

WORKSHOP

THE FUTURE OF LAND IN ASIA

Decolonial Perspectives on Agriculture,
Food Sovereignty, and Conservation

23-24 April 2026

HYBRID FORMAT

Online via Zoom

NUS AS8-04-04

<https://ari.nus.edu.sg/events/future-of-land/>

**THE FUTURE OF LAND IN ASIA:
Decolonial Perspectives on Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Conservation**
23-24 April 2026 | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

This workshop is organised by the Asia Research Institute, with funding support from the Departments of Sociology and Anthropology, and Geography at the National University of Singapore.

Across Asia, struggles over land are intensifying. Land grabs for capitalist agriculture continue to erode customary land ownership and agro-food systems, while natural habitats are being rapidly destroyed by the combined pressures of large-scale plantations and smallholder encroachment. In response, state and corporate actors have introduced a range of solutions to address these problems—including private land titling programs, new types of protected areas, sustainable agriculture schemes, and carbon forestry projects.

Yet these efforts have largely failed to promote a more just and sustainable future for people living on the land. As a result, rural and Indigenous communities continue to find themselves caught between the dual enclosures of capitalist agriculture and conservation. These overlapping regimes have dispossessed people of land, deepened vulnerability, and undermined food sovereignty.

Although questions about land in Asia have garnered significant scholarly attention over the years, relatively little research has analyzed these processes in relation to settler colonialism. This oversight is attributable, in part, to the political and theoretical difficulties of applying a settler colonial lens to the Asian context, where the notion of Indigeneity raises complex and contested questions about definitions of colonialism and the colonizers-colonized dyad. However, the lack of attention to ongoing settler-colonial structures of capitalist land use in Asia risks limiting understandings of the conjuncture of violence, domination, and racialization that shape contemporary land politics in the region today.

Hence, this workshop rethinks the future of land in Asia by foregrounding settler colonialism as a key analytic for understanding these dynamics. It views settler colonialism as a persistent political-economic structure that shapes how land, labor, and natural resources are appropriated in support of capitalist extraction and settler-state dominance. Settler colonialism encompasses a diverse set of forces that underpin various forms of land dispossession and environmental degradation in Asia, which can include internal and historical forces of appropriation irreducible to European colonialism.

This workshop brings together cutting-edge research on contemporary land struggles in Asia, especially where agriculture, food sovereignty, and environmental conservation intersect. It recenters Asia within settler colonial studies, highlighting the region's colonial histories and capitalist transformations as central rather than peripheral to global patterns. Moreover, by featuring regionally grounded scholar-activist research, it grounds theory in lived struggles and opens space for decolonial futures. The workshop will engage the following questions and more:

- How have colonial and capitalist land regimes evolved, and what futures do they envision?
- In what ways do state conservation and market-based environmentalism reproduce settler-colonial and capitalist logics?
- How are Indigenous practices and movements advancing food sovereignty, land justice, and decolonial futures?
- How does the articulation of race, gender, and violence shape access to land and agro-food systems?
- What forms of environmental and climate reparations support Indigenous sovereignty and land repatriation?

By bringing together interdisciplinary scholars to grapple with these questions, the workshop will open new conceptual and political horizons for imagining more just and decolonial futures of land.

WORKSHOP CONVENORS

Dr W. Nathan GREEN | *Department of Geography, NUS*

Dr Ting Hui LAU | *Department of Sociology & Anthropology, NUS*

Assoc Prof Jamie S. DAVIDSON | *Asia Research Institute & Department of Political Science, NUS*

PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

DATE	TIME (SGT)	PANEL SESSION
23 April 2026 (Thu)	09:30 – 09:50	WELCOME & INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	09:50 – 10:50	GUEST SPEAKER – ORANG LAUT SG
	11:20 – 12:50	PANEL 1 – SETTLER COLONIALISM AND INDIGENOUS DISPOSSESSION
	14:00 – 15:30	PANEL 2 – GREEN CAPITALISM AND THE NEW FRONTIERS OF EXTRACTION
	16:00 – 17:30	PANEL 3 – FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE
	18:00 – 20:00	WORKSHOP DINNER (<i>For speakers and chairpersons only</i>)
24 April 2026 (Fri)	09:30 – 11:00	PANEL 4 – COLONIALISM AND THE POLITICS OF LAND
	11:30 – 13:00	PANEL 5 – THE STATE AND TERRITORIALIZATION
	14:00 – 15:30	PANEL 6 – FOOD AND AGRARIAN CAPITALISM
	16:00 – 17:00	PANEL 7 – SETTLING THE MARGINS
	17:00 – 17:30	SUMMARY & CLOSING REMARKS

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23 APRIL 2026 • THURSDAY

09:30 – 09:50	WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
	<p>W. NATHAN GREEN <i>National University of Singapore</i> TING HUI LAU <i>National University of Singapore</i> JAMIE S. DAVIDSON <i>National University of Singapore</i></p>
09:50 – 10:50	GUEST SPEAKER – ORANG LAUT SG
<i>Chairperson</i>	<p>W. NATHAN GREEN <i>National University of Singapore</i></p> <hr/> <p>The Orang Laut and Singapore’s Indigenous Futures</p> <p>FIRDAUS SANI <i>Orang Laut SG</i></p> <hr/> <p>QUESTIONS & ANSWERS</p>
10:50 – 11:20	MORNING TEA BREAK
11:20 – 12:50	PANEL 1 – SETTLER COLONIALISM AND INDIGENOUS DISPOSSESSION
<i>Chairperson</i>	<p>TANIA LI <i>National University of Singapore</i></p> <hr/>
11:20	<p>Indigenous and Traditional Territories in Asia: Rethinking Land, Sovereignty, and Settler-Colonial Legacies</p> <p>JUNE RUBIS <i>Macquarie University</i></p> <hr/>
11:40	<p>Fascist Ecology: Plantations, Land Resettlement, and Settler Colonialism in Postcolonial Southeast Asia</p> <p>PERDANA ROSWALDY <i>Monash University Indonesia Perdana</i></p> <hr/>
12:00	<p>Indigenous Dispossession, Settler Colonialism and Heritage Activism: The Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia</p> <p>YUNCI CAI <i>University of Leicester</i></p> <hr/>
12:20	<p>QUESTIONS & ANSWERS</p>
12:50 – 14:00	LUNCH BREAK
14:00 – 15:30	PANEL 2 – GREEN CAPITALISM AND THE NEW FRONTIERS OF EXTRACTION
<i>Chairperson</i>	<p>TOM OZDEN-SCHILLING <i>National University of Singapore</i></p> <hr/>
14:00	<p>Ecologies of Energy: Competing Climate Mitigation Technologies and River Relationalities in Eastern Taiwan</p> <p>DANA E. POWELL <i>Taipei Medical University</i></p> <hr/>
14:20	<p>Land’s Exhaustion, Capital’s Triumph: For Whom is the Future of the Extractive Regime?</p> <p>PAUL K. GELLERT <i>University of Tennessee</i></p> <hr/>
14:50	<p>Green Grabbing and Social Forestry as a New Development Frontier</p> <p>SURAYA A. AFIFF <i>University of Indonesia</i></p> <hr/>
15:10	<p>QUESTIONS & ANSWERS</p>
15:10 – 16:20	AFTERNOON TEA BREAK

