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Where Internal and International  
Migration Intersect: Mobility and the  
Formation of Multi-Ethnic Communities  
in the Riau Islands Transit Zone

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# Where Internal and International Migration Intersect: Mobility and the Formation of Multi-Ethnic Communities in the Riau Islands Transit Zone

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Indonesia is the focus of considerable attention within contemporary migration studies. Migration scholars have documented in detail the dual processes of internal migration (both state-sponsored transmigration as well as ‘spontaneous’ internal migration) within Indonesia as well as international labour migration flows from Indonesia. Internal migration, especially through the transmigration program, has changed the economic, environmental and ethnic landscapes of many regions in Indonesia’s outer islands (Dawson 1999; Elmhirst 2000; Fearnside 1997; Tirtosudarmo 1990). Meanwhile the placement of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians overseas every year has reshaped communities not only in migrant workers’ provinces of origin, but in the borderland communities through which many of them pass on their way to and from overseas. In 2006, almost 650,000 Indonesians were placed through formal international labour migration programs (Depnakertrans 2007a, 2007b). Many hundreds of thousands more leave through unofficial channels. It has been suggested that in the 1990s, migration from Indonesia to Malaysia through official channels was only one-third of that through alternative channels (Nayyar 1997).<sup>1</sup>

It is perhaps surprising, then, that the literatures on these two kinds of migration seldom intersect. Instead, internal migration and international migration are dealt with as separate phenomena and the links between them are rarely considered. The extensive body of work on international labour migration from Indonesia has focused on national-level policies or on labour migrants’ experiences in their provinces of origin, during the process of migration, or in the destination country (cf Hugo 2002; Sukamdi and Brownlee 2000).<sup>2</sup> The ongoing preoccupation amongst researchers and activists with the regulatory frameworks and socio-cultural conditions in receiving countries and how these shape migrant workers’ experiences of labour migration (cf Huang, Yeoh, and Rahman 2005; Loveband 2004) was sparked by several high profile cases of physical and sexual abuse, and deaths of migrant workers, many of them women working as domestic helpers in Asia and the Middle East (Human Rights Watch 2004; Quinn 2002). Other accounts deal in depth with the individual experiences of migrant workers themselves (cf Abdul Rahman 2003; von der Borch 2006; Wong and Anwar 2003). With a few exceptions (Tirtosudarmo 2004; Ford 2001, 2006), the literature has said very little about the impact of migration flows on the transit provinces through which many of them pass.

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<sup>1</sup> International labour migration is a major source of foreign exchange, totalling around US\$7 billion per year (Asian Development Bank 2006, 123).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of this literature see Ford (2006).

The lack of scholarly interest in Indonesia's transit provinces in part reflects the highly centralised approach taken by the national government during the Suharto years (1966-1998), when policy-makers paid little attention to the documented flows of migrant workers through Sumatra and Kalimantan and refused to recognise the large flows of undocumented labour migrants across land and sea borders. The centralised approach to labour migration policy continued until 2002, when Malaysia stepped up forced repatriation of undocumented labour migrants causing a humanitarian crisis in the East Kalimantan border zone centred around Nunukan (Ford 2006). Although since then more attention has been paid to structures and processes for managing returned labour migrants in the transit zones, there has been little examination of the broader socio-economic impacts of migration on the transit zone community themselves.

This article seeks to begin to address this lacuna through a close analysis of migration flows in one of Indonesia's key transit areas – the Riau Islands (*Provinsi Kepulauan Riau*, Kepri Province).<sup>3</sup> The territory of Kepri Province consists of the main islands of Bintan, Batam, Karimun (collectively known as the Riau Islands), along with Natuna and Lingga, as well as many other smaller islands and islets. The province was officially formed in 2002. Before that time, the Islands – which lie in the Straits of Malacca to the north-east of Sumatra and directly south of Singapore – were incorporated into the Province of Riau, whose capital is located in Pekanbaru on the Sumatran Mainland. Like other borderland regions situated close to much wealthier economies, the Riau Islands have experienced rapid social and economic transformation by virtue of their proximity to Malaysia and Singapore. They are the site of considerable documented and undocumented labour flows to both countries, as well as the nearest point for repatriation of workers whose contracts have ended or undocumented migrants who have been deported. The islands have also attracted large numbers of internal transmigrants in search of work. This has particularly been the case since the formation of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT) in 1990, a project which heralded a new era of cross-border economic engagement, promising to restore Riau Islanders' dreams of prosperity by leveraging on Singapore's status as an 'Asian Tiger' to improve economic conditions in the islands, and by allowing Riau Islanders special access to Singapore and Malaysia.

In this article, we examine a range of geographical sites in Kepri Province in order to tease out the relationship between different forms of migration and various attempts to manage them. As Batam has been the main focus of the growth triangle initiative, it figures prominently in economic studies of the Riau Islands.<sup>4</sup> As a result, the realities of different island communities are often lost: the experiences of other islanders either ignored or aggregated with those of Batam Islanders. In order to understand the

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<sup>3</sup> The research on which this paper is based was funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Project grant *In the Shadow of Singapore: The Limits of Transnationalism in Insular Riau* (DP0557368) – see project website <http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/research/intheshadow/>. The ethnographic material draws on research interviews conducted with Riau Islanders and Singaporeans between 2004-2007.

<sup>4</sup> In contrast, anthropological studies, with the exception of Lindquist (2004), focus on the island of Bintan (Wee 1985, 2002; Faucher 2006, 2002), or study the sea nomads of the region (Chou 2006; Chou and Wee 2002).

differential impact that internal and international migration has had on different parts of the province it is important to consider more than one geographical location. In this paper, we focus on two internal sites (Batam and Bintan islands) and two geo-political border sites (the Indonesia-Singapore and the Indonesia-Malaysia borders) and trace the migration flows across and within these sites over a 30 year period. We have chosen the island of Bintan for two reasons. First, it is the site of the current provincial capital, Tanjung Pinang (also an important pre-colonial and colonial seat of power); and second, it has been the focus of a number of significant development projects under the IMS-GT. Our research is the first attempt to bring together existing (and sometimes piecemeal) demographic and qualitative data with an analysis of the regulatory frameworks designed to control population movements within and through the province. Our analysis begins with an overview of population movements into and out of the Islands. This section documents the socio-economic forces that have contributed to the movement of large numbers of Indonesians into the transit area. We examine the impact that these movements have had on population sizes as well as the changing gender and ethnic composition of different island communities. This discussion serves as a background to the second part of the article where we explore the range of regulatory regimes that have been developed to shape and control population movements into and out of the Riau Islands.

Drawing on this quantitative and qualitative data, we argue that the processes of internal and international migration are mutually constitutive in the borderlands. Therefore, in order to understand border crossings and international migration from the Riau Islands into Singapore and Malaysia, attention must be given to mobility and exclusion within the border zone itself. The Riau Islands' status as a transit zone for international labour migrants and as a destination for internal migrants determines its demographic profile and policies of migration control. At the same time, the creation and control of *internal* borders within the borderlands is strongly influenced by the fact that not everyone who comes to the Riau Islands has the intention of moving on, and not all international migrants returning to the Islands intend to go home. As the following discussion shows, policies designed to curb population movements between the islands and efforts to restrict migratory flows into and out of the province sometimes operate in accord, but more often they are incompatible. Closer attention to these interrelated processes allows us to develop a richer and more nuanced picture of migration patterns within the borderlands. Our analysis demonstrates that internal migration cannot be understood as a solely 'national' phenomenon, and that international migration cannot only be explained by 'push and pull' factors in sending and receiving destinations.

