

# **Global City frontiers: Singapore's hinterland and the contested socio-political geographies of Bintan, Indonesia.**

**Bunnell T\***, **Muzaini H B†** and **Sidaway J D¶**

\* Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, Singapore 117570

Email: [geotgb@nus.edu.sg](mailto:geotgb@nus.edu.sg)

† Department of Geography, University of Durham, Durham DH1 3LE, United Kingdom

Email: [h.b.Muzaini@durham.ac.uk](mailto:h.b.Muzaini@durham.ac.uk)

¶ Department of Geography, Loughborough University, Loughborough, Leicestershire,  
LE11 3TU, United Kingdom

Email: [j.d.sidaway@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:j.d.sidaway@lboro.ac.uk)

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## **Abstract**

During the 1980s, Singapore's policy-makers increasingly perceived that the continued expansion of the Singapore economy required more spaces and workers beyond the 680 square kilometre territorial limits of the city-state. While planning to extend these limits through further land reclamation, Singapore also began to foster economic co-operation with regional neighbours, most famously in the form of a so-called Growth Triangle incorporating proximate areas of Malaysia and Indonesia. The empirical focus of this paper is on the tourist enclave developed on the Indonesian island of Bintan, a 45-minute ferry ride from Singapore. This enclave embodies complex re-territorializations. We specify how, despite a decade of re-fashioning zones of Bintan into quasi-enclaves and the literal and metaphorical cultivation of a tourist haven, other claims on these transfrontier zones resurfaced in the form of resistances and struggles over the terms of access to land and resources. It is argued that the trajectory of Bintan is symptomatic of wider transformations and epitomizes new configurations of sovereignty, urbanity and 'gated globalism'.

Borderlands have become privileged in the global narrative as places where local differences may be developed as sites of profitable exchange (Medovi, 2005: 172).

Azure pools, manicured golf courses and blooming gardens had come to adorn the original exotic wilderness. Gracious living and relaxed elegance had become the way of life. The romance of Bintan lives on, albeit to the beat of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world village (Massot, 2003: 76).

## **Introduction: Re-locating Singapore's urban frontier**

### **Contexts and Structure**

Since the 1980s, Singapore's policy-makers and politicians have argued that further expansion of the Singapore economy required spaces and labour beyond the 680 square kilometre territorial limits of the city-state. Ambitious land reclamation schemes had their physical limits in terms of the capacity to provide new commercial and residential spaces. Intensive redevelopment (and state finessed gentrification strategies in locales where 'heritage' could be profitably mobilised) also ran-up against the sheer density of population (over 5,000 people per square kilometre) and urbanisation. With an accumulation and development strategy founded on exports, transshipment and a reputation as a relatively secure and efficient regional base for services, banking and brokering, Singapore had long needed to import cheap contract labour from elsewhere in Asia (especially from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand), source skilled workers globally and consume vast quantities of resources and

provisions (from foodstuffs, to sand for the construction industry, to drinking-water) from elsewhere in Southeast Asia and as far away as Europe and New Zealand. Singapore has hence been particularly active in pursuit of multilateral and bilateral ‘free trade’ agreements. Since the 1980s, however, a more formal arrangement with Singapore’s immediate neighbours has also been sought. The Singapore government fostered deeper economic co-operation with these regional neighbours, most famously in the form of a so-called Growth Triangle (formalized in a tripartite treaty signed in 1989), centred on the city-state, but incorporating proximate areas of Malaysia and Indonesia (see Figure 1). In addition to the expectations of resort development and tourists traversing the Growth Triangle’s peripheries, corporate and official narratives about the putative complementarities of this triangular arrangement proliferated (see Phelps 2004a, Sparke et al., 2004). These argued that the other sides of the triangle would benefit from inflows of investment and expertise; while the city-state itself would benefit from the availability of relatively cheap land and labour in the Malaysian state of Johor and, more markedly, on the Riau islands (chief among them Batam and Bintan) of Indonesia. In more critical terms, the profound, and often contradictory social, environmental and economic consequences of opening vast tracts of land in the island of Batam to Singaporean and other foreign investment have been traced elsewhere (e.g. Grundy-Warr et al., 1999, Lindquist, 2002; Mack, 2004; Phelps, 2004b).

The transformation of neighbouring Bintan, by comparison, has received relatively little critical scrutiny. Chang (2001) has begun to chart Bintan’s place in the contours of ‘Singapore’s regional tourism forays’ (these will also be our primary focus here) and

Grundy-Warr et al. (1999) begin to map Singaporean investment in Bintan as part of what they term ‘fragmented integration’ in the Singapore-Indonesia border zone. Chou (2002) and Chou and Wee (2003) describe how the indigenous people of the *Kepulauan Riau* (Riau Archipelago), including those, known as the *Orang Suku Laut* [1], who live in and around the coasts of Bintan and Batam, have found their presence and especially their access to resources increasingly marginalized and overwritten by new forms of tenure and ‘development’ propelled by the Indonesian state and bolstered by the Growth Triangle. However, further attention to Bintan offers instructive pointers to patterns of domination and resistance in the ‘backyard’ of what has come to be regarded as a key node in the world economy, one of the control centres for global accumulation – in short a putative Global or World City (Freidmann, 1986; Sassen, 1991; Beaverstock et al., 1999; Taylor, 2005). In the case of the Growth Triangle, the immediate hinterland of Singapore spans inter-state boundaries. It is precisely this complex array of formal boundaries that – together with other (related) processes of demarcating, diving and bounding space – make this case distinctive. However, we will argue that the complexity and multiplicity of boundaries across the Growth Triangle are an acute expression and combination of wider tendencies. These include the ways that powerful agents in ‘World Cities’ appropriate and exploit resources from a hinterland (as described in Brechin’s, 1999 and Davis’s, 1998 studies of San Francisco and Los Angeles for example), the imposition of new modes of conduct increasingly registered in bounded urban sites and zones (what Smith, 1996 terms the ‘revanchist city’ associated with intensified gentrification), the development of planned tourist enclaves (Judd and Fainstein, 1999) and the shifting political terrain and reworking of border practises that incorporate both

elements of older sovereign practises and new transnational state sovereignties (resulting in what Cunningham, 2001 and Coleman, 2005 argue is a 'gated globalism').