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16:00 – 17:30	PANEL 3 – FRONTIERS OF VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE
Chairperson	SAHANA GHOSH <i>National University of Singapore</i>
16:00 <i>Online</i>	“All That is Left is a Football Field”: Living with Perpetually Violent Frontiers on Borderlands in Myanmar JASNEA SARMA <i>University of Zurich</i>
16:20	Who Grabs Tribal Land? Politics of (Dis)possession and Accumulation in India’s Northeast ROLUAHPUIA <i>Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee</i>
16:40	The Moral Economy of Distance and Indigenous Peasant Resistance in Nepal SUJAN DANGAL <i>National University of Singapore</i>
17:00	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
17:30	END OF DAY 1
18:00 – 19:30	WORKSHOP DINNER

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24 APRIL 2026 • FRIDAY

09:30 – 11:00	PANEL 4 – COLONIALISM AND THE POLITICS OF LAND
<i>Chairperson</i>	JACOB RINCK <i>National University of Singapore</i>
09:30	Grassland Contracts, Testimony, and Land Justice along the Sino-Kazakhstan Border GULDANA SALIMJAN <i>University of Toronto</i>
09:50	Green Accumulation Without Reparation: How Nepal Eradicated Indigenous Customary Land Management System DHIRENDRA NALBO <i>The Open Institute for Social Science</i>
10:10	Racializing the Agrarian Frontier: Land, Law, and Hegemony in Colonial Punjab and Malaya MAJED AKHTER <i>King's College London</i>
10:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
11:00 – 11:30	MORNING TEA BREAK
11:30 – 13:00	PANEL 5 – THE STATE AND TERRITORIALIZATION
<i>Chairperson</i>	FAIZAH ZAKARIA <i>National University of Singapore</i>
11:30	Colonizing the Ocean: Contesting Dry Futures with Land Reclamation in the Maldives ERIC HIRSCH <i>Franklin & Marshall College</i>
11:50	The Londo Blangkon State: Village Politics, Power Brokers and Land Deals Program in Mudflow Disaster FATHUN KARIB <i>National University of Singapore</i>
12:10	Fragmented Recognition: Indigenous Communal Land Titling and the Contradictions of 'Indigenous Territory' in Cambodia EUNBI KO <i>University of Melbourne</i>
12:30	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
13:00 – 14:00	LUNCH BREAK

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14:00 – 15:30	PANEL 6 – FOOD AND AGRARIAN CAPITALISM
<i>Chairperson</i>	MARVIN MONTEFRIO <i>National University of Singapore</i>
14:00	Settler Colonial Appetites: Indigenous Food Knowledge, Land Dispossession, and the Enduring Legacies of Nutmeg in the Banda Archipelago KATHLEEN M. BURKE <i>Instituto Ciências Sociais</i>
14:20	Beyond Optimization? The Politics of Yield, Erasure, and Hidden Harvests in the Philippine Uplands WOLFRAM DRESSLER <i>The University of Melbourne</i>
14:40	Profit and Planet over People: Decolonizing Sustainability Certification in Coffee Agriculture MUHAMMAD MIRZA ARDI <i>National University of Singapore</i>
15:00	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
15:30 – 16:00	TEA BREAK
16:00 – 16:40	PANEL 7 – SETTLING THE MARGINS
<i>Chairperson</i>	COLUM GRAHAM <i>National University of Singapore</i>
16:00	Internal Colonialism, State Land Policy, and Settler Ecologies in Cambodia’s Uplands PHASY RES <i>Independent Researcher</i> LONG SAROU <i>Independent Researcher</i> LY VOUCH LONG <i>Independent Researcher</i> W. NATHAN GREEN <i>National University of Singapore</i>
16:20	Settlers Without a Metropole: The Ta’ang in Northern Thailand MICHAEL R. DUNFORD <i>National University of Singapore</i>
16:40	QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
17:00 – 17:30	SUMMARY & CLOSING REMARKS NATHAN W. GREEN <i>National University of Singapore</i> TING HUI LAU <i>National University of Singapore</i>
18:00	END OF WORKSHOP

The Orang Laut and Singapore's Indigenous Futures

FIRDAUS SANI
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This session shares the perspectives of the Orang Laut, Singapore's Indigenous maritime communities, on land, heritage, and the lasting impacts of colonisation. It centres lived experiences, family histories, and knowledge shared by the community.

We will explore how the Orang Laut's connection to the sea and islands has changed over generations due to British colonisation, postcolonial development, and modern urbanisation. Participants will hear about relocation from ancestral islands, the loss of traditional livelihoods, and the challenges of maintaining Indigenous identity in Singapore today. We will also highlight the complexities of Malay and Indigenous identities and how these affect recognition and support for our communities.

The session situates Singapore within a broader regional context, touching on parallels with Indigenous communities in Malaysia and Indonesia. It also shares how Orang Laut SG started as a small initiative to preserve stories and heritage, and how it has grown into a community organisation that advocates, educates, and connects people with Indigenous histories.

Finally, we will reflect on ongoing challenges and what we hope for the future, including recognition, understanding, and stronger connections between Indigenous communities, the public, and institutions. This session offers a grounded, lived perspective to the conversation on decolonial approaches to land, heritage, and Indigenous futures.

Firdaus Sani is an artist, cultural practitioner, as well as the founder of Orang Laut SG and The Black Sampan. He is a fourth-generation Orang Laut descendant who advocates for Indigenous voices and community and cultural preservation through art, education, and outreach.

Orang Laut SG is a descendant-led ground-up initiative that focuses on reclaiming Indigenous narratives and supporting community members from Singapore's Southern Islands, who have been impacted by relocation. Our mission is to raise awareness and advocate for community and cultural preservation through art, advocacy, educational and outreach programmes.

