2024.
[20] Environmental NGO workers, interviewed July 2024.
[21] Fieldnotes, Rempang, July 2024.
[22] Community organiser, Glemring village, interviewed August 2022.
[23] Fieldnotes, Zaru and Glemring Islands, August 2023.
[24] Local journalist, interviewed in Rempang, 8 August 2023.
[25] Fieldnotes, Glemring Island, August 2023.

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