### **The Riau Islands as a Site of Desire**

The Riau Islands are located along Indonesia's frontier, thousands of kilometres from the nation's capital in Jakarta. The Islands lie along the edge of the border between Indonesia, Singapore, and Peninsular Malaysia. By ferry, Batam is less than an hour from Singapore, and Karimun, which lies to the west of Batam, is less than an hour from the State of Johor in Malaysia. The particular location and nature of the Indonesia-Singapore-Malaysia borderlands makes this region a special kind of border

zone. The islands have been a site of desire for both internal and international labour migrants since the colonial period because of their strategic location on the Straits of Malacca. The flows of people into the Riau Islands and across the geo-political borders have not been uniform over this time, but have risen and fallen with the fortunes of the different islands and cross-border economic synergies and political tensions. In the contemporary period, the fact that the Islands are separated by narrow straits from the cosmopolitan centre of Singapore and the booming economy of Peninsular Malaysia make this border zone quite different from Indonesia's land borders with Eastern Malaysia, East Timor or Papua New Guinea. For example, in contrast to the transit zone of Nunukan in Eastern Kalimantan – which is imagined entirely as a place of crossing – the Riau Islands are both a space of intense movement internationally and a destination in themselves.

As the discussion that follows shows, the shifting patterns of human movement historically, but particularly over the last few decades, have had important consequences for the patterns of settlement, lifestyle and outlook in different communities in the Islands. The rapid population growth experienced by both Batam and Bintan Islands over this period has been the consequence of planned internal labour migration programmes, spontaneous labour migration generated by rumours of the region's booming economy, and largely unplanned return migration by documented and undocumented international labour migrants. The islands also accommodate a large temporary migrant population of documented and undocumented labour migrants, and a smaller transitory population of Indonesian tourists.<sup>5</sup> Our analysis demonstrates that these different 'migrant' populations are not discrete, and individuals can move from one category to another over a short period of time.

#### *The Riau Islands as a destination*

Although Batam and Bintan are part of the same border zone, their history of development and the population and migration profiles are very different. Bintan has long been established as a major population centre. Its capital Tanjung Pinang is one of the oldest cities in the region and traces its historical origins back to the seat of the Johor-Riau Sultanate located a short distance away on the tiny island of Penyengat. Tanjung Pinang then played a key role as the seat of the Dutch government in the region and was a key trading and customs port during the colonial period. By 1971, the population of the Riau Islands as a whole had reached 331,136 – a figure that had grown 1.7 per cent annually since 1961. Twelve per cent of the region's population were non-citizen residents, many of them Chinese (Esmara 1975, 26, 28). However, during the 1970s thousands of people migrated to Tanjung Pinang from the main Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra, and to a lesser extent from other parts of the archipelago. Some of these were serving members of the military forces who decided to settle in the islands with their families, rather than moving to a new posting. Others were attracted by the prospect of better paying jobs. Many of these labour migrants travelled to the islands through kinship networks, and although the majority intended

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<sup>5</sup> The islands also attract a large number of international tourists, particularly from Singapore and Malaysia. While some of these tourists stay in the numerous beach resorts scattered on both islands, large numbers of working class men also visit the islands as sex tourists. For a discussion of sex tourism in the islands see Ford and Lyons (2008).

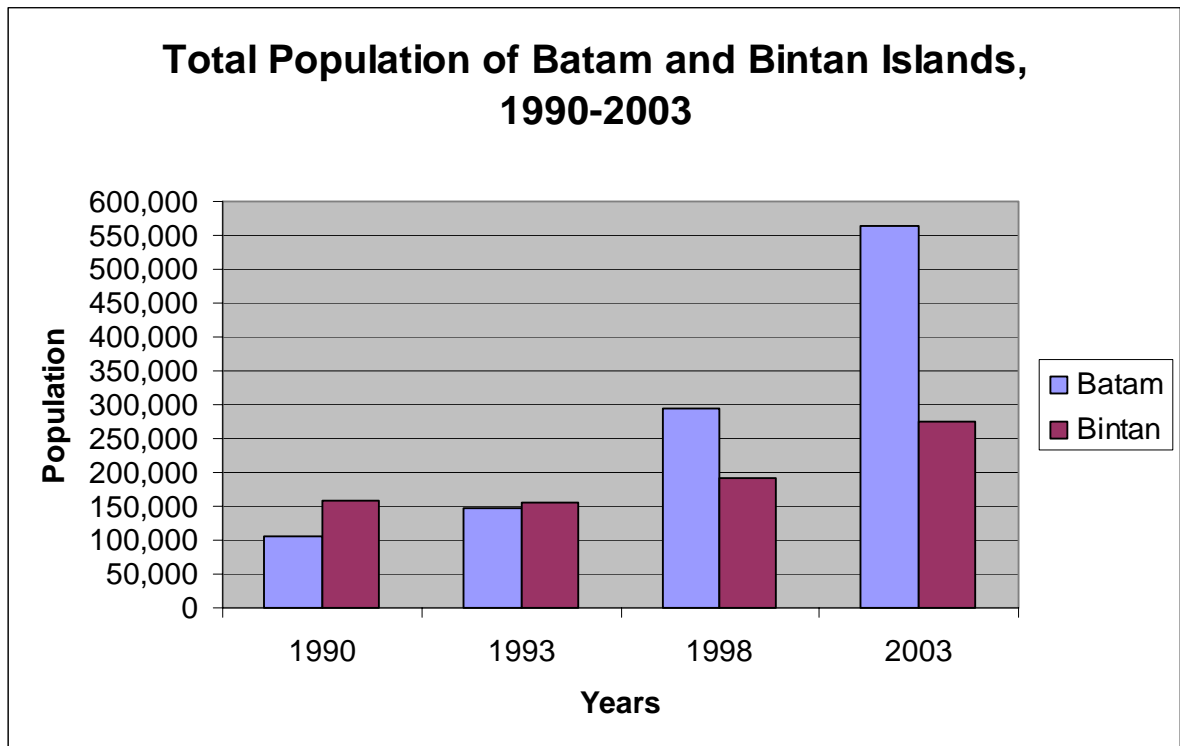
to spend a short period of time in the islands amassing their savings (as part of a tradition of *merantau*), others decided to settle permanently (Sobary 1987). By 1976, the total population of Bintan island was 111,091 (South China Sea Fisheries Development and Coordinating Program 1977).

In contrast to Bintan, early migration to Batam was motivated by concerns to protect Indonesia's territorial sovereignty. A number of young people moved to Batam to support the Indonesian army after the declaration of Independence in 1945, and again during the period of Confrontation (Roeroe et al. 2003). The population remained small in the early 1970s, when it reached an estimated 6,000 (Otorita Batam n.d., 6), but began to approach the size of Tanjung Pinang in the late 1970s. By 1978, the year that Batam was designated as a tax-free bonded zone for export industries, its population had increased to 31,800. The signing of a development agreement between Indonesia and Singapore in 1980 then attracted domestic and foreign investors, and during the next ten years, large numbers of construction workers were brought to Batam to develop Batamindo Industrial Park and its associated infrastructure (roads, ports, and housing).