**Indigenous and Traditional Territories in Asia:
Rethinking Land, Sovereignty, and Settler-Colonial Legacies**

JUNE RUBIS

Macquarie University, Australia
jrubis@gmail.com

Across Asia, rural and Indigenous communities continue to face intensifying pressures on their lands, from industrial plantations and agribusiness to conservation and carbon forestry projects. These initiatives, framed as solutions to ecological crisis, often reproduce older forms of dispossession, leaving communities caught between the twin enclosures of capitalist agriculture and conservation. What is less explored, however, is how these dynamics echo settler-colonial logics of domination, even in contexts where Indigeneity and colonial histories are understood differently than in classic settler states.

In this paper, I reflect on how Indigenous and Traditional Territories (ITTs), a governance term currently under negotiation within the Convention on Biological Diversity, might open new political and conceptual ground for land struggles in Asia. Unlike protected areas or market-based schemes, ITTs begin from the recognition of Indigenous and local governance systems, kinship ties, and relational approaches to land. From my position as a Bidayuh scholar-practitioner engaged in both grassroots work and multilateral policy spaces, I ask how ITTs could be mobilized as tools of survivance and sovereignty in Asia, rather than absorbed into technocratic mapping and conservation targets.

By situating ITTs within the lived realities of land contestations, I argue that they offer a generative space for rethinking food sovereignty, environmental justice, and reparations in the region. At the same time, I highlight the risks of co-optation if Indigenous-defined concepts are stripped of their political force. This intervention foregrounds Asia not as peripheral, but as central to global debates on settler colonialism, sovereignty, and the future of land.

June Rubis is a Bidayuh scholar-practitioner from Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, whose research bridges Indigenous sovereignties with global environmental governance. Trained as a conservation biologist, she has over a decade of field experience on big cats and primates across Malaysia, and earned her DPhil in Geography & Environment from the University of Oxford. She is currently a Research Fellow at Macquarie University, leading *Decolonial Cartographies*, a project that recentres Indigenous sovereignties in biodiversity mapping and global policy arenas. Her scholarship advances frameworks such as *contra-memory*, which reframes Indigenous stories as acts of resistance, and reimagining conservation through Indigenous sovereignties and ritual governance, moving beyond critique to affirm Indigenous worlds as foundations for global environmental futures. Dr Rubis has consulted for UN agencies on Indigenous environmental governance, serves on the Editorial Board of *Progress in Environmental Geography*, and is a Lead Author for the IPBES Second Global Assessment. She co-founded Building Initiatives in Indigenous Heritage (BIH), revitalising ritual and kinship governance in Borneo.

Fascist Ecology:
Plantations, Land Resettlement, and Settler Colonialism in Postcolonial Southeast Asia

PERDANA ROSWALDY
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This research investigates the endurance of Indonesia's land resettlement policy – a program that moves people from highly populated areas to less populated ones to cultivate cash crops – called transmigration. Originating in 1911 under Dutch colonialism, transmigration is the world's longest-running land resettlement policy aiming for land and population distribution and food sovereignty. Existing research has focused on the failure of transmigration and the multidimensions of problems transmigration has caused. Still, despite the program's decreased scale, the government has only continued transmigration and reformulated the policy's role for Indonesia's quest for sustainability and green economy. Using the lens of settler colonialism, I analyze how transmigration furthers the annihilation, domination, replacement, and exploitation of indigenous land and people. Transmigration constitutes a state-building project that envisions a new postcolonial modern Indonesia and a device that consolidates imperial interests in subjugating third-world countries into a cash crop machine. Drawing from ethnography and archival research, the policy creates what I call "fascist ecology" – an ecosystem built on ethnonationalist spatial engineering and depoliticized subjects uprooted from their land, justifying and perpetuating Indonesia's political-economic dependence on monoculture. I also historically compare transmigration to Malaysia's Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA). This research examines the socio-spatial configuration of fascism and its permutations in Southeast Asia, leading to the region's rising authoritarian and reactionary politics, that violently protects the interest of extractive industries amid its struggle against climate change.

Perdana "Pepe" Roswaldy is Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Research and the Sustainability program, Monash University Indonesia. Pepe's core research asks how environmental and spatial changes influence and are influenced by communities' socio-political aspiration and mobilisation. They obtained a PhD in Sociology from Northwestern University with a dissertation on how land speculation and sustainability certifications have helped expand Indonesia's oil palm plantations. An ethnographer, Pepe also incorporates bioenvironmental data (specifically soil and water sampling) and Geographic Information System to complement their qualitative research. Pepe's work has been published in *International Quarterly of Asian Studies*, *Journal of Agrarian Change*, and *Jurnal Antropologi Indonesia*. Pepe also engage with non-academic and creative means to showcase their work: a long form essay on *Phenomenal World*, a roundtable interview for *History and Political Economy Project*, and an experimental documentary movie on Indonesia's colonial plantations titled *Tropic Fever*.

**Indigenous Dispossession, Settler Colonialism and Heritage Activism:
The Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia**

YUNCI CAI

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The Indigenous Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia have been grappling with the harsh realities of climate change, forced assimilation and encroachment of their territories and resources for over a decade. Since the 2000s, neo-liberal processes of resource extraction and economic growth have transformed their native customary lands, territories and waters into resource frontiers, leading to severe environmental pollution and encroachment of their Indigenous territories and resources, which in turn threatens their livelihoods and the erosion of their cultural heritage and identity. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research with Orang Seletar community of Johor Bahru and the Mah Meri community of Carey Island, I examine the different mobilisations of cultural and environmental battles over rights to Indigenous territories and resources. I demonstrate how the sustained encroachment onto Indigenous territories and resources, and heritage erasure of the Indigenous peoples, is a conscious effort by the settler Malay-Muslim society to eliminate the Orang Asli with the motive of gaining access to their territories, and how climate change and neoliberal politics are accelerating the process of native elimination. I show how the Orang Asli communities have drawn on their cultural heritage to resist the settler state, mobilising an essentialised version of their cultural heritage and framing themselves in an antiquated notion of Indigeneity in order to lay claims to their native rights through the legal jurisprudence. However, these tactics risk positioning the Orang Asli as anti-development and limits the transformative potential for the Orang Asli, since they are still subjected to mainstream settler sovereignty.

Yunci Cai is Associate Professor in Museum and Heritage Studies at the Museum Studies @ School of Heritage and Culture, University of Leicester (UK). She is a critical heritage and museum studies scholar, specialising in the cultural politics and museologies in and of Asia. She holds a PhD in Museum and Heritage Studies and a Master of Arts with Distinction in Museum Studies, both from the Institute of Archaeology, University College London and a First-Class Honours in Geography from the National University of Singapore. She is the author of *Staging Indigenous Heritage: Instrumentalisation Brokerage and Representation in Malaysia* (Routledge, 2020), which explores the cultural politics of four Indigenous cultural villages in Malaysia; and the editor of *The Museum in Asia* (Routledge, 2025), which is the first academic book to examine museums in Asia from a theoretical perspective informed by critical museology and heritage studies.