Also seeking a conceptual vocabulary to locate contemporary globalization and inter-city relations, Michael Peter Smith (2001: 5) coins the productive metaphor of 'transnational urbanism', 'as a marker of the criss-crossing transnational circuits of communication and cross-cutting, translocal and transnational social practises that "come together" in particular [urban] places'. Since then, Smith (2005: 244) has argued that 'in future studies of transnational urbanism we need to devote equal attention to the effects of the power-knowledge venues by which states, institutional channels and other powerful actors broker or otherwise affect our mobile subjects' translocal interconnectivity'.

In the Growth Triangle, however, 'transnational urbanism' appears as a more literal manifestation of transnational territoriality in the form of complex articulations of nation-state and other boundaries. Singapore and its hinterland thus form an interlaced assemblage of border zones. We argue that these are symptomatic of wider tendencies and strategies of rebounding at diverse urban frontiers and transnational spaces of accumulation. This paper is a grounded attempt to excavate and analyse some of these geographies. The paper thus takes us into the contested frontiers of Singapore's immediate cross-border hinterland. Following some further background on Bintan (in the remainder of the introduction), we provide an overview of recent conceptualizations on the interactions of Global Cities, borders and states. Yet we insist that the case we elaborate here in relation to such literatures is one of specifically *human* geographies.

What is usually absent from the media reportage on the rise and missteps of Bintan as Singapore's economic playground are the voices and imaginings of anyone other than political and corporate authorities. To the extent that much academic research on regional economic zones relies on similarly selective authoritative material, social scientists – even ostensibly 'critical' ones – have often served to perpetuate the preponderance of views of selected Global/World Cities and 'from above' (Robinson, 2002). Thus, in the second section of the paper, we complement secondary sources with material from fieldwork [2] in elaborating our arguments on the complex and contested landscaping of Bintan. We conclude by relating the Bintan case to wider arguments about socio-economic exclusion in city 'frontier' zones. The issues raised and potential for their exploration in Bintan and other islands of the Riau Archipelago are broad. However, our empirical focus here is necessarily limited principally to the intriguing case of the tourist enclave in Bintan.

### **Bintan contexts**

The contemporary Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle overlays both a long history of territorialization and reterritorializations and an array of formal and informal networks. Prior to the 1824 Anglo-Dutch Treaty of London (which demarcated British and Dutch colonial spheres of trade and influence in Southeast Asia), the Riau Archipelago, Singapore and the Malay peninsula were closely bound by kinship and trade and subject to common political jurisdiction under maritime-orientated Sultanates. Subsequently, the borders between the colonial states remained relatively porous and after the interlude of Japanese Occupation (the only time that most of what is now termed

Southeast Asia was ever ruled by a single power) this continued into the early post-colonial era. Geopolitical tensions and conflicting claims over the legitimacy of the postcolonial states made the borders much less open in the 1960s (Liow, 2005). By the 1970s, the uneven development of Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia rested upon and reinforced the sovereign aspirations (particularly on the part of Singapore) to regulate borders, especially to control labour migration, whilst retaining some flexibility for capital and commodities to flow across them in search of profitable opportunities. The Growth Triangle represents a consolidation of these modes of regulation and control. Thus, whilst Newman and Thornley (2005: 246-7) are able to claim that ‘as a city state Singapore is free from the complexities of intergovernmental relations between national and city levels’, a host of other complex relations emerge between Singapore and neighbouring territories in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Since the establishment of the Growth Triangle in 1989, Batam has seen the largest transformations. The population there has grown from a few thousands in the 1970s to hundreds of thousands today. Much of the landscape of the island has become densely urbanized (with a mix of industrial facilities, bars, nightclubs [3] and restaurants, informal housing and speculative real estate) and over 400 factories have been established, as well as port facilities, hotels and highways. Over 70% of the foreign capital investment is reportedly from Singapore-based companies (including Singapore-based branches of multinationals). However, in the 1990s, Singaporean (and other foreign) investments also flowed into two distinct and demarcated zones in Bintan, each of which was intended to perform a specific economic role (see Figure 2). The first of

these was the Bintan Industrial Estate (BIE) in the northwest of the island, at Lobam. Phase 1 of the estate covering 55 ha was, as one Singapore *Business Times* (14 June 1996) report put it, ‘aimed at traditional low-tech industries like textiles, footwear and woodworking’. While such ‘low-tech’ and labour-intensive manufacturing could be shifted to Bintan, higher-end manufacturing processes as well as product design, marketing and distribution would be retained in Singapore. The official conception of this S\$60 million development, however, emphasized not so much economic division as spatial expansion. The General Manager of Bintan Industrial Estate Management, for example, saw his role as one of providing ‘a conducive manufacturing environment in Bintan which will serve as an extension of manufacturing space from Singapore’ (cited in *Business Times*, 14 June 1996). With the completion of a direct ferry link from Singapore’s Tanah Merah ferry terminal to Lobam, it was even possible for senior staff to commute to BIE within this extended ‘transnational’ economic space.

FIGURES 1 & 2 NEAR HERE

A second Singaporean economic zone on Bintan, and our main focus here, comprised a 23,000 ha resort and tourist complex along the northern coast. On the one hand, this was intended to be (and to be seen as) different from Singapore, a space of salubrious tranquillity in contrast to fast-paced, modern city life. Thus, for Singaporeans, Bintan was to become ‘another Bali...only closer to home’ (*Straits Times*, 18 October 1996). On the other hand, however, Bintan Beach International Resort (BBIR, as the zone eventually became known) was also conceived as part of an extended Singapore. The combined

marketing of Bintan's 'beaches with coconut trees and palm trees' and Singapore's 'city experience' was used to attract international visitors to an emergent transnational tourist region (*Straits Times*, 22 January 1996; see also Chang, 2001). For the Singaporean market, proposed holiday bungalows in Bintan were likened to New York City residents' country homes 'in the woods in New Jersey' (*Straits Times*, 18 October 1996).

Since the mid 1990s, ten resorts and villas have been built on the palm-fringed white sands facing the South China Sea. In terms of security [4], infrastructure, cleanliness and even roadside landscaping, this zone of Bintan – like the industrial estate at Lobam – was imagined as, and has functioned as part of, a greater Singapore. Another commonality among the two otherwise economically differentiated zones on Bintan concerned the composition of investment and development partnerships. In the 1990s, Singapore state-linked corporations entered into joint venture agreements with companies controlled by the Indonesian Salim Group. Partnership with one of Indonesia's largest conglomerates – closely connected with then President Suharto – promised a smooth process of Singapore-led economic transformation in Bintan.