Batam boasted a population of approximately 43,000 in 1983 (Roeroe et al. 2003), while Tanjung Pinang had a population of 47,175 in the same year (Sobary 1987, 9). Within a short period of time, however, the population on Batam had more than doubled. In 1990 Bintan's total population stood at 157,451 and Batam's population was 105,820 – see Graph 1.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The statistics we have used for Bintan have been compiled by disaggregating the statistics for the former Regency of Insular Riau and recombining them according to the new local government boundaries. This was necessary in order to generate meaningful data series.



Source: (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau dengan PT. Duta Consultant Engineering 2005; Bappeda dan Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau 1999; Bappeda dan Kantor Statistik Kabupaten Kepulauan Riau 1994, 1991; BPS Kota Batam 2004).

A major factor in this rapid population growth was the impending formation of the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT). The proposal for the IMS-GT was spearheaded by the Singaporean government which was increasingly concerned about the rising cost of local labour and the movement of multi-nationals out of Singapore into more cost-efficient manufacturing sites in other parts of Asia (Lee 1991). The proximity of the Riau Islands would allow Singapore to develop a 'regionalisation strategy' that combined Singaporean capital and the city-state's port and services industries with a ready pool of cheap labour (Sparke et al. 2004). The industrial manufacturing zones, ports, and tourism projects established on the islands of Batam, Bintan and Karimun as a direct result of the growth triangle initiative now define the province's economic landscape.<sup>7</sup> Once the IMS-GT was established, however, Batam began to attract the highest levels of foreign investment, and as a consequence the largest volume of migrants from within Indonesia seeking work in the industrial parks and tourist resorts (Grundy-Warr, Peachey, and Perry 1999; Bunnell, Sidaway, and Grundy-Warr 2006). By 1998 Batam's population more than doubled while Bintan's grew at a much slower rate (see Graph 1). When the national census was taken in 2000, 43 per cent of the population of the Riau Islands had been born in another province or overseas. Almost half of these migrants had moved to the Islands since 1995 (Ananta and Bakhtiar 2005, 17).

<sup>7</sup> For details of major IMS-GT projects, see Peachey et al. (1998) and Pereira (2004).

The IMS-GT was marred by numerous setbacks, culminating in the economic and political uncertainty following the Asian Financial Crisis (1997-1998), when many multi-national investors began to downscale their levels of investment in Batam, and tourists, worried about social unrest, stayed away from the Bintan Resort zone.<sup>8</sup> The crisis had the opposite effect, however, on internal migration. The Riau Islands' relative prosperity became a magnet for people in other parts of the Indonesian archipelago. In the three years following the crisis (1998-2001), Bintan experienced a 34 per cent increase while the growth rate in Batam's population reached an incredible 79.5 per cent. By the end of 2004, the population of the province as a whole was 1,285,617 – 277,986 of whom lived on Bintan Island (160,918 in Tanjung Pinang), and 633,944 on Batam (Bappeda Provinsi Kepri n.d.).<sup>9</sup> Migrants from other parts of Indonesia were attracted to the Riau Islands by the prospects of employment in an economy that had been cushioned from the economic crisis of 1997-1998 or because of their relative calm during the violence that erupted across the archipelago from 1998.<sup>10</sup>

Although the impact of the crisis on economic investment was relatively short-lived, the manufacturing sector has not recovered to pre-1997 levels and the growth triangle is generally regarded on all sides as a failure (Sparke et al. 2004). In recent years, however, growing global demand for oil has resulted in a boom in the shipping industries in the islands. In 2006, in an effort to re-invigorate the economies of the islands, Singapore and Indonesia announced the creation of Special Economic Zones in Batam, Bintan and Karimun (the BBK SEZ). The SEZ Framework Agreement on Economic Cooperation outlines seven key areas that Indonesia and Singapore will cooperate in to ensure that business, regulatory and labour conditions in the islands are favourable to investors (Ministry of Trade and Industry 2006). The agreement is still in its infancy and it remains to be seen what impact the BBK SEZ will have on local communities and continuing migration flows.

The rapid population growth in both Batam and Bintan has had a significant impact on the character of the urban communities on both islands. Lindquist (2002, 41) describes Batam as a 'kind of crossroads inhabited by migrants and tourists [where] most people call somewhere else "home", even if they have never been there, and most have plans to go elsewhere'. As the result of its long-standing status as an urban centre and the slower pace of economic development, Tanjung Pinang, the main town on Bintan, has far less of what Lindquist (2002, 12) calls Batam's 'distinct frontier-town atmosphere'. Earlier waves of migrants to Tanjung Pinang tended to assimilate into the local Malay culture and adopted an identity as *Orang Riau* (people from Riau) (Ford 2003b). However, importantly there has been some convergence between the social structures on Batam and Bintan over the last two decades. On Bintan, large

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<sup>8</sup> Personal communication, senior figure within Bintan Resort Development Corporation, April 2006.

<sup>9</sup> The growth of Bintan's population outside the capital reflects the employment opportunities in the Bintan Resort Zone, which employs a significant number of internal migrants.

<sup>10</sup> Kelly suggests that the official population figures for Batam are a vast underestimate given the numbers of unrecorded migrants arriving daily in the late 1990s. He cites a senior Batam Industrial Development Agency (BIDA) official estimate that the total may be as high as 500,000 in 1998, with 1000-2000 new arrivals drawn by prospects of employment and fleeing conflict disembarking every week (Kelly 2004, 77).

numbers of new migrants many of whom are less assimilationist than their counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s have moved to Tanjung Pinang. On Batam, longer-term communities have developed that *do* call the island home.

Perhaps the most significant changes since the early 1980s have been on the ethnic make-up of the island communities. These new waves of migration to the Riau Islands since the lead-up to the formation of the IMS-GT built on historical patterns, which had already created a markedly heterogeneous population in the region. The original populations of the Islands consisted of *Orang Melayu* (Malays) and *Orang Laut* (nomadic fisher-people) (Wee 1985). During the colonial period considerable numbers of Bugis traders and warriors, as well as Chinese traders and coolies, began to arrive, creating an increasingly diverse and vibrant community (Roeroe et al. 2003). The enormous in-flow of labour migrants from throughout Indonesia during the 1990s led to the development of an even more ethnically diverse population. Figures from the 2000 Census show that on Batam, the Javanese constitute the single largest ethnic group, followed by Malays, Minang and Bataks. On Bintan, Malays make up the largest ethnic group, followed by Javanese and Minang (see Table 1). According to the Census, of the almost 1,800 foreign citizens living in the Islands, 180 were Singaporeans and 168 were Malaysians, 172 and 133 of whom respectively were living in Batam.

**Table 1. Population of Batam and Bintan by Ethnicity in 2000**

ETHNICITY	BATAM		BINTAN	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Malay	91,386	20.90	132,708	41.54
Javanese	116,726	26.69	70,676	22.12
Minang	65,057	14.87	20,023	6.27
Batak	65,239	14.92	11,192	3.50
Sundanese	14,162	3.24	8,220	2.57
Bugis	9,999	2.29	6,785	2.12
Flores	9,298	2.13	3,353	1.05
Banjar	2,908	0.66	2,676	0.84
Others	61,059	13.96	63,597	19.91
Foreign	1,524	0.35	252	0.08
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>437,358</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>319,482</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: BPS Riau Province (2005a; 2005b)

Although Chinese Indonesians are not specifically identified in provincial statistics tables, ethnic Chinese comprise a significant proportion of ‘others’ on both islands, particularly Bintan, where the city of Tanjung Pinang has a large Chinese community. In 1930, 60 percent of Tanjung Pinang’s population was Chinese (Butar-Butar 2000, 5). However, the influx of migrants, most of them not Chinese, over the last three decades has shifted the ethnic balance between the Chinese and non-Chinese in the city, and to a lesser extent in other parts of the Riau Islands.<sup>11</sup> In 1991 the Chinese

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that we have heard many accounts of Chinese from Jakarta and other major cities in Indonesia taking shelter in the islands during the anti-Chinese riots of 1998.

community accounted for 16 per cent of the entire population of the Riau Islands (Rusli, Sumardjo, and Syaikat 1996, 60), while national Census data from 2000 shows that the Chinese community in the Riau Islands comprised just under 10 per cent of the population (Ananta and Bakhtiar 2005, 20).