Ecologies of Energy:
Competing Climate Mitigation Technologies and River Relationalities in Eastern Taiwan

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BAQLU RESEARCH TEAM

CoLab for Environmental Health Equity and Renewal

This paper explores possibilities for decolonial environmental relations in rural eastern Taiwan, as they are reconstructed under emergent forms of local environmental governance. National mandates for “resilience”, “revitalization”, and “green growth” in Taiwan target areas that carry a double burden of socio-ecological vulnerability: on the one hand, these lands are to provide the energy resources (massive amounts of water and electricity) to power the island and its growing high-tech chip industry; and on the other hand, these lands are the sites of increasingly violent earthquakes and storms, elevating an affective sense of risk and uncertainty about the future. Most significantly, this terrain is also predominantly Indigenous (Bunun), through ancestral territorial land tenure entangled with early 20th-century Japanese-era forced removals of Indigenous communities, to lower-altitude lands. This paper picks up the author’s earlier argument of the “double force of vulnerability” (Gutierrez, Powell, and Pendergrast 2021) to examine whether this “double force” is the case in this part of eastern Taiwan. Building from a collaborative, Bunun-led methodology, we term the Baqlu (“renewal”) Team. This paper advances a decolonial theory of environmental wellbeing as well as collaborative, anti-colonial research methodologies, as part of a wider contribution to global Indigenous Political Ecologies. Examining two very different empirical projects of environmental relationality along a common watershed – “The Bean Club” (豆豆班) and the “FengPing Xi Hydropower Plant” (峰屏溪水力發電廠) – this paper highlights how competing climate mitigation techniques and forms of expertise (planting heritage legumes versus constructing hydroelectric systems) expose some of Taiwan’s urgent environmental and transitional justice questions, at the level of lived experience.

Dana E. Powell is a cultural anthropologist and associate professor in the Graduate Institute of Medical Humanities at Taipei Medical University, where she also serves as Director of the Center for Humanistic Innovation and Social Engagement, in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. She joined the faculty at TMU in 2023, following twelve years directing the environmental anthropology program at Appalachian State University in western North Carolina, USA. Working at the intersection of environmental and medical anthropology, Powell’s work advances collaborative and comparative methodologies in environmental justice research on energy technologies in rural, predominantly Indigenous lands, focusing on land rights movements and diverse embodiments of ecological harm and wellbeing. Her first book, *Landscapes of Power* (Duke Press, 2018), and earlier articles offer ethnographic and humanistic analysis of environmentalism’s entanglements with extractive fossil-based infrastructures and tribal sovereignty in the Navajo Nation; her more recent publications elevate work by citizen scientists facing bioenergy and toxicity in rural eastern North Carolina; and her current, collaborative work, based in eastern Taiwan, tracks and amplifies projects of Indigenous (Bunun) environmental governance of mountains and rivers in the face of two intertwined forms of enclosure: the capture of energy resources for Taiwan’s high-tech development and the surge of settler hiking culture, which occur (in Hualien County) in the context of seismic and climatic disasters. Powell’s work has been supported by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research; the US National Science Foundation; the Research Institute for Environment, Energy and Economics at Appalachian State University, and Taiwan’s National Science and Technology Council.

**Land's Exhaustion, Capital's Triumph:
For Whom is the Future of the Extractive Regime?**

PAUL K. GELLERT

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The future of land in Indonesia's extractive regime is in question. The extractive regime's long history began in the colonial period and has continued to the present (Gellert 2010, 2019; see also Thaler 2024). Following independence, Indonesian political leaders embarked on a long, complex struggle sometimes against but often cooperative with foreign sources of agro-extractive capital. In the authoritarian, capital-friendly New Order period (1966-98), multi-national corporations led a vast agro-extractive expansion. Despite the variation, the agro-extractive activities persisted, expanded, and ironically took on a more 'settler colonial' modality in regions of extraction. In the 21st century, transformation of land, ecologies, and livelihoods moved eastward across the archipelago. Politically, the *reformasi* period meant decentralization and further openness to foreign capital, followed in the last decade by re-centralization, neoliberalism, and an elite nationalist deepening of agro-extractive accumulation, legitimized by modest downstreaming efforts. Land is increasingly exhausted by the extensification of 'old' commodities like pulp tree and oil palm plantations and the introduction of new 'green' nickel extraction and carbon markets. The contradictions of the extractive regime are approaching a climax as different commodity sectors compete for access and control of land. But for what and for whom? This paper argues that land-based struggles, mostly Indigenous-led, flounder in 'optimistic' legal reform struggles (Gellert 2025) that insufficiently address the ways that legal systems oppress some groups and rarely confront the political economy of the agro-extractive regime directly.

Paul K. Gellert is Professor of Sociology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and Visiting Scholar at the Center for Place, Culture, and Politics, CUNY Graduate Center. His research focuses on the political economy of natural resources, especially in Indonesia, where he has conducted research for over three decades. His writing takes a world-historical sociology approach to the politics and ideology of what he has called Indonesia's 'extractive regime'. He has published in *Globalizations*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, and *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, and has contributed chapters on coal, utilities, and transport, and on the Global South, in *Climate Obstruction: A Global Assessment* (Oxford, 2025).

Green Grabbing and Social Forestry as a New Development Frontier

SURAYA A. AFIFF

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When President Jokowi came into power in 2014, agrarian and environmental justice activists were able to make the state implement a policy to support the local and indigenous communities' access and ownership of land and forest areas through the programs of agrarian reform, social forestry, and *adat* forest recognition. These are part of the activist efforts to prevent rural communities from being dispossessed from their land by the state and capitalist agribusiness. Recently, the programs have also intersected with the Indonesian government policy for implementing global market-based green solutions for climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives. Using the green grabbing concept, I discuss the example of these intersections between carbon market, land grab, and social forestry in the case of the ecosystem restoration project in Kalimantan. An interesting aspect of this case is that an albumin factory was developed as a community-based activity symbolizing the company's vision of a restorative economy. I argue that the effect of green grabbing cannot be generalized because it might create various forms of exclusion and inclusion processes in terms of people's relationships with land and nature.