However, almost from their inception, development of the new economic spaces in Bintan was far from smooth. From June 1997, malaria scares led to a collapse of visitor arrivals at BBIR. The environment and ecology of the island itself appeared to defy easy emulation of Singapore. As one newspaper article lamented during a second outbreak of malaria in November 1997, the 'fogging' strategy (based on regularly spraying insecticide) that is used to eliminate mosquitoes in 'urbanised Singapore' was ineffective

in ‘tree-covered Bintan’ (*Business Times*, 25 November 1997). Meanwhile, tourist arrivals across Southeast Asia were also adversely affected by haze attributed to forest fires in other parts of Indonesia. At least Bintan’s remoteness from the centres of Indonesian politics appeared to protect Singaporean tourists and investors from the social and political turmoil characterizing many other Indonesian islands and cities. In May 1998, while riots and anti-Chinese pogroms took place in Jakarta, prompting Singaporean expatriates to return home, readers of Singapore’s *Business Times* were assured that Batam and Bintan remained ‘a haven of tranquillity among the chaos and rampage in Jakarta’ (*Business Times*, 16 May 1998). Yet later that year, reports surfaced about two demonstrations over land compensation in Bintan. In the second of these, on 19 December 1998, ‘angry villagers’ blocked access roads to the Bintan beach resorts. While resort representatives stressed that ‘the demonstration was not instigated by other unrest in other parts of Indonesia’ (reported in *Straits Times*, 23 December 1998), ‘Singaporean’ economic space in Bintan was clearly not wholly isolated from the consequences of the wider political and economic transformation in Indonesia.

Following the fall of President Suharto in May 1998, the new Indonesian government attempted to wrest control of companies owned by Salim Group, one of which (PT Buana Megawisatama, BMW) had overseen compensation awarded to occupants of the land that became BIE and BBIR. In a subsequent, larger demonstration in January 2000, more than 1,000 people – including former villagers from sites in both the BIE and BBIR zone as well as political activists from Jakarta and elsewhere in Indonesia – destroyed the guardhouse at the gates of the resort, while 300 others shut down the main power supply

to the industrial estate. Singapore's English language broadsheet, the *Straits Times*, reported that the estate's 27 investors, 19 of whom were Singaporean, were 'very unhappy' at the disruption to their operations (*Straits Times*, 19 January 2000). Yet perhaps more significant was the re-imagining of Bintan's economic landscapes in the light of the violence. On 17 and 19 January 2000 respectively, images of 'angry mobsters' breaking the gate to BBIR and 'weapon-toting demonstrators' made the front-page of the *Straits Times*. Despite a decade of re-fashioning specially selected zones of Bintan into suitably Singaporeanized economic space and the literal and metaphorical cultivation of a 'peaceful' haven, other views on and of these zones – other social and political geographies – surfaced in the form of unruly, *parang*-wielding demonstrators.

## **Framing the Growth Triangle**

### **Boundaries and Limits**

As we have noted, Singapore is designated in academic literature as a World (or Global) City, what Taylor (2004) terms a 'regional command centre'. It is important, however, to consider the specificity of the Singapore case rather than reducing this to a generalized singular pathway of Global City formation. Yeung (2000) has pointed out how Singapore's determined pursuit of World City status is tied up with an active regionalization drive, involving investments and markets in Southeast and East Asia. More recently, Olds and Yeung (2004) have considered Singapore as exemplifying a distinctive pathway to global city formation. The distinguishing feature of what they term 'Global City-States' such as Singapore and Hong Kong (although in the latter case, it has

become considerably more blurred since the restoration of Chinese sovereignty in 1997 is that they have not had a hinterland within the same national boundaries. Thus, whilst other World Cities have developed strong embedded relations in their immediate 'national' hinterlands, in the case of Singapore, a regional hinterland extends across state boundaries. Amidst what Scott et al. (2001) have identified as a range of 'Global City-Regions', Singapore is therefore distinctive. The result is a complex mode of 'fragmented integration' (Grundy-Warr et al., 1999), whereby Singapore's relative economic power extends unevenly into and re-articulates other political spaces within the 'Growth Triangle' and beyond.

Our interest here is at a more truncated scale however: the immediate hinterland of Singapore under formation today in Bintan. Part of the paper's contribution, therefore, is to detail attempts to shape territory in northern Bintan, Indonesia. This zone is intended to perform a specific role, as a tranquil haven for tourists and global city professionals (both Singaporean and expatriate) and one which is differentiated from the rest of Bintan and other parts of Indonesia (such as Batam) that find themselves incorporated in the Growth Triangle. In tracing this, we follow Smith (2001: 6) in seeking 'an agency-oriented theoretical perspective [towards transnational urbanism] that concretely connects macro-economic and geopolitical transformations to the micro-networks of social action that people create, move in, and act upon in their daily lives'. Notwithstanding the roles of global networks in configuring world cities, Smith goes on to argue for 'the continuing significance of borders, state policies, and national identities even as these are often transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices'.

We have also noted that others have referred to ‘revanchist cities’ to describe the gentrification and political confrontation at the (internal) urban ‘frontier’ of capital and conflict in western cities (Smith 1996; MacLeod 2002). In our case study however, the ‘frontiers’ involve the reworking and replacing of *international* and *intra-national* boundaries within the Growth Triangle. Whilst examining the construction and reproduction of these boundaries, we are also mindful of the limits to and disruptions of the smooth space of accumulation (and the neatly-bounded BBIR). In particular, in what follows, we recount the roles of and voices from struggles articulating other geographies in and beyond these frontiers. These voices articulate alternatives that are not simply reducible to the logics of capital and the neat official reboundings of the Growth Triangle. The landscaped biome [5] for tourism in northern Bintan rests on the labour of thousands of workers and seeks to exclude other visions and claims. Yet as this paper also begins to detail, this project has not proceeded uncontested.