The gender composition of the population has also changed considerably since the formation of the IMS-GT. On Batam since the late 1990s when the factory and port infrastructure was completed, construction workers and male factory workers began to be replaced by large numbers of female factory workers who were believed to be best suited to work in the electronic industries.<sup>12</sup> Since 1999, women have outnumbered men on Batam, reflecting increased pressure on women in other parts of Indonesia to migrate for work as a result of the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-98 (BPS Kota Batam 2004). In contrast, in Bintan, men continue to outnumber women reflecting the island's more traditional economic opportunity structures, which attract more male migrants than females (annual volumes of *Kepulauan Riau Dalam Angka* 1990-2005; *Tanjung Pinang Dalam Angka* 2002-2005). This reflects the fact that the IMS-GT had a much less significant, and more differentiated, impact on development opportunities in Bintan where there is a much smaller manufacturing sector. The large resort enclave in the north of the island (which takes up almost one-third of the Bintan landmass), provides a limited number of jobs and is effectively cut off from the rest of the island, thereby reducing opportunities for associated service industries to develop alongside the resorts.

The impact of these migratory flows on the life of island communities has been dramatic. While earlier waves of migrants tended to assimilate into local Malay culture, the sheer volume of later arrivals, combined with the often temporary nature of their sojourn, has meant that many groups continue to retain their languages and cultural practices. In some areas these ethnic differences are a source of tension, sometimes leading to open conflict. As new migrants settle and as the population of locally-born residents grows, however, a new group of *Orang Kepri* have begun to emerge.

### ***The Riau Islands as a space of transit***

Most studies of Batam or the Growth Triangle make some reference to the large number of people passing through the islands in search of work overseas, but very little has been written on these international flows and their impact on the social and ethnic mix of different communities in the Islands themselves. This silence belies the fact that the Riau Islands are a key point of departure and return for large numbers of tourists and international labour migrants from Indonesia to Singapore and Malaysia, and the extent of the impact of international flows – particularly those of labour migrants – have on local communities in the Islands.

Singapore receives significantly more visitors from Indonesia than from any other country. In 2003, 22 per cent of all visitors to Singapore held Indonesian passports. In that year, of a total of 1,341,708 Indonesian visitors to Singapore, 661,962 arrived by

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<sup>12</sup> For a discussion of the gendered ideologies associated with employment practices in export processing zones in Southeast Asia see Ong (1987) and Wolf (1992).

sea, mostly from the Riau Islands (Singapore Tourism Bureau 2004, 16).<sup>13</sup> In the same year, 621,651 Indonesians visited Malaysia on tourist visas, or just under 6 per cent of a total of 10,576,915 visitors (Tourism Malaysia n.d.).<sup>14</sup> Although departure data does not disaggregate Indonesian tourists by place of residence, it is common knowledge that many Indonesians leaving through Batam in particular come from elsewhere in the archipelago since it is far cheaper to take an internal flight to Batam and make the ferry crossing to Singapore, or less commonly to Malaysia, than to fly directly from Jakarta or other major Indonesian cities. In addition, all Indonesians pay less exit tax (or *fiskal*) if they leave by land or sea. Regular travellers may even seek to illegally obtain a local identity card and passport in the Islands so that they can avoid the exit tax altogether. Batam's status as a transit point for Indonesian tourists leaving for Singapore has had a significant impact on its economy. Staff at large hotels in Batam cite guests' desire to travel onto Singapore as a major consideration for both individual tourists and for event organisers, for whom Batam is now an established location for large conferences. As Bintan's airport has been unavailable for large commercial flights for some years, it has not benefited from the same kind of tourist traffic.<sup>15</sup>

The other major kind of cross-border traffic to flow through the Riau Islands consists of labour migrants seeking work in Singapore or Malaysia. In 2006, 1,910 migrant workers left Tanjung Pinang through official channels to work overseas, 61 per cent of them women (Dinas Tenaga Kerja dan Kesejahteraan Sosial Pemerintah Kota Tanjung Pinang 2006). Data collected from interviews with unofficial 'passport agents' and labour sending companies in 2005 suggests that many more of the migrant workers who pass through the province are undocumented, or in possession of *aspal* (*asli tapi palsu*, real but fake) documents – official travel documents obtained illegally in the Islands. As with tourists, Bintan and Batam's roles in the flow of overseas labour migrants differs significantly. Batam is now the main official point of departure, particularly for migrants seeking to work in Singapore. This has particularly been the case since 2004, when the Indonesian government introduced a requirement that all Indonesian women going abroad to work as domestic workers should be tested in Batam on their knowledge of English and household tasks before being deployed overseas (Zainol 2004).

Significant numbers of workers seeking to enter Singapore and Malaysia illegally also pass through the Riau Islands. In 1986 Tanjung Pinang was considered the most strategic staging post to travel illegally to Singapore and Malaysia (Sobary 1987, 5). As transport infrastructure improved on the island of Batam it became the preferred departure point. However, many migrants travelling through irregular channels continue to leave from Bintan or the island of Karimun (Ford 2003a). The Riau Islands became a key staging point for illegal entry into Singapore and Malaysia in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis. This was partly a consequence of the islands' resilience to the economic problems facing other parts of Indonesia. Men and

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<sup>13</sup> This figure also includes some Indonesian foreign domestic workers, since many domestic workers enter Singapore on a social visit pass before receiving an official work permit.

<sup>14</sup> We do not have access to statistics regarding how many of these Indonesians arrived by sea.

<sup>15</sup> The airport between Sekupang and Tanjung Pinang, which was heavily used in the 1970s by mining interests is currently being upgraded to accommodate flights from Jakarta and other major centres.

women travelled to the islands in large numbers hoping of finding work in the export manufacturing zones. Inevitably, the formal sector was unable to absorb them. With little prospect of work in their home villages many of these internal migrants made the decision to try their luck in Singapore and Malaysia. As the effects of the crisis finally began to be felt in the islands, internal migrant workers who had been laid off from their jobs in Batam's formal sector also began to attempt to cross the border illegally.

Workers who leave through official and unofficial channels spend a significant period of time in the Islands before departure, housed in barracks or in agents' homes, and undertaking 'training' in local households (cf Ford 2001). This phenomenon is so widespread that instead of using the word *pembantu* (helper or servant), local residents use the term TKI (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia*, Indonesian Worker) – the Indonesian government's official term for blue-collar international labour migrants – to describe their household help. Although some intending migrant workers are given little opportunity to leave their barracks, many others engage in the life of the community during their time in the Islands, patronising local businesses and recreation sites. Most local residents we interviewed in 2005-2006 did not feel that they created a disturbance, although many did note that social problems did arise if agents kept them in holding centres too long before placing them overseas.