Suraya A. Afiff is a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology and a senior research fellow at the Asia Research Center (ARC), Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Indonesia. In the early 1990s, she was actively involved in the Indonesia Forum for the Environment (WALHI), one of Indonesia's major environmental groups. Her research uses a critical political ecology framework to analyze Indonesia's agrarian change and environmental politics. Her research interests span a wide range of topics, including agrarian conflicts, state forest tenure politics, land grab issues, climate justice, community-based natural resource management, and agrarian and environmental justice movements. Her recent research used a social reproduction lens to analyze the corporate plantation-migration nexus in North Sumatra and the impact of the Indonesian government's plan to build the Giant Sea Wall on the living space of those who depend on green mussel cultivation income along the Jakarta coastal areas.

“All That is Left is a Football Field”:
Living with Perpetually Violent Frontiers on Borderlands in Myanmar

JASNEA SARMA
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How do communities in Asian *borderlands* make sense of, and live with, frontiers that remain perpetually extractive and violent? Drawing on ethnographic research in Kachinland along the China–Burma borders, this paper asks what it means to inhabit *homelands* that are simultaneously borderlands and violent frontiers: marked by militarization, revolution, and war, and also by successive waves of extraction driven by China’s expanding markets and Myanmar’s inner resource frontiers (Sarma et al. 2023). In Laiza and Mai Jia Yang, once Indigenous Lisu homelands and later the headquarters of the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), resource frontier dynamics have layered revolution upon waves of extraction and land transformations. From colonial and postcolonial exploitations of timber, opium, jade, and logging to contemporary land grabbing, agribusiness, large-scale scam industries, and rare earths mining, these lands are never allowed to rest, or as spaces described as “*left with nothing but a football field.*” Drawing on interviews and ethnographic observations between 2015 and 2024, this paper advances two interventions. First, to understand some *borderlands as perpetual frontiers*: not sites of singular commodity booms and busts, but recursive waves of slow violence, where extraction, ecological ruin, and shifting land/resource regimes accumulate in border-homelands. Second, the idea of *living with frontiers*: how communities endure, reconfigure, and sometimes even seize opportunities from the very structures that dispossess them. Finally, the paper situates the China-Myanmar border in relation to spaces Asia that share similar dynamics of being both borderlands and extractive spaces.

Jasnea Sarma is a feminist ethnographer and political geographer working on borders, migration, conflict and extractive spaces, with a focus on the borderlands of China, Burma, India. She is a senior lecturer in Political Geography at the University of Zurich and editor of *Geopolitics*. More of Jasnea's research and other public publications can be found at <https://uzh.academia.edu/jasneasarma>.

Who Grabs Tribal Land?
Politics of (Dis)possession and Accumulation in India's Northeast

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Scholars working on land dispossession in India have largely centered on the role of the state in facilitating the process of dispossession. In neo-liberal India, 'land wars' have intensified due to the twin processes of intensification of land dispossession and the commodification of land. Tribal communities constitute one of the social groups that are disproportionately dispossessed due to various infrastructural projects, and what makes the experience of tribes distinct is how they experience land loss and dispossession from the state and non-state actors, or non-tribal groups. In this paper, I focus on land dispossession in a context where both tribes are predominantly dominant, particularly in the northeastern state of Manipur, characterized by informal and customary land governance regimes. Based on a case study of the Khuga Dam, a hydroelectric power project located in the tribal region of Manipur, the paper examines how land dispossession is enabled by a process from within, with indigenous/tribal leaders and elites themselves participating in and benefiting from it. The dam today remains non-functional and unused, but the dam site has undergone a massive transformation, with more land being converted for private purposes, such as resorts and farms. The paper specifically examines how tribal-indigenous groups and local governments are entangled in resource extraction and infrastructure projects, at times facilitating the process of land dispossession and benefiting from land use change and other infrastructural initiatives. In doing so, the paper contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of dispossession, land-use change, and contemporary debates of development in India.

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The Moral Economy of Distance and Indigenous Peasant Resistance in Nepal

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In this paper, I engage with the concept of moral economy used by James Scott as the right to subsistence to argue that the violation of this right occurs not only when subsistence of the peasants is made precarious by excessive extraction but also when other forms of exploitation are exacted due to the physical distance between the peasants and the landlord. This paper draws on the insights from a year-long ethnography of a movement for land defense in Kathmandu and Dang led by indigenous Tharu peasants who till the land owned by an influential temple located in Pyuthan. The lands owned by the temple are spread across twelve villages in the Dang while the temple is located almost sixty kilometers north of Dang. Before roads to the temple were built, the peasants were forced to traverse over three days' distance along the hills on foot with food grains, and often even priests and eminent visitors, on their backs. In addition to the rent extracted from the peasants, it is this labour that forms a core narrative of exploitation deployed by protesting peasants as they travel over 500 kilometres to Kathmandu to claim deeds to land as per the Land Act in defiance of a Supreme Court verdict of 2006, which nullified their tenancy status. The distance from the temple in the past and the distance to Kathmandu today bring to sharp relief the significance of spatiality in understanding the moral economy of peasant resistance.

Sujan Dangal is a PhD Scholar at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, National University of Singapore. My doctoral research is on the political economy of Guthi, an ancient communal land tenure in Nepal that continues to be a dominant form of tenure alongside private and state ownership. I follow the divergent meanings attributed to Guthi, which has become a site of contestation as members of Guthi seek to defend it from the State's attempts to wrest control over land away from them, while indigenous peasants are organising to demand privatisation of Guthi land as a tool for land defence.

**Grassland Contracts, Testimony, and Land Justice
along the Sino-Kazakhstan Border**

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This paper examines the revocation of rural grassland contracts and ecological conservation subsidies from Kazakhs who migrated from northwestern China to Kazakhstan between 2015 and 2020. Although many insist that their land contracts and conservation agreements remain valid, county and village authorities in China terminated their subsidy payments and, in some cases, reabsorbed contracted grasslands and reallocated the land, citing their emigration. Drawing on testimony from affected migrants, this paper treats these accounts not merely as evidence of grievance but as a counter-archive of land governance in pastoral China.

I first outline the formal legal framework: collective ownership of rural land, the administrative logic of grassland conservation subsidies, and the implications of nationality loss under China's prohibition of dual citizenship. From the state's perspective, the loss of collective membership following emigration justifies contract termination. Yet testimonies describe verbal threats, opaque procedures, sudden subsidy suspension, and retirement pension revocations coinciding with intensified counterterrorism campaigns and surveillance governance in the region.

I argue that grassland conservation policy operated as a territorial technology that conditioned land use rights on political membership and spatial fixity. Cross-border mobility transformed pastoralists from collective members into administratively disposable subjects. By situating these testimonies alongside global debates on Land Back movements, right of return claims, and reparative justice, this paper demonstrates how testimony rearticulates land contracts as claims to belonging, economic reparation, and social justice. The case invites broader reflection on how ecological governance, border securitization, and settler colonial formations intersect in contemporary Asia.