### **The ‘Singaporeanization’ of the Bintan landscape**

It is hard not to notice how the BBIR has been re-fashioned as part of greater Singapore. The clean and immaculate veneering of the roadsides, the streetlights, white-lines on the road, smooth tarmac and road-signs, the modern – yet localized – architecture of the resorts (the products of investments by Singaporean and other international investors) and golf courses that line the sandy beaches of Bintan and, less visibly, the importation of infrastructural facilities (such as a powerhouse and reservoir supplying electricity and freshwater to the resorts) offer a stark contrast to much of the rest of the island. Outside

the BBIR (with the exception of the crowded provincial capital of Tanjung Pinang, the BIE and other smaller industrial areas), there still exists a landscape of *kampongs* ('villages'), jungle and plantations, unpaved roads and smallholdings. Aside from immigration checks at the Bandar Bintan Telani ferry terminal (the disembarkation point for holiday-makers to the tourist zone), there is little to distinguish BBIR from tourist islands within Singapore such as Sentosa (which has been transformed into a resort with hotels, golf courses, an artificial beach and other tourist attractions). In Bintan, aside from the resort establishments, visitors can watch cultural performances, shop for souvenir items, sample Singaporean, 'international' or Indonesian food at the restaurants (all priced in Singapore Dollars), or learn about the island's natural history (though virtually nothing of its social and political history is represented) at an interpretive Bintan Heritage Centre [6]. For Singaporean visitors – who constitute around 70 per cent of the island's visitors – the transformation of the landscape also allows them to relate to the site as an extension of 'home', a place where modern city-dwellers can experience a little of the 'rustic' (something that has largely disappeared from 'mainland' Singapore). As such, the 'relaxed' atmosphere of BBIR has become a great pull for visitors; they get to 'explore' a little, but return to the comforts of their resorts and air-conditioned rooms at the end of the day. For Singaporeans and others residing in or visiting Southeast Asia's global city, the proximity of Bintan and the fast ferries – combined with the fact that accessibility, security and local 'authenticity are tightly managed and circumscribed – make it ideal for weekend getaways.

Yet this space was no *tabula rasa* awaiting an influx of capital, workers and tourists.

When the land was acquired in the 1990s, there were already people residing within and moving through what was to become the BBIR. These included both thousands of villagers (*Orang Kampung*) and the more mobile *Orang Laut* (sea people) whose presence is harder to enumerate, but who had long moved through Riau and beyond (prior to the imposition of border controls), utilizing a diverse range of resources and economic strategies. As Chou and Wee (2003: 332) document, the resort development in Bintan, in tandem with the wider transformations in Riau, have carved up and undermined custodianship and utilization of resources by the *Orang Laut*:

[W]ithin the framework of the Growth Triangle as an economic zone orientated towards the global market, the tribal indigenes of Riau have been completely invisible and disenfranchised. Their existence, livelihood needs, and resource rights are totally ignored. Their livelihood resources are appropriated without compensation or even acknowledgement. This non-recognition of the *Orang Laut* as flesh-and-blood inhabitants of the Riau Archipelago contrasts sharply with the privileging of a global economy that exists, in the final analysis, only as an abstract projection – that is, an imagined marketplace.

For the villagers (*Orang Kampung*) of north Bintan, ‘development’ has also largely been an experience of loss and exclusion. Bintan Resort Corporation (BRC), the main developers of BBIR saw more than 5,000 existing residents from 10 villages as antithetical to the aim of promoting BBIR as a ‘world-class’ attraction. Virtually all were relocated to new settlements outside the boundaries of the resort area. Land acquisition by BMW thus led to the demarcation of a ‘Singaporean’ economic space as separate from the rest of Bintan, an area that is reconfigured not only in terms of its physical landscaping but also in terms of permitted people and practices. This is nowhere more visible than at the iron gates of the entrance to the resort premises, with its guardhouse

and patrolling security personnel. In addition, a fence circles much of the perimeter of the BBIR and where it does not, there are natural barriers (the sea and steep jungle) and guards patrol to ensure that relatively few people can slip through undetected unless they come by boat or through areas of dense vegetation away from the roads and fences. Entrance into the BBIR for 'local' people [7] who are not working at the resorts is usually controlled. Those without any official business are frequently refused entry and those working within the resort have to produce a card that identifies them as resort workers. As Rahman, a resident of one of the villages that has been resettled, stated, 'Unless villagers have official business at the resort, or they work there, they are not allowed in ... there are guards making rounds to ensure no one goes in illegally'.

## **Contesting the BBIR**

### **BBIR Boundary Practices**

Notwithstanding attempts to ensure that BBIR is a secure place for visitors, and to regulate entry, a large demonstration took place at the entrance of the BBIR in January 2000 [8]. As part of the protest, villagers, 'armed with spears and machetes, overran Singaporean-owned tourist resorts' on the island (*Associated Press* 28 February 2000). Led by student provocateurs from other parts of Indonesia, more than 1,000 displaced villagers assembled illegally to launch a protest against the BBIR and the Indonesian authorities [9]. During this period, visitor numbers to the island plummeted and resorts reported low occupancies (*Business Times* 21 January 2000). The demonstrators blocked the main entrance, and food and other supplies were disrupted (*Straits Times* 21 January 2000). They were only dispersed when the authorities deployed the military (bringing

extra forces from Jakarta) to put down the demonstration. The villagers then had no choice but to leave the area. Corporate elites and the Indonesian military-state apparatus have frequently drawn upon the police and armed forces (which until 1999 were under joint military command) to ‘regulate’ other economic zones in Indonesia (Ong, 2000; Kingsbury, 2003), and this was to be no exception. In the case of Bintan, media narratives quickly linked the demonstration to the issue of inadequate compensation for the land that had become the resort. According to these press reports, the primary grievance concerned the low level of compensation. Agencies responsible for clearing the way for the resort and industrial estate paid just 100 rupiah (US 1 cent) for each square meter of land acquired (*Agence Presse* 20 April 2000; *Straits Times* 20 January 2000) by agencies. However, our conversations with villagers and activists, many of whom were personally involved in the demonstrations, indicate that these issues of compensation are more complex.

For one, some villagers bemoaned that the payment of compensation was not consistent. According to Anwar (one of the students who came to Bintan to participate in the demonstration), ‘while most [of the villagers] were only given 100R per square meter, there are also those who received as much as 4,000R and also those who only received 75R or as low as 25R’. Many of the villagers were also unhappy with the way the *pembebasan tanah* (literally, the ‘freeing of the land’) was carried out. Some complained that they had not been consulted prior to the act of land acquisition itself, and most had grievances about how the process was undertaken. As Hami, now a resident of Sungei Kechil village, recounted, ‘the villagers were forced out of their own houses. They were

evicted and not given any choice. Some were injured [during the process of evictions].