The islands have not only become a major departure point for Indonesians seeking to work abroad, they have also become an arrival point for returning international migrants. Not all of these workers arrive in the islands of their own accord – while some are 'dumped' in the islands by errant employers, others are 'repatriated' to Indonesia by the Singaporean or Malaysian governments as part of their deportation actions. Some of these 'illegals' seek to cross the border again as quickly as possible, while others return to their home provinces. Yet another group decide to remain in the islands, forming a new cohort of internal migrants. It is important, then, to remember that even temporary labour migrants become long-term residents, creating increasingly heterogeneous populations and potentially transforming the meanings attached to 'home'.

Spaan (1994, 97) claims that illegal workers who returned to Batam in the early 1990s were absorbed into the local manufacturing industry. As their numbers began to increase, however, local job opportunities became scarce. This problem became more apparent when increasing numbers of undocumented migrant workers were repatriated to the Islands after the Malaysian government passed a new immigration act in 2002 (see below). Many of the repatriated workers had neither the money nor the desire to return to their provinces of origin, instead hoping to earn enough money in the Riau Islands to permit them to leave for Singapore or Malaysia once more. However, their increasing presence put significant pressure on the transit zone's economy and social infrastructure, and many migrants who stayed in the Islands were absorbed into the informal sector and the vice industries, including prostitution, drug trade, smuggling and gangsterism (*premanisme*). More recently, there have been reports of female domestic workers being 'dumped' in the islands by their Singaporean employers who do not want to pay the full cost of repatriating them to their home villages in Java and Sumatra. These women arrive in the islands often

without money or contacts and have little means to return home. (Human Rights Watch 2005, 50).

This analysis of the migration flows into and out of the Riau Islands demonstrates the fluid nature of the categories ‘internal’ and ‘international’ migrant. The IMS-GT may be criticised for failing to produce the levels of anticipated economic growth and development originally forecast by member nations, but it has had a dramatic impact on flows of people into the Riau Islands as well as flows across the border into Singapore and Malaysia. As our discussion indicates, these migration flows were the consequence of a complex range of interconnected forces operating in the islands and abroad.

## **Internal and International Borders**

In the previous section we documented the volume and type of migration into and out of the Riau Islands by internal and international migrants. These flows do not occur in a policy vacuum. A range of regulatory measures have been instituted to manage the flows of migrants into the province, between different islands in the province, and across the borders into Singapore and Malaysia. In this section, we describe the policy and legislative frameworks that attempt to control population movements into and out of the islands, and examine what impact they have had on those flows.

### ***International Bordering Practices***

Until relatively recently the concept of *international* migratory flows between Insular Riau and Singapore and Malaysia was rendered problematic by the lack of a locally-recognised geo-political boundary and the absence of clear national immigration regimes. The borders that today mark out the nation-states of insular Southeast Asia are based in large part on boundaries created under the Anglo Dutch Treaty of London (1824). Prior to this date, the Johor Sultanate, centred in the islands of Riau, was the site of political power in the region. Pre-colonial trade routes acted as conduits for the movement of people and goods and facilitated the creation of strong social, cultural and economic ties amongst different communities. The Anglo Dutch Treaty, however, effectively split the Johor-Riau Sultanate into two parts, each governed with varying degrees of success by their respective colonial powers (Trocki 1979; Tagliacozzo 2007). The British focused their attention on the Straits Settlements, and transformed Singapore into a dominant entrepot, while the Dutch, distracted by events in Java and mainland Sumatra, exercised limited control over the Riau Islands. Meanwhile a flourishing Chinese barter trade between Singapore and Indonesia (labelled ‘smuggling’ by the Dutch), saw the Riau islands become increasingly tied to the Singapore economy (Tagliacozzo 2007; Trocki 1990).

The first attempts to regulate the flow of people throughout the Malay Archipelago occurred during the late colonial period. From the 1930s onwards, the British colonial authorities in the Straits Settlements were increasingly concerned about regulating the flow of Chinese and Indian labour migrants into Singapore and Malaya. By the end of World War Two, Chinese migration into Malaya had effectively ceased (Kaur 2004, 212). In contrast, ‘Indonesians’ were assumed to be of the same ‘racial stock’ as local

Malays (Kaur 2004, 209) and Indonesian labour migration to Malaya continued to be encouraged by the British. The Immigration Ordinance of 1953, however, saw the introduction of more stringent border controls into Malaya reflecting growing nationalist sentiment at the time. In the post-World War Two period in Singapore, attempts to regulate Indonesian migration were complicated by the presence of a number of competing forces vying for international recognition of their status as official agents of the newly created Republic of Indonesia. For example, between 1945 and 1947 there were at least three different groups *within* Singapore issuing passports for the Republic (Yong 2003, 79)<sup>16</sup> – not all of which were accepted within the Republican territories themselves, or by the Dutch.<sup>17</sup> In reality, the papers held by cross-Strait travellers were of limited significance, and traders and their families continued to cross the border between Insular Riau and Singapore with relative ease.

The Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) saw the introduction of a compulsory system of identification cards for all Straits Settlement residents aged 12 years and over.<sup>18</sup> For some individuals, the issuing of formal identity papers actually allowed them to claim citizenship in their place of residence even though they had been born elsewhere. High levels of mobility meant that it was not uncommon for many families (both Malay and Chinese) to consist of children who were born in different places. Individuals, and sometimes entire families, simply adopted the nationality (and associated identity papers) that best suited them at the time. This changed significantly in 1963 when the formation of the Federation of Malaya led to a period of tense stand-off between Malaya and Indonesia, commonly referred to as Confrontation.<sup>19</sup> With Confrontation, the border's role in identifying and keeping apart the new national citizens of Indonesia and Malaya (soon to become Malaysia and Singapore in 1965) was made far more apparent.<sup>20</sup> As citizenship laws began to be tightened, and immigration controls made it more difficult to cross the border without passports or other identity papers, some families found themselves divided. For individuals caught on the 'wrong' side of the border during Confrontation, there was a strong imperative to 'adopt' a new nationality as a means of proving one's allegiance to the nation. The case of one of our informants, a 'Singaporean Malay', reveals the ease with which this transformation could take place. He and his brother were both born in Tanjung Pinang but went to school in Singapore. Their younger siblings were all born in Singapore, but moved back to Riau in the early 1960s. The family was separated during Confrontation and to avoid problems with local authorities, the boys simply 'switched' citizenship by claiming they had lost their

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<sup>16</sup> By this time, there was a widespread understanding in Singapore that Dutch passports would not be accepted (Yong 2003, 79).

<sup>17</sup> For example, the Dutch declared that in Tanjung Pinang, only passports issued by Indoff (Indonesia Office), the Republic of Indonesia's diplomatic mission in Singapore, would be recognized (Yong 2003, 79).

<sup>18</sup> These identity cards became the basis for future immigration and citizenship regimes in the independent nations of Singapore and Malaysia.

<sup>19</sup> The Riau Islands, along with Indonesia's land border with Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo, were a key location during the stand-off. Large numbers of defence force personnel from other parts of Indonesia were stationed in the Islands at this time, a significant number of whom later settled in the islands.

<sup>20</sup> For personal accounts of the difficulties faced by Bintan islanders in travelling to Singapore during this time, see Ford and Lyons (2006).

birth certificates. Instead, they relied on their school records to demonstrate that they were Singapore nationals.