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**Green Accumulation Without Reparation:
How Nepal Eradicated Indigenous Customary Land Management System**

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Nepal's community forestry program is widely regarded as a global archetype of participatory environmental governance, drawing delegations of state and non-state actors from across the globe eager to replicate its successes. Celebrated for reversing environmental degradation and expanding forest cover, the initiative remains foundational to both national environmental strategy and international models. However, beneath this celebratory story of forest governance, a deeper historical dimension has received little scholarly or indeed public attention: the land dispossession, such as among indigenous communities in the eastern hills, that enabled the transition to community forestry. Drawing from archival sources and intensive qualitative research in the eastern hills, I will highlight two key findings.

First, what appears as an effective model for sustainable natural resource management and inclusive community development, community forestry is embedded in a longer, centralizing history of land control and agrarian restructuring: a final nail in the coffin to end and erase a customary land tenure system. This is the case among the Limbu indigenous community of Nepal's eastern hills who practiced Kipat – an indigenous, and historically state-sanctioned, land tenure system. This is the paradox of community forestry in Nepal: it is seen as empowering local communities, yet it operates within a historical context marked by indigenous dispossession. In many ways, community forestry is green accumulation without reparation. Seen from the perspective, how can we theorize its complicity with the fundamental alternation of the relationship between indigenous communities and their ancestral land, hence an erasure of cultural sovereignty by a settler movement? From a political ecology perspective, I argue secondly, community forestry must thus be understood not merely as a tool for sustainable natural resource management, but equally as an environmental policy deeply shaped by historical and ongoing state-led land transformation and continued processes of communal alienation.

Dhirendra Nalbo, PhD, is an educator and researcher specializing in conflict resolution, environmental peacebuilding, and social justice. He co-founded the Open Institute for Social Science in Kathmandu, where he also teaches. Dr Nalbo is also a visiting professor at the Kathmandu University and Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. He earned his PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from The Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. His dissertation focused on natural resource management and peacebuilding in Myanmar's Kachin State. He also holds an MA in Conflict Resolution from the University of Bradford and an MA in English from Pokhara University. He teaches and writes on indigeneity and indigenous issues primarily related to the environment, climate change, natural resource management and peacebuilding.

**Racializing the Agrarian Frontier:
Land, Law, and Hegemony in Colonial Punjab and Malaya**

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Resource frontiers are where new commodities are produced in the process of incorporating territories into global circuits of capitalism and commodification. In what follows, I detail the racial logics that drove the making of the colonial agrarian frontier in Punjab and Malaya in the first decades of the 20th century. As Anna Tsing argues, frontiers are not discovered but created by the agents of capital and the expansionary state: they are “imaginative projects” (Tsing, 2003). The law is a key arena for reimagining the relationship between landscapes, resources, and people. Through a comparison of imperial British legislation - specifically the Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 and the Malay Reservations Enactment of 1913 - I argue that racialization is a key moment in the making of agrarian frontiers across Asia. By examining law and custom around the inheritance of agrarian land in both places, the paper also insists on a gendered account of racialised hegemony on the resource frontier. This paper critically extends Mahmood Mamdani’s (2020) work on racialised territories and tiered citizenships from the settler colonial contexts he examines to the terrain of colonial and postcolonial capitalism in Asia. Mamdani argues that settler colonial states operate on the logic of dispossession, spatial segmentation, and constitutional subordination of racialised groups. However, Mamdani does not consider certain key factors of postcolonial state formation: capitalist subsumption, uneven geographical development, and racialization in the Asian context. Tracking land and law through the lens of inter-Asian resource frontiers, this paper critically extends Mamdani’s formulations into the space of colonial capitalism.

Majed Akhter is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in the Department of Geography at King’s College London. His research and teaching interests are at the intersection of geopolitics (especially of decolonisation), natural resources, and infrastructures. His research has been published in journals such as *Antipode*, *Political Geography*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *Progress in Human Geography*, *Geoforum*, and *Critical Asian Studies*. His expertise has also been featured in outlets such as BBC Radio 3, BBC Radio 4, Al Jazeera, Dawn, and Economic and Political Weekly. With colleagues at King’s, he has co-authored an advanced textbook, *Water: A Critical Introduction* (Wiley). Majed’s current project examines the geopolitics of empire and decolonisation in British Malaya through the lens of natural resources and infrastructures. He is working towards writing an inter-Asian monograph that connects and compares how resource frontiers and infrastructural development shape ethno-nationalist states in Pakistan and Malaysia.

**Colonizing the Ocean:
Contesting Dry Futures with Land Reclamation in the Maldives**

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What does it mean for a state to respond to elite land grabs, housing crises, and, perhaps, its own future disappearance by creating new land? Land reclamation, dredging sediment from the sea floor to create new land where there was once ocean, has long been a fact of life in the Maldives, as in many coastal communities. But land reclamation projects are now proliferating at a new scale in the country. Reclaimed land provides a foundation for expanded urban zones, new ports, more heavy industry, luxury resorts, and increased influence in Indian Ocean trade. Often irreversibly degrading coral reef systems and harming fisher livelihoods, land reclamation is also fueling the development of artificial islands, prompting utopian dreams of “ecocities” with solar-powered affordable housing and protected coastlines.

This paper investigates the contested futures of Maldivian land by tracking a specific effort to colonize the ocean: the partially built, perpetually behind-schedule Ras Malé project, a signature effort of the current president and the Maldives’ largest reclaimed artificial island settlement scheme to date. Building on ongoing fieldwork, I follow ocean colonization in two senses. First, I trace local debates about land reclamation’s work as a frontier fantasy, a blank canvas for elite imaginaries of resettlement that purports to solve the country’s housing and climate crises without attending to the already-marginalized agriculture and fishery sectors. Second, I identify how geopolitical entanglements inherent to Maldivian land reclamation, which requires the debt-funded assembly of foreign engineering expertise, exposes the country to new forms of financial colonization.

Eric Hirsch is Associate Professor of Environmental Studies at Franklin & Marshall College. An environmental and economic anthropologist by training, Hirsch’s research focuses on what it means to experience, enact, and embody economic growth in places acutely affected by weather and climate extremes. His first book, *Acts of Growth: Development and the Politics of Abundance in Peru* (Stanford University Press, 2022), investigated these topics in southern Andean Peru’s Colca Valley. His newer work is scoped more comparatively between Peru, the Maldives, and the United States. Among his current projects, Hirsch is conducting research for a new book about land reclamation in the Maldives, tentatively titled *Adaptive State*. He also leads the *Agricultural Futures Archive*, a collaborative digital ethnography project in the mid-Atlantic United States focused on climate adaptation and the future of agriculture, funded by the Mellon Foundation. Hirsch received his PhD in anthropology from the University of Chicago.