When BMW came, they did not care for the villagers, they just wanted the land’.

Understandably, this is also one of the reasons stipulated within the *Ratapan Rakyat Bintan* (‘Grievances of the Bintanese Villagers’) (undated) document, outlining the numerous grievances of those affected by the land acquisition:

The process and implementation of the acquisition of indigenous land was done in a method that was inhumane, inappropriate and involving the use of intimidation, force and violence. The villagers themselves were never consulted for their views as to whether they wanted their land to be acquired or not, and the value of the land offered as compensation to the villagers was also never discussed before the act.

Other eviction tactics were also used. As Rahman, a resident of Segiling village, stated:

The authorities used other means to get villagers out. The school that used to be nearby was moved to the new settlement. It is now very far for villagers who refused to sell their land, about 9km. It is hard for us to send our children to school. Therefore, to be close to the new school, the villagers eventually moved.

Upon being compensated to move out of their land, villagers were to be provided with an alternative settlement (*pemukiman*) where each household would be given a house and a piece of land (*tanah kaplin*) where they could continue their farming activities. However, according to many of the villagers involved, these promises never materialized. Instead of just being given the houses, villagers had to pay (in some cases more than they were originally compensated), to buy the new houses. Some had to live in tents while their new houses were being built. Even those who secured a house, were far from content with the resettlement. In Hami’s words, ‘the houses measured 5x6 meters, small and hardly enough to live in. The houses did not have any flooring, just sand and earth. There were no windows. And the houses were not free. Life was really bad for us’. Many of these

houses have, over time, been torn down or refurbished although a few still stand as testament to the difficult times that these villagers endured during the initial resettlement period. According to Hami, at some parts of Sungei Kechil, many of the *tanah kaplin* remain undeveloped by the villagers due to lack of funds.

The move to the new settlements also affected the livelihoods of the villagers, most of whom are either farmers or fishers. Those who once worked extensive plots now found that the new lands they were provided with were too small or not suitable for planting. As Hami, who is also one of Sungei Kechil's representatives, indicated, 'the villagers used to have large pieces of land and we used to work coconut plantations and other things, but the ones provided here are just not enough; perhaps only enough for us to plant grass'. The fishermen were the most adversely affected. For many, home used to be by the sea, but since many of the new settlements located away from the coast some fishermen now have to travel far just to get to the sea. At Segiling, for instance, villagers have to travel 7km to the beach each day. In other cases, the water near the settlements is not suitable for fishing. As Kersen, a fisherman at Sungei Kechil, puts it:

We are near the sea but there are no fish here. The best place to catch fish is within the resort area near Lagoi [where our village used to be]. A lot of the villagers have to go all the way into sea to catch fish. There are no fish here.

Further compounding problems, some fishermen claim that resort activities have adversely affected fishing conditions. As Kersen continues, 'fishing here is bad because of resort developments. There are too many tourist ferries that drive the fish away. The many water-sports activities also mean that benzene is produced that kills the fish here'.

The frustration at being excluded from the prime land and resources appropriated for the BBIR is further aggravated by exclusion from job opportunities within the resorts. For example, many of the villagers are unhappy that workers within the resorts are mostly from other parts of Indonesia. According to Dian, a former resident of Sebong Lagoi village who has been relocated to Sungei Kechil village, 'most of the [resort workers] are non-Bintanese, 10% are from Bintan and the rest are from other parts of Indonesia such as Bali, Medan and Jakarta. It is difficult for [the local] villagers to get work at the resort'. As part of efforts to make the resorts 'world-class', there has been extensive recruitment of Indonesian resort workers who have been trained in other established tourist centres such as Bali (*Straits Times*, 20 January 2000). Given that many of the Bintan villagers lack formal qualifications and foreign language skills, they are therefore restricted, at best, to menial jobs such as grass-cutting and sweeping. The employment of workers from other more established tourist areas has also precluded the need to train the local people. As one villager mentioned:

Many of the original inhabitants here are still fishermen. None of us work at the resorts. If we want to work at the resort, we need to know how to speak English, or have a certificate. The villagers here are mainly the uneducated. The resorts do not even have plans to train us.

Another mentioned that:

The outsiders working at the resort are paid quite high, about S\$500 per month. This is because they are trained. For example, those from Bali or Jakarta, they have been trained and when they come here, their pay is high. But for the villagers, many of them are not trained, so cannot even get a job.

According to villagers, jobs at the resorts are mainly advertised over the Internet (to which the villagers had no easy access). Moreover, according to another villager:

At Lagoi, if there is a job opening, the villagers don't know about it. Because of a system of racial bias [*sistem suku*], many of the employees are from outside Bintan. If superiors are Javanese, they would only select Javanese to work for them, if Bataks, they only employ the Bataks. So Riau people do not get to work at the resorts.

This ensures a cycle where many feel themselves to be systematically deprived of job opportunities within the resort. In addition, the few attempts to incorporate villagers within the resort activities have also achieved limited success. For example, at Sungei Kechil, a small-scale BBIR-driven initiative (involving ecotourism, demonstrations of fishing techniques and performances of traditional Malay dances) is not widely felt to have had much positive impact. This is largely due to low earnings (since earnings depend on the number of tourists who come) and the fact that such an initiative only allows for those with certain skills to take part. Hami avers that 'the ecotourism centre is for villagers here to be trained and to provide them with jobs. But not many villagers are involved in the project. Only about 10 or so villagers are involved in it ...there is no asphalt road to the ecotourism centre'. According to another local youth, who works at the ecotourism centre as a guide, 'we target about 200 tourists a day but usually we get an average of about 85 visitors. It is also seasonal. During the holiday season in Singapore, more people will come. Sometimes, we don't have anyone coming at all'.