By the mid-1970s, cross-border movements were increasingly regulated by more stringent customs and passport checks on the Singaporean and Malaysian sides of the border. For those not officially seeking to cross borders for work, entry requirements for Indonesian, Singaporean and Malaysian passport holders to ASEAN member countries are now consistent. They may enter an ASEAN country without a visa and stay for up to 30 days on a tourist or social visit pass. Under the terms of the IMS-GT, Riau Islanders were offered improved access to Singapore and Malaysia because they would not have to pay the exit tax (*fiskal*) imposed by the Indonesian government on its citizens.<sup>21</sup> But while Singaporean and Malaysian immigration law supposedly treats all Indonesian passport holders in the same way, Riau Islanders' ability to cross into Singapore or Malaysia is also influenced by immigration profiling that is mediated by ethnicity and class, which targets Indonesians deemed to be travelling for illegitimate purposes. Chinese informants have suggested that they find it easier to cross the border than their non-Chinese compatriots. While many middle-class Riau Islanders continue to travel regularly to Singapore and Malaysia to visit relatives or for medical tourism, working and lower-middle class Indonesians face longer waiting times than civil servants or members of the upper-middle class. As they pass through immigration checkpoints their documents are carefully scrutinised, and they are often interrogated at length about the reasons for their journey. In Singapore, such visitors are frequently asked to provide proof of their ability to support their time in the city-state through the provision of *uang tunjuk* (show money).<sup>22</sup>

The attention shown to Indonesian visitors by immigration officials in Singapore and Malaysia reflects ongoing – and increasingly punitive – attempts to regulate the flow of documented and undocumented labour migrants into both countries.<sup>23</sup> Up until the 1980s, Singapore and Malaysia received only a very small percentage of Indonesian labour migrants. Since the mid-1980s, however, increasing numbers of documented migrants are seeking work in the region (Nayyar 1997). Figures released in the 2000 census show that Singapore's 612,200 foreign workers constitute 29.2% of the total workforce. About 500,000 of these workers are considered unskilled or low-skilled, of which an estimated 150,000 are domestic workers, approximately one third of whom are from Indonesia (Almenoar and Tan 2004). In contrast, among the male foreign workers, Indonesian men constitute a small minority. The guest worker program in Singapore is tightly regulated to ensure that low-skilled foreign workers remain temporary workers who can be easily repatriated during periods of economic recession. Among the measures used to control the flow of labour migrants are a work permit system, a dependency ceiling (which regulates the proportion of foreign to local workers), and a foreign worker levy (Huang and Yeoh 2003, 80). The majority

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<sup>21</sup> As noted above, many Indonesians from Jakarta and elsewhere fly to Batam and then make the ferry trip to Singapore or Malaysia in order to avoid the higher rate of *fiskal* charged on citizens leaving Indonesia by air, along with the higher costs of international flights.

<sup>22</sup> The need to provide *uang tunjuk* has given rise to a lucrative credit lending business on the Indonesian side of the border.

<sup>23</sup> Labour flows are also monitored, with varying degrees of success, on the Indonesian side of the border. Labour migrants are required to register with the Indonesian Department of Manpower, a task that is normally completed on their behalf by recruitment agencies.

of low skilled workers come through legal work placement agencies on a maximum of two year employment contract (subject to a one-off renewal).

Significant numbers of Indonesians also enter Singapore to work illegally. Spaan (1994, 97) notes that in the early 1990s, as a consequence of the growing manufacturing sector in Batam, Javanese men were attracted to the islands and would alternate between work in Batam factories and illegal work in Singapore. There was an unprecedented growth in the numbers of illegal immigrants entering Singapore via the Riau Islands in 1998 as a consequence of the Asian Financial Crisis. While 1997 figures show a total of 84 illegal entrants arrested at sea that year (The Straits Times 1998), the figure in April 1998 alone was 258 (Teo 1998). The authorities identified Batam and Tanjung Pinang as major hubs for smuggling syndicates who operated throughout Indonesia. In an effort to crack down on illegal migration, the Singaporean government stepped up its coastal surveillance, as well as tightening immigration controls at the major checkpoints in the ferry terminals that serviced arrivals from the Riau Islands. Indonesians suspected of entering on tourist visas in order to work illegally were turned away at the immigration counters. The drop in the exchange rate made it more difficult for Indonesians to obtain the 'right' amount of *uang tunjuk*. To spread news of its harsh treatment of illegal entrants, the Immigration Department started showing videos to passengers departing for Batam and Bintan at the World Trade Centre and Tanah Merah Ferry Terminals warning about tough immigration laws for illegal workers. The video showed illegal migrants being arrested at worksites and housing flats. Indonesians passing through the terminals were encouraged to tell their compatriots 'back home' about the government crackdowns on 'illegals'. Singaporeans were warned about the dangers of large numbers of unskilled Indonesian migrants entering Singapore and were urged to be vigilant in order to protect the island city (Miller and Singh 1998). They were told that as a nation, Singaporeans had to 'grow calluses on their heart' when confronted with the plight of Indonesia's poor.

Due to increased global concerns about terrorism since 2001, Singapore began to step up border patrols in the Straits, and as a consequence the numbers of immigration offenders arriving by sea remains low. Immigration regulations, combined with an effective border control system and an active policy of monitoring the legal status of foreign workers in workplaces, have resulted in relatively low numbers of undocumented labour migrants.<sup>24</sup> Our research suggests, however, that many Riau Islanders continue to enter the country on tourist passes and work as temporary labourers. Indonesians are recruited as cleaners and domestic helpers during key cultural and religious festivals such as Chinese New Year and Idul Fitri, and as seamstresses and handymen. These periods also attract significant numbers of hawkers and traders who sell goods in markets around the islands. Indonesian women from the islands also enter Singapore on tourist passes to work temporarily in the local sex industry (Henson 2004).

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<sup>24</sup> 153 people were arrested trying to enter Singapore by sea in 1999 (Ministry of Home Affairs 1999). This figure rose to 307 people in 2000, but dropped to 123 in 2001 after a range of new border protection measures were introduced (Ministry of Home Affairs 2001).

Indonesia's contemporary sea border with Peninsular Malaysia is far more porous than its border with Singapore. In the 1970s, Indonesians were welcomed by the Malaysian government as part of its attempt to 'balance' Malaysian society demographically and economically after the race riots of 1969. However, following the economic recession of the mid-1980s public opinion turned against Indonesians (Crisis 2005). Migrant labour is an integral part of Malaysia's economic growth and rising demand for skilled workers at home has seen the construction, plantation, forestry and services sectors experience labour shortages that have been filled by migrant labour. As of the end of June 2006, 1.84 million registered foreign workers were employed in Malaysia. These constituted over 16 per cent of the workforce. Of these, 64.7 per cent were from Indonesia (Ministry of Finance Malaysia 2007, 78). Indonesian women typically occupy positions in manufacturing, hospitality and domestic work. Recent figures suggest that there are more than 161,000 documented domestic workers, over half of whom come from Indonesia (Chin 2003). In addition, there are estimated to be almost as many undocumented migrant women working as domestic workers in Malaysian homes (Tenaganita 2005). Indonesian men work in the construction, manufacturing, and plantation sectors.