**The Londo Blangkon State:
Village Politics, Power Brokers and Land Deals Program in Mudflow Disaster**

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This paper introduces the concept of the *Londo Blangkon State*, highlighting the role of the Indonesian state as an intermediary and power broker among empires, local villages, and indigenous communities, using the Lapindo Mudflow Disaster as a case study. In May 2006, an underground eruption triggered by the drilling activities of the Lapindo Corporation led to a devastating mudflow that affected villages in the Porong subdistrict of Sidoarjo, East Java. Research conducted on post-disaster land politics revealed the local concept of intermediaries known as *Londo Blangkon* (Karib 2022), describing local villagers who act as *kaki tangan* (henchmen) for both the corporation and the state, facilitating compensation through land transactions. During the Dutch colonial era, *Londo Blangkon* referred to individuals who collaborated with the colonizer against Javanese villagers. In the aftermath of the mudflow, affected villagers perceive both their formal leaders (*Lurah and Kepala Desa*) and informal community leaders (*Tokoh Masyarakat*) as working in favor of the corporation and the state, betraying their fellow villagers. This situation reveals an enduring colonial legacy within the contemporary post-disaster context, underlining the loss of land and the tensions between affected villagers, the state, and the corporation. The paper examines why the villagers of Porong continue to face power dynamics reminiscent of the colonial era. Villagers' experiences highlight the state's recursive colonial character, as exemplified by the "old state, new society" (Anderson 1983). Although independence and decolonization have taken place, the colonizers are gone; yet their colonial infrastructure remains in the postcolonial world. Indonesian political elites and state officials undergo a colonial mutation (Fanon 1967), transforming and becoming *Londo Blangkon* at the national level, mutating the past colonial roles of intermediaries in the villages and districts. The *Londo Blangkon State* signifies the ongoing colonial presence (Stoler 2016) connected to past intermediary traditions (Breman 1980; Ong Hok Ham 1984) and their modern applications (Anthlov 1995). Drawing from the mudflow disaster case study, the paper further argues that the postcolonial state should not be characterized as a form of settler colonialism, as argued in West Papua (Kadir and Wahid 2025; McNamee 2023), but instead as a *Londo Blangkon state* that mediates relationships between empires and international corporations to access land and natural resources across various frontier areas, not limited to West Papua.

Fathun Karib is a joint appointment postdoctoral fellow under the DIJ-ARI Research Partnership on Asian Infrastructures and affiliated to the Inter-Asia Engagements and Science, Technology, and Society clusters at Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore. His current research interests are energy and environmental history, critical agrarian studies, Anthropocene/Capitalocene, the political economy of disaster, commodity frontiers, and the history of geology as a science.

**Fragmented Recognition:
Indigenous Communal Land Titling and the Contradictions of
'Indigenous Territory' in Cambodia**

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Across Asia, state-led land programs have been promoted as solutions to intensifying dispossession, agribusiness expansion, and environmental degradation. Cambodia's Indigenous Communal Land Titling (ICLT) program, introduced in the early 2010s, is one such intervention, designed to safeguard highlander lands from plantation concessions and the expansion of lowland migrants. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Ratanakiri province, northeast Cambodia, this paper argues that ICLT exemplifies the contradictions generated when the notion of indigenous territory is codified through state-centred frameworks.

Drawing on decolonial perspectives that frame territory as a political project of spatial appropriation, the paper foregrounds the epistemic hierarchies and knowledge translations embedded in ICLT. The program illustrates how state mapping and classification technologies, premised on static, singular notions of land and territory, restructure local land relations. These interventions intensify unpredictability and vulnerability for highlander communities, revealing the paradox that legal recognition alone cannot secure land rights or sustain livelihoods.

This case carries broader implications for land politics across Asia. Efforts to codify indigenous territory without careful engagement with local knowledge risk reproducing hierarchical epistemologies, obscuring plural practices, and undermining food sovereignty. By examining ICLT as a contradictory form of recognition, the paper contributes to rethinking territory, recognition, and dispossession in Asian land struggles. It underscores the necessity of critical engagement with indigenous territoriality in non-settler colonial contexts.

Eunbi Ko is a PhD candidate at the School of Geography, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, University of Melbourne. Her doctoral research investigates the mobilisation of the concept of indigenous territory in Cambodia's highlands, drawing primarily on political geography, political ecology, and decolonial thought. By theorising heterogeneous territory within contemporary resource frontiers, she examines the uneven spatial dynamics of land dispossession and questions universalised notions of territory and indigeneity.

**Settler Colonial Appetites:
Indigenous Food Knowledge, Land Dispossession, and the
Enduring Legacies of Nutmeg in the Banda Archipelago**

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The Banda archipelago represents a crucial yet underexamined site for understanding the entanglements of settler colonial violence, land dispossession, and Indigenous knowledge systems in maritime Southeast Asia. While recent scholarship has illuminated Indigenous displacement and plantation labour in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Banda, the enduring relationships between land appropriation, nutmeg monoculture, and Indigenous food sovereignty remain largely unexplored. This paper intervenes in this gap by centering Banda within settler colonial studies, demonstrating how the Dutch East India Company's genocide of the Bandanese and subsequent plantation regime established lasting structures of environmental degradation and epistemological erasure that continue to reverberate through contemporary food systems.

Combining a close critical reading of the Dutch colonial archives with oral histories from Indigenous survivors in Banda and the Bandanese diaspora across Southeast Asia, this paper traces how Indigenous food knowledge persisted despite—and in resistance to—settler colonial dispossession. By examining what I term "settler colonial cuisine," the paper reveals how colonizers simultaneously erased and appropriated Indigenous agricultural practices and culinary knowledge to sustain plantation economies. The paper shows how present-day Indigenous activists use continuities of Indigenous food knowledge to articulate pathways toward food sovereignty and decolonial futures grounded in land repatriation and environmental justice.

Kathleen M. Burke is Marie Skłodowska Curie Fellow at the Instituto Ciências Sociais, Portugal. She is a historian of food, gender, and maritime empires in the Indian Ocean World. Her first book project, "Hearth of Empire: A History of Indian Ocean Cuisine", shows how colonial kitchens were important, but overlooked, spaces of power, knowledge production, and cultural exchange in the Dutch East India Company's empire in the Indian Ocean. Her current project, "Cultivating Connections", focuses on how Indigenous growers in the Indian Ocean were adapters and transformers of knowledge about American plants. Her latest publication, "Recultivating Connections in the Indian Ocean", came out in late 2024 in *Slavery and Abolition*.