As such, it is apparent that the impetus for the demonstration of 2000 extends beyond the issue of compensation *per se*. The problems faced by the BBIR are also related to the political economy of corruption in Indonesia [10]. What was first presented as a transparent process of purchasing land from the villagers became plagued by charges of corruption. As Othman explains, 'during the demo, we were promised nine million rupiah

but till now, we are still waiting. I feel the money might have gone to developing other areas like Uban and Lobam. These places have always been given priority over the villages'. Our informants frequently articulate the perception that the troubles facing the villagers are reinforced by the corrupt practices of the local politicians (see also Columbijn 2003). For example, according to Anwar:

Once, the investment coordinator from Singapore came down to explain the situation to us. He said the investors had paid between 1,300 to 1,500 rupiah per square meter, yet the money never reached us. It hurts. Due to corruption and nepotism, the Indonesian authorities have hoodwinked us again.

Nonetheless, as Setiawan, one of the main student activists from the demonstration of January 2000 forcefully puts it, 'this is not just Indonesia's problem but Singapore's as well. According to Indonesian authorities, this is not a Singaporean investors' problem but that is not true. All lies. The resort management also has to take responsibility'.

Having hit a brick wall every time he tries to seek redress from the Indonesian authorities, Setiawan also indicated how he is now seeking to meet representatives from the BBIR or other Singaporean investors to see how they too can help solve the problem.

It is important to note that not all villagers affected by the land acquisition process supported the large-scale demonstrations. According to Suderman, a representative of Berakit village, the villagers were engaged in manoeuvres over the terms of compensation:

The freeing of the land was done through consensus between the developers and villagers. The villagers were given a choice, and those who moved compensated. In Lagoi, there are still those who are defending their land. During the demo, the villagers followed blindly, all because of the provocateurs... Some of the villagers used the money to buy a motorcycle. Now the motorcycles have been sold off. I think that the demonstration was a way to make more money for them.

In the issue of how the BMW had ‘scared’ or ‘tricked’ the villagers into leaving their homes, Pak Salman also recounted instances where the local villagers themselves had tried to mislead the authorities during the *pembebasan tanah*:

During the freeing of the land, villagers were paid for the land as well as for their houses, chicken coops, and coconut trees. All trees had their own prices according to their age. There was no cheating. There were villagers in Lagoi and Segiling who, the night before the day the BMW surveyors came, planted new vegetation so that they could get more money. Thus, the villagers also cheated.

What is clear is that following the demonstration, the boundaries that were implemented as part of the ‘Singaporeanization’ of the BBIR landscape became more visibly demarcated: barbed wire barricades were installed in front of the entrances to the BBIR (and the BIE); security was stepped up in the form of more guards patrolling (*Straits Times* 1 February 2000); and a sign at the entrance of BBIR warns villagers of the consequences of any future illegal assemblies. While the demonstrations manifested overt expressions of broader grievances, in the next section of the paper, we consider the more mundane or ‘everyday’ transgressions and negotiations around the boundaries of the BBIR.

### **Tactics of negotiation and transgression**

One of the outcomes of the January 2000 demonstration was the formation of the *Yayasan Tragedi Lagoi* (hereafter Yayasan [11]), which was aimed at carrying on the struggle over compensation (Yayasan Tragedi Lagoi Indonesia, 2004). Anwar, one of the activists working with the Yayasan outlines the organization’s primary functions:

The Yayasan was set up after the demonstration of 2000. It is an official institution for those involved in the land compensation issue. Our priorities are as follows: (a) to seek suitable compensation for those who have not received appropriate compensation for land taken away from them; (b) to fight for better human rights more generally; (c) to upgrade the status of the local population workforce and get the villagers involved in the authorities' development plans.

Aside from the eventual formation of the Yayasan, resistance took other forms and, indeed, some villagers managed to stand their ground. Within the BBIR, there is still one village, Kampong Bahru, where some residents refused compensation and relocation. According to one of these villagers, Yusuf, 'at the time, the military came to force us to move. But my family resisted them because this is our land. Most others have moved to the new *permukiman*. Here only about six to seven of the original households are left'. He went on to recount the subsequent ways in which BMW had attempted to get them to move to the new *permukiman* that had been provided for them at Sungei Kechil:

In 1995, when the BMW came to develop the golf course, they actually blocked the entrance to the village... without the entrance we would be trapped here. So a group of the villagers, including those who have moved out of the resort area, about 700 of us, demonstrated against BMW. After that, the blockade was lifted.

Being within the BBIR prevented these people from taking part in protests including the one in 2000. However, in spirit, they supported these actions:

We live within the resort and our land has not been freed. We have not received compensation so we have not been cheated. It is difficult because we live within the resort. If the authorities force us to leave for creating trouble, we may be in a worse state. We support our friends out there. But we do not want any incidents.

There are some villages in which people have been compensated but have yet to move as their land has not been developed.. According to Rehman, a resident of Berakit, for example, 'at Berakit, the villagers whose land had been freed have received compensation but, because a new settlement has not been set-aside for them, they have

remained where they are. How can they move? They have nowhere to go'. During the initial *pembebasan tanah*, many pleaded ignorance of proper procedures, and fear of the repressive tactics of the Suharto government, when they were forced to accept meagre compensation for their land. Throughout Indonesia, the (frequently chaotic and often violent) meltdown of the Suharto regime was accompanied (and propelled) by mobilizations, claims and contestations. Many of these also related to the terms of access to land and resources (Potter and Badcock, 2004). In the case of the lost lands that were re-designated as the BBIR, the prospect of more systematic and comprehensive compensation became one of these subjects of contest and counter-mapping. As another Berakit villager said, 'our house here is still within the resort area but developments have not been planned yet. If the authorities want to get this land later, they would have to pay us appropriate compensation. We will negotiate for a higher amount of money'.

In other cases, despite new *pemukiman* having been granted, village land remained undeveloped and so villagers have moved back to fish. In Segiling, for example, 20 or so former residents have been able to return (even though their homes are no longer standing) and have constructed small huts by the beach. As one of the villagers stated:

We moved back here because we are fishermen. It is easier for us to catch fish if we are close to the sea. The land that we have at the new settlement is far from the sea. If the developers decide to develop this land, we will just leave again.

Some of these villagers now maintain houses at both the old sites and the new *pemukiman*. In other cases, villagers have not moved back to the sites of their old villages, but negotiate with security guards about periodically crossing over into the resort area to fish:

There are plenty more fish within the Sedona area than here. The security at the Sedona Resort knows us. So they let us go into the resort area to catch fish. But we have to be very careful so that we do not disturb any of the resort activities.

Hence, despite the various security measures that have been emplaced at the BBIR, boundaries are sometimes still quietly transgressed by some of these local villagers.