The Malaysian government has long sought to regulate the flow of Indonesian migrant workers while allowing large numbers to enter illegally between crackdowns. Although Indonesian workers are an integral part of the Malaysian economy they are subject to regular deportation campaigns. These deportations are short-lived and large numbers of foreign workers subsequently return (Ford 2006). Undocumented workers are deemed to be 'illegal' and are subjected to harsh and arbitrary immigration laws. Because of their status, undocumented migrants are frequently subject to harassment, extortion and theft by the police and immigration authorities. Those arrested can be detained in detention camps under extremely harsh conditions for such periods as are deemed necessary to arrange for their deportation (Suaram 2003). Like the Singaporean government, the Malaysian government also intensified its efforts to control labour migration from Indonesia after the Asian Financial Crisis. These efforts culminated in the revision of the Immigration Act in 2002 and the subsequent deportation of hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers to Belawan, Batam and Dumai in Sumatra, and Pontianak and Nunukan in Kalimantan (Ford 2006). However, Malaysia's labour immigration regime continues to operate on regular but unpredictable cycles of crackdowns and unofficial policy relaxation, depending on the needs of the labour market and the political pressure of community hostility to labour migrants. In recent years, during crackdowns, the threat of arrest has increased with the commissioning of volunteer forces (known as RELA). As extensive press coverage has confirmed, the RELA forces have a reputation for violent behaviour and racial profiling. According to NGO sources, RELA members receive a bounty for each irregular labour migrant they arrest, in addition to a daily allowance for their expenses.

Tightening immigration regimes are not the only factors that account for changes in the numbers and levels of cross-border migration into Singapore and Malaysia. Significant differences in the wages and costs of living in the three countries make it expensive for Indonesians to travel abroad. Although wealthier Riau Islanders continue to holiday in Singapore and Malaysia – along with wealthy Indonesians from

other parts of the archipelago – our lower middle and working class respondents have indicated that after the crisis the border began to represent a serious barrier to their mobility. This time, however, it was not because physical movement was restricted, but because growing economic disparities began to disrupt their dreams and expectations about a shared ‘way of life’ across the Straits (Ford and Lyons 2006).

### ***The Construction of Internal Borders***

The inflow of inter-provincial migrants has also been a matter of concern for different levels of government. In 1928, the Dutch government made the Riau Archipelago into a free trade zone in an attempt to take over some of the trade then passing through Singapore (Touwen 2001, 90). Our older long-term respondents in Karimun and Tanjung Pinang indicated that people arriving from other parts of Indonesia were required to have special documentation. Many of the labour migrants who came to Batam from the late 1970s were recruited under a program involving 11 other Indonesian provinces. Called the *Angkatan Kerja Antar Daerah* (Inter-Region Work Force) (Roeroe et al. 2003), the program allowed migrants to stay in Batam if they found stable formal-sector jobs. Similar arrangements were put in place under the IMS-GT. The Batamindo Authority created a special subsidiary company (TunasCarrier) to recruit labour on behalf of companies located on the site. Employees were sought from all over Indonesia and were signed up on contracts with the subsidiary company rather than the individual employers (Murray and Perera 1996, 62). These restrictive contracts ensured that the migrant workers were bound to TunasCarrier and could not change jobs freely. Companies in Batam were responsible for providing housing for their employees and for covering the costs of their repatriation to their home villages at the end of their employment contracts. This arrangement was largely unsuccessful in regulating the in-flow of migrants to Batam, as large numbers of people arrived using the services of unofficial labour recruiters (*calo*) or came of their own accord. A number of multinationals, unhappy with the quality of labour supplied by Batamindo, also began to source their labour themselves (Murray and Perera 1996, 62).

These attempts to regulate the inflow of migrant workers needed for the manufacturing and tourism sectors have had a negative impact on the employment opportunities of resident Riau Islanders. Bintan islanders who travel to Batam in search of work in the factory zones have found themselves disadvantaged by a system of recruitment that operates on networks based in Java and the Sumatran mainland, resulting in lesser access to jobs for local Islanders as well as poorer wages and conditions. ‘Local hires’ are offered lower wages than workers recruited from other parts of Indonesia, and are often the first to be retrenched when there is a downturn in production. On Bintan, the Lobam EPZ and the Bintan Resort Zone are located long distances from the main urban communities and jobs were largely taken up by Indonesian migrant workers from Sumatra, Sulawesi, Java and Bali. These internal bordering practices served to create tensions between long-term residents and local arrivals. These tensions were further heightened as migrants increasingly moved into areas where locals were traditionally employed.

The local economies of Batam and Bintan could not successfully absorb all the migrants that arrived in the decade following the Asian Financial Crisis. As the population increased, so too did levels of unemployment. National data indicates that in 2003, the percentage of working-age Riau Islanders not in work was as high as was 17.68 per cent in the old Riau Islands Regency (incorporating Tanjung Pinang), while Batam reached 19.74 per cent. In that same year, approximately 44 per cent of the working-age population of the Riau Islands Regency was employed in the formal sector, while in Batam the percentage was as over 71 per cent (Ananta and Bakhtiar 2005, 23). Batam's infrastructure in particular was unable to keep up with the large numbers of migrants arriving every week. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that at this time the Riau Islands were also the staging post for the departure of large numbers of undocumented labour migrants seeking work in Singapore and Malaysia. In Batam, most of the local housing had been built for factory workers and was simply not available to the unemployed and those in the informal sector. The housing shortage resulted in the establishment of large squatter settlements across the island (Grundy-Warr, Peachey, and Perry 1999). There have been sporadic attempts by local authorities to dismantle these squatter settlements, but many have grown into established communities with electricity, water and other services.

The creation of the new province of Kepri in September 2002 as part of the Indonesia's regional autonomy program has given local authorities greater capacity to regulate the flows of labour migrants through the implementation of local government regulations, or *peraturan daerah*.<sup>25</sup> Batam introduced population controls through Local Government Regulation No.2/2001 on the Registration and Control of the Population in the City of Batam, which came into force on 1 October 2001. Under the regulation, people undertaking family visits are only permitted to remain for a period of 15 days, while business and other visitors have to present paperwork demonstrating the purpose of their visit. Newcomers seeking work have to deposit sufficient funds for a return ticket and demonstrate that they have enough money to cover 15 days' living costs in Batam. Those not planning to settle permanently in Batam are issued temporary local identity cards (Batam City Government 2001).

Attempts by local authorities in Batam to manage these flows in turn had flow-on effects in other places in the province. As it became increasingly difficult for prospective international migrants to cross the border from Batam, they attempted to do so by going through Bintan and Karimun. This put considerable pressure on local authorities to do something about the problem. Police were on standby in the ports and instructed to round up individuals whom they suspected were planning to cross the border illegally (Ford 2003a). Newspaper reports suggest that in 2001 as many as 183 people were deployed to ports in Batam itself and to 12 departure checkpoints in Jakarta, Mainland Sumatra, and in Tanjung Balai Karimun, Kundur, Tanjung Batu, Tanjung Pinang in the Riau Islands (Kompas 2001), and by December 2006 the Batam local government had collected Rp.160,000,000 in return ticket deposits under the law (Batam Pos Online 2007). The enforcement of these regulations has been patchy and sporadic. In most ports, officials do not bother to check travel papers or

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<sup>25</sup> In the Riau Islands, these laws build on attempts to regulate in-migration in the period before Confrontation. Similar regulations were enacted in Jakarta and a number of other provinces after regional autonomy.

determine who is a migrant and who is a local. One of our informants stated that most officials ignore travelers on intra-island ferries and focus their attention on boats arriving from other provinces.