Beyond Optimization?
The Politics of Yield, Erasure, and Hidden Harvests in the Philippine Uplands

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In Southeast Asia, cereal crop production for food security has long prioritized input-intensive farming, yield maximization, and surplus accumulation. Since the Green Revolution, however, efforts to close the so-called yield gap—the difference between actual and potential yield—have stalled, undermined by biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and climate vulnerability. Broader agrarian changes—driven by infrastructure, extractivism, and peri-urban expansion—have reinforced productivist logics and declining yields through dispossession and restricted access to land and resources. Drawing on Spivak’s notion of epistemic violence, this paper examines how the political economy of commercial rice production, shaped by racialized technological optimism, narrowly defines yield as volume and marketable output. Over time, such violence erases Indigenous and local smallholders situated knowledge and agroecologically diverse practices. Examining the roles of the International Rice Research Institute and the Philippine state, I trace how decades of rice research and policy have criminalized swidden yields and marginalized the cosmologies that sustain them. Ethnographic insights from southern Palawan show how Pala’wan farmers struggle to sustain rice yields due to criminalisation, enclosures, and pressures to intensify, while, when conditions allow, strive to cultivate socio-ecologically complex yields entangled with spirit worlds. For the Pala’wan, upland rice yields involve ongoing negotiations with forest deities through which social relations, moral order, and ecological functions are maintained. The conclusion calls on public and private sector actors to move beyond narrow productivist models and recognize the enduring significance of swidden yields and cosmologies for Indigenous rights to land and livelihood.

Wolfram Dressler is a professor of conservation and development in the School of Geography, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Melbourne. His research interests focus on human-environment relations through a critical political ecology lens, particularly in the areas of conservation, development, and agrarian change. Ethnographic in nature, his research examines how regional political and economic processes shape access to resources, exchange relations, and environmental change at various societal scales in Southeast Asia.

Profit and Planet over People:
Decolonising Sustainability Certification in Coffee Agriculture

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This paper examines why sustainability certification has failed to reduce poverty among coffee farmers in the Gayo Highlands, Indonesia. The production of “sustainable” coffee continues to depend on low-wage labor hired by farmers and landowners. Farmers sell their beans to middlemen who possess the capital to purchase large volumes at local prices and resell them to foreign companies at a premium. While certification may make agriculture slightly more environmentally friendly, it unintentionally entrenches structural inequality between capitalist intermediaries and producers.

I argue that certification regimes reproduce colonial patterns of extraction by privileging global markets and intermediaries over farmers’ livelihoods. The paper asks how these unequal relations emerged, persisted, and became difficult to dismantle. Drawing on archival research and ethnographic fieldwork in the Gayo Highlands, I show that land reform alone is insufficient; decolonizing sustainability requires price transparency and the strengthening of farmer unions.

By situating Gayo coffee within broader debates on agrarian change, development, and global value chains, this study highlights the limits of market-based solutions to rural poverty. Unless certification schemes are grounded in local histories of exploitation and struggles for justice, they risk delivering profit and environmental branding to corporations while leaving farmers marginalized.

Muhammad Mirza Ardi is a PhD student in Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. His research focuses on development policy and agrarian change in Aceh, Indonesia, with attention to the intersections of history, class, and state power. He holds a Master's in Public Policy and Management from the University of Melbourne (Australia Awards Scholarship) and a Master's in Theory and Practice of Human Rights from the University of Essex (Chevening Scholarship).

Internal Colonialism, State Land Policy, and Settler Ecologies in Cambodia's Uplands

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By drawing on theories of settler-colonialism in Asia and long-term research in Cambodia's northeastern province of Mondulhiri, this paper argues that lowland to upland migration reproduces colonial structures of land control over Indigenous people. Beginning in the late 1950s, the Cambodian state encouraged primarily ethnic-Khmer people to migrate from lowland to upland regions to control, assimilate, and acculturate ethnic minorities' ways of living and land use. In contrast, contemporary settler-migration to upland regions is not driven by an explicit state immigration program. Migrants, most of whom are ethnically Khmer, pursue individual and household livelihood strategies as they seek economic opportunities, claim agricultural land, and establish village settlements through kinship networks. Nevertheless, state land policies related to economic land concessions, land formalization programs, and farmland mortgages to the country's banking and microfinance industry, have facilitated significant lowland to upland migration over the past two decades. Migrants often strategically embrace state policies and other forms of land governance, including cash-cropping and land purchases financed by loans, to gain control over Indigenous customary lands. Based on fieldwork among settler-migrant and Indigenous communities surrounding plantation projects and within state protected areas located on Indigenous customary land, we examine how migrants advance land claims through engagement with state land zoning and tenure policies. We argue that state land policy systematically supports migrants' claims in ways that reflect settler-colonial logics, dispossessing Indigenous inhabitants, facilitating extractivist agriculture, and undermining conservation goals.

Phasy Res holds a PhD in sociology from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, France. Adopting anthropological research methods and analysis, her doctoral research examined the impacts of microfinance on agrarian practices and relations among Indigenous upland farmers in northeastern Cambodia. She has also researched a wide range of development issues in agrarian settings, including Green Revolution-induced changes in agricultural practices, access to antimalarial drugs, and the dynamics of labour migration in the sub-Mekong region. Her research interests lie in the development, agrarian and peasant studies at the intersection of microfinance, land, Indigenous culture, and identities. Her work has been published in *Espace Politique*, *Malaria Journal*, *Development Policy Review*, *Development and Change*, and *The Journal of Peasant Studies*.

Long Sarou is an independent researcher based in Cambodia. His research interest includes the dynamics and transformations of rural landscapes, focusing on natural resource and land governance, conservation programs, migration to forest frontiers, the political economy of resource grabbing, and climate change issues. He holds a PhD in Human Geography from Crawford School of Public Policy, the Australian National University, and his doctoral thesis examined indigenous land claims and livelihoods in the North-East Cambodia.

THE FUTURE OF LAND IN ASIA:
Decolonial Perspectives on Agriculture, Food Sovereignty, and Conservation
23-24 April 2026 | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

Ly Vouch Long is a highly accomplished Freelance Researcher, Consultant, and Ethnographic Specialist with over fifteen years of experience (since 2008) providing on-the-ground expertise across Cambodia and Southeast Asia. His core specializations include climate change, migration, debt, indigenous communities