A few of the villagers have also found other ways of re-inserting their presence within tourism activities from 'below'. At Kampong Bahru, for instance, resort employees sometimes bring tourists to the village within the BBIR as part of an unofficial tour. To cater to these visitors, the villagers put up mini-galleries outside their homes where tourists can learn about seashells and fishing techniques. Yusuf added:

There are many fishermen here. When we go out to sea to catch fish, many resort visitors see us. 'White people' like to see us work and take photographs. In the village, we also have a stage where we practice our dances for visitors. This way, we can earn money from tourists. They also come to eat fresh coconuts for S\$1-2. We have a gallery where visitors can learn about types of seashells. Some visitors would buy souvenirs from us costing up to \$5. This is very good for the villagers.

Part of Kampong Bahru has also been converted into a rustic *kelong* (a wooden pier traditionally used for fishing).

The presence of Kampong Bahru also allows for other boundary-crossings on the part of those who have moved out of the resort area. For example, individuals who have family at the village within the BBIR are allowed to enter the zone (although they still need to report to the guardhouse each time). Movements into the resort are also allowed on other special occasions. As Winarta indicated:

When we were forced to move out, we did not have enough time or money to move the cemeteries. Now it is difficult to go in. But they cannot destroy it. It is important to local villagers [*orang orang kampong disini*]. Our ancestors are buried there. Once a year...villagers are allowed in. But we still need permission.

These sacred presences endure. Despite the process of 'Singaporeanization', there are landscape features and presences which pre-date the formation of the resort. Earlier human geographies have not simply been overwritten or erased by the formal economic or legal development of the BBIR. Alternative views of the land (and continuation of earlier understandings, meanings and 'power' of the space) indicate how, despite attempts to present the resort area as an ordered landscape, other narratives resurface. For many of the villagers, sites and places within BBIR are still seen as sacred [12] and the way they have been developed is perceived to be sacrilegious. According to one villager:

Many people working within the resort have been possessed (*mengalami keserapan*). Some became crazy and others got sick. I think it is because the land has not been 'cleansed'. There were no ritual feasting (*kenduri*) or prayers (*doa*) chanted to ensure the development is not plagued by these problems. Until this is done to appease the spirits in the area, the hauntings will continue.

It is clear therefore that notwithstanding the many measures put in place by the BRC to 'Singaporeanize' the BBIR, it is not possible to eradicate all the local particularities and meanings invested in the land. The process of taming the Bintanscape through specific strategies of boundary-making and the production of a biome for tourists, enabling flows of foreign bodies and monies, thus remains subject to these material and symbolic reworkings.

### **Conclusions: the revanchist Global City?**

Writing of 'development' strategies elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Cooke (2003: 268) notes how, mapping and land-use policy have been used by successive colonial and

postcolonial regimes as a strategy of power, ‘exercised via species control and territory’.

She points out how:

At present, the mapping of rural Sarawak into development zones is informed by a developmentalist view of local landscapes as having a particular niche in a globalised economy. Although this niche is a complex one, official imaginations [and plans] are focussed on Sarawak as a supplier of commodities....envisaged as hectare after hectare of oil palm – and to a smaller extent, pulp and paper – plantations.

Cooke explores how, in response, counter-mappings have sought to assert the customary rights (*adat*) of local communities to land, and the material and cultural resources upon it.

Bintan’s proximity to Singapore means that low cost industrial production (at Lobam) and tourism (in the BBIR) are similarly envisioned as niche spaces within the ‘global’. In this paper, we have both detailed aspects of this process and read them through developing literatures on borders, accumulation and city ‘frontiers’. We have also documented some of the ways that, in the case of the Bintan resorts, the visions of developers have evoked ‘counter-mappings’ in the form of other claims and attendant transgressions. The modest efforts by locals to benefit from the tourism economy, to negotiate better prices when their land is taken and, in some cases, to reclaim land and resources, have been described here in a provisional and partial attempt to develop accounts of agency and struggle in the context of ongoing reterritorializations which they can sometimes subvert and disrupt, but ultimately over which they have little control.

The zones and fences in Bintan are tied-up with the extension and deepening of Singapore’s strategy of enhancing its position in the competitive hierarchy of cities and states in Asia and the dynamic of development via dispossession established in Suharto’s Indonesia. As we noted in the introduction, to describe the frontiers of capital and

contours of struggle over social space, housing and welfare in cities of the Americas and Europe, critical observers have designated 'revanchist cities', where 'repressive and ideological state apparatuses are folded together in a disciplinary and, at times, penalizing and stoutly authoritarian effort' (MacLeod, 2002: 608). In this sense, Singapore's post-independence push for order, development and control looks like a prototype, albeit one mediated through recourse to powerful ideologies of 'Asian values' modernity, nation-building and community and the spectacular redevelopment and reworking of a migrant and colonial city into an model of globalised, networked 'post-colonial' urbanity (Kong and Yeoh, 2003). For about the first thirty years following independence, this was confined to the 680 square kilometres of Singapore; all 'traditional' *kampong* housing was cleared and swathes of the island re-ordered according to a master plan to build (in the language of the day), a 'world class' tropical city. By the 1980s, notwithstanding land reclamations and higher skyscrapers, space for extensive further expansion in Singapore had more or less run out. In this context, the visions of a Growth Triangle taking in parts of Johore and Riau were born. Since these visions articulated (albeit not without some tensions) with the elite developmental visions in Malaysia and Indonesia, the Growth Triangle came to be celebrated as an avatar of a new phase of regionalized development. In this, Singapore and its neighbours were amongst the advance guard of a worldwide proliferation of Growth Triangles, Arcs and entrepreneurial cross-border regimes (Neilson 2004). As we have charted here, this rests upon extensive re-territorializations, in particular the reworking of boundaries. Thus capital flows and tourist bodies permeate the Singapore-Indonesia boundary (whilst migrants are blocked), but beyond this postcolonial boundary, other new lines are being drawn and spaces enclosed, as in the

fences around the BBIR and the strategy to rework its biome into geometric cultivated landscaping. These are stark examples of a worldwide phenomena; the firming of new gates, boundaries and fences (Klein and Levy 2002). These are epitomized both by tightened immigration and ‘security’ controls everywhere, increasingly revanchist cities and thousands of gated communities. Although some observers locate creative cultural hybridities in cross-border sites of fast urbanization (Dear and Leclerc, 2003), the force and exclusions on which such urbanization rests give others much more cause to be sanguine (Coleman, 2005).

Moreover in Bintan, in the immediate hinterland and – as we have set out here – on one of the frontiers of a World City, there are also suggestive historical parallels which cast such tendencies into a longer term frame of state-city-capital-societal interactions. Thus in his account of the changing roles of the Straits of Malacca (of which the *Selat Singapura* between the Riau archipelago and Singapore is the narrowest point) in the evolving patterns of regional and global commerce over the past several millennia, Freeman (2003: xvi) points to ‘the critical functions of trade facilitation, enhancement, security, and control performed at different epochs by three important gate-keeper entrepots in the region: Melaka (Malacca), British Penang (Pulau Pinang), and Singapore’. In due course, concerns about disruption to these functions (including piracy) lay at the roots of colonial intervention (and are echoed today in discourses about terrorism and piracy in the Straits). Here, other geographies of power and accumulation (those of ‘buccaneers’ and ‘rebels’) have long contested the views from those control centres. The contexts may have changed, but the marginal disruptions detailed in this

paper and attempts to extract just a little of the profits of commerce and subvert something of the sovereign power are not unprecedented. Indeed, exploring the complex historical geographies of Riau-Singapore-Malacca, Colombijn (2003: 339) claims that '[p]erhaps the most striking feature of the political history of the states in the Malacca Straits is structural instability. Most polities existed in a state of flux, oscillating between expansion and contraction'. Today, for all the apparent significance of the postcolonial boundaries and the apparent rigidity of newer ones, so ongoing struggles threaten to disrupt and transgress the 'smooth' spaces and sharp lines between the multiple territories and boundaries that border the Straits.

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### **List of Figures**

Figure 1. The location of the Bintan Beach International Resort within the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle.

Figure 2. Map of Bintan, indicating the locations of the Bintan Industrial Estate and Bintan Beach International Resort.

### **Footnotes**

[1] The term may be translated as 'people of the sea'. The *Orang Suku Laut* are usually differentiated from *Orang Kampung* (villagers) and both are now greatly outnumbered by more recent migrants to Riau.

[2] Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted in Bintan in May-August 2004. Most of these were with activists involved in the demonstrations and struggles over land in Bintan or displaced villagers. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian and selected sections transcribed and translated. All translations here are by the authors. The interviews were conducted without the knowledge or permission of the authorities and no officials were present at the discussions. The names of interviewees have been changed. Interviews were not taped; instead extensive (frequently including verbatim quotes) notes were taken which form the basis of the transcripts and quotes that inform the paper. Repeated visits to the field over a four-month period were used to establish rapport with

informants and to clarify dissonances and questions. All three authors were based at the National University of Singapore at the time of the fieldwork and made a series of short 2-3 day trips to Bintan to conduct the research (staying in the island's largest town on Tanjung Pinang or in Tanjung Uban just outside the resort zone). In addition to the diverse conceptual literatures cited in the main text, we found some inspiration and encouragement in Routledge's (2001, 2002) critical 'post-development' ethnographies of some similar struggles in Indian resort areas.

[3] These facilitate sex tourism (mostly from Singapore) and Batam in particular has come to acquire the reputation (both in Singapore and to some extent in Indonesia) as a site of sex tourism and more widely as a sometimes unruly place (Lindquist, 2002). Although there are some locales for prostitution in Bintan, these are both more partitioned from the main settlements and relatively distant from the enclaved resort that forms our empirical focus here.

[4] Since 9/11 and even more so since the foiling of plots to explode bombs in Singapore in 2002 and attacks on clubs and restaurants in Bali in 2002 and 2005, security concerns have grown in Southeast Asian resorts. However, as this paper details, in Bintan 'security' (and heightened surveillance and border practises) are both wider phenomena than, and predate, these concerns about terrorism.

[5] Here we have in mind Mitchell's (2001) work on the role of labour in the production of landscape. The BITZ is labour intensive, since it rests (like the city state of Singapore itself and some other 'garden' world cities such as Dubai [Ouis, 2002]) on intensive and cheap imported labour to cultivate it. Since such landscaping relates to terms of ownership, access and control of 'nature', territory and buildings, we have also found Blomley's (2005) injunction for critical geography to 'remember property' thought-provoking.

[6] All of these are located at *Pasar Oleh Oleh*, a specially constructed tourist-orientated 'village' comprising shops and restaurants.

[7] The question of who is a 'local' and the precise terms and conditions of access are complex. It was beyond the scope of our research to untangle the degrees of 'localness' and as Chou and Wee (2003) point out, the territoriality of tenure, claims, rights, responsibilities and privileges regarding places, land and resources in Riau are not easily mapped. Our informants in Bintan used the term *orang orang kampong disini* [people of this or that village] even where the villages had been erased or relocated in the process of the resort development.

[8] Prior to the demonstration of January 2000, smaller protests by employees seeking more remuneration and better staff benefits had already occurred (see *Straits Times* 8 December 2000, for example).

[9] The group of protestors met up at Lobam industrial estate and later split into two, the second group heading to the BBIR. While the protestors were successful in entering the former, the police and military forces that were brought in to quell the demonstration prevented them from entering the BBIR. The detailed social composition of the protest movements and action is beyond our scope here. However, our interviews indicate that some of those involved had gained experience through, and were emboldened by, the mass demonstrations that accelerated the collapse of Suharto's regime in 1998. In some cases, students who became involved in (and sought to direct) the Bintan mobilizations and associated campaigns had traveled to Bintan from Java in order to participate.

[10] A detailed consideration of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the regime of accumulation put in place in Indonesia under Suharto is widely acknowledged to have rested upon widespread dispossession, patronage and corruption, bolstered and policed by the armed forces and underpinned by the violence of 1965-66 when hundreds of thousands died in anti-communist purges with the sanction of Washington D.C. and other foreign powers. In turn, this was embedded in the global polity, which was deeply complicit in these processes (Kahn and Formosa, 2002).

[11] Apart from organizing demonstrations, petitions and protests, the Yayasan also seeks to find a solution to the problems faced by the local villagers by negotiation and discussions with local politicians and resort investors.

[12] See Chou (1997) for further details of how places in Riau have become differentiated as abodes of spirits (*hantu*) that require certain modes of human conduct.