Another structure developed in the province to regulate the presence of Indonesians from other parts of the Archipelago is the system of holding centres for undocumented labour migrants expelled from Malaysia. By late 2004, the provincial government had established four holding centres with a combined capacity of 2000 people in Batam, and another centre, accommodating up to 600 people, in Tanjung Pinang. The Batam holding centre was located in a facility built earlier to detain Indonesian citizens found to be in breach of Local Government Regulation No.2/2001, which by 2004 was no longer in use since the inflow of migrants from other parts of Indonesia had stabilised (Head of the Batam local government's population division cited in Tempointeraktif 2004). Deported migrant workers are not permitted to stay in the Riau Islands: after a maximum period of two weeks, they are returned to their home provinces.<sup>26</sup> In 2006 alone, 16,805 Indonesians passed through the Tanjung Pinang holding centre (Satuan Tugas Tim Pemulangan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia Bermasalah (TKI-B) dan Keluarganya dari Negeri Malaysia Kota Tanjung Pinang 2006a, 2006b, 2006c).

Given the limited success that the provincial authorities have had in restricting the inflow of migrants seeking to use the Riau Islands as a staging post for cross-border labour migration, these rules represent a very partial attempt to regulate migration flows after the fact. Local authorities recognize that there is little they can do to restrict attempts by migrant workers to cross the border into Malaysia for work, especially when demand for their labour continues to rise. The cycles of recruitment and deportation continue to put stress on local government services already stretched by the large resident migration population.

### **Teasing out the Links**

We noted in our introduction that much of the literature on migration in Indonesia treats internal and international flows of people as separate phenomenon. Our discussion of the Riau Islands demonstrates, however, that within transit zones these categories frequently overlap and individuals may move from one category to the other within a short space of time. The geographical proximity of the Riau Islands to Singapore and Malaysia, combined with the IMS-GT initiative, serves as a magnet for large numbers of internal migrants from throughout Indonesia. While many of these people migrate under formal labour recruitment programs, many others travel to the islands independently in search of better employment prospects. Significant numbers of these 'internal' migrants become international migrants when they cross the border in the hope of finding jobs abroad. The difficulties associated with labelling migrant workers as either 'internal' or 'international' become even more apparent when we consider the cases of international migrants who spend long periods of time in the islands prior to departure, or who return to the islands between their overseas trips. The cyclical nature of demand for foreign workers in Malaysia in particular means

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<sup>26</sup> In Tanjung Pinang, the practice is for deportees to arrive on a Thursday, and to stay a maximum of three nights (Interview with NGO worker, Tanjung Pinang November 2006).

that many of these ‘international’ migrants may in fact settle in the islands rather than returning ‘home’. Further complicating the distinction between internal and international migration are those groups of migrant workers who move across the border on a daily and weekly basis to work illegally in Singapore and Malaysia. Many of these workers are internal migrants to the Riau Islanders, but make their living as undocumented international labour migrants.

At the same time, however, we recognize that it is important both analytically (and in policy terms) to make a distinction between national and international flows of people. As our discussion of the regulatory frameworks employed by local and national governments has shown, different forms of migration require different policy responses. While both groups of migrants place an enormous strain on services and infrastructure, the needs of both groups are often quite different. Nonetheless, the fluid nature of migration flows in the transit zones means that Indonesian authorities cannot address the needs of these different groups of migrants in isolation from each other. As we have argued, international migration has an enormous impact on life in the Riau Islands. Responding to international migrants as individuals who are simply on their way ‘somewhere else’, whether that destination be ‘home’ or abroad, ignores the realities of life in the border zone. Similarly, treating internal migrants as either a transitory workforce who will go ‘home’ when the job market shrinks, or as an homogenous group of settlers who will assimilate into islander life, overlooks the complex character of Kepri’s multi-ethnic population.

The fluid character of internal and international migration in the transit zone also has important implications for Indonesia’s regional neighbours. Our discussion demonstrates that internal migration cannot simply be understood as a matter of national concern to be dealt with by the Indonesian government alone. As the problems associated with the Asian Financial Crisis illustrate, decisions made by Singaporean (and to a limited extent Malaysian) investors to withdraw from the Riau Islands had flow on effects on the Singaporean and Malaysian economies. As factories shut down, the mostly single workforce suddenly found itself unemployed and a long way from home. The policy of recruiting staff from other parts of Indonesia, rather than training a locally-based workforce, exacerbated unemployment levels. Unable to rely on their extended families, these workers looked for other ways to make a living. Many of them attempted to cross the border, while others found work in the largely illicit informal sector. Singapore and Malaysia stepped up border security efforts and immigration checks in order to cope with the influx of illegal workers and the impact of a growing underworld economy in the islands.

International bordering practices by Indonesia’s neighbours can also impact on policymaking by local and provincial authorities. Malaysia’s policy of opening and then closing its borders has had an enormous impact on the Riau Islands. As we have discussed, provincial authorities have had to introduce a range of local laws to control population movements into the islands. While these laws are targeted at all arrivals, their primary focus is on individuals who are attempting to use the islands as a departure point for undocumented labour migration to Malaysia. In this case, the Riau Islands’ status as a transit point requires a local-level response to an issue that local authorities do not regard as a problem of their own making. The multiple problems

associated with policing these laws, together with endemic corruption, have meant that these regulations have had little effect on population movements into and out of the islands. While unemployment levels remain high in the islands, the need to try and control these flows will remain.

## Conclusion

The Riau Islands' location on Indonesia's borders with Singapore and Malaysia has significant implications for the province's demographic profile and policies of population control. Like many borderland regions, the Islands have experienced rapid social and economic transformation by virtue of their proximity to wealthier economies, particularly Singapore. The growth of manufacturing and service industries in Batam and Bintan as part of the IMS-GT created a demand for labour, and improved transport infrastructure facilitated the movement of people into the islands. Significant numbers of migrants were attracted by the prospect of employment in the export processing zones and resort zones on Batam and Bintan. As economic conditions became more difficult throughout Indonesia as a consequence of the Asian Financial Crisis, the prospect of finding employment in the islands continued to be a major drawcard for internal migrants.

While the islands were initially able to absorb some of these new arrivals, growing unemployment led many of these migrants to consider crossing the border in search of work. They joined many thousands of other hopefuls who arrived in the islands intent on crossing the border illegally. As economic conditions worsened in the islands, earlier waves of labour migrants lost their jobs and joined them. These groups of potential undocumented workers are not the only international labour migrants to arrive in the islands. In recent years the Indonesian government has sought to use the islands as a staging post for documented migration flows, particularly through its 'one gate' program for domestic workers. The cross-border flows of people have grown even as the geo-political borders that separate them have become more tangible and more tightly regulated. Although these movements have historical origins, they are also a product of the specific contemporary character of the Riau Islands border zone. Despite increased security concerns and policing of the border zone, the geographical proximity of the Riau Islands to Singapore and Malaysia means that they remain attractive as a place to cross the border as well as a destination in themselves.

As we have argued here the impact of migration on the Riau Islands is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained with reference to Indonesia's geopolitical borders alone. An analysis of cross-border economic integration, migrant flows, and the formation of multi-ethnic communities requires an approach which gives attention to different geographical sites (in this case Batam and Bintan islands) and different forms of migration. Our research shows not only that geopolitical borders are not as strong a barrier as is generally suggested in the literature on the Riau Islands, but that these borders are not the only kinds of formal barriers to mobility in the border zone. It is essential, then, to examine the boundaries that define the multiple spaces which constitute the border zone. It is also important to recognize the special character of internal and international migration in transit zones, in which individuals can move from one category to the other very quickly, or belong to both categories at once.

These complexities necessitate research and policy responses that take into account the unique character of the transit provinces, and the role that their geography plays in the formation of multi-ethnic communities and the management of migration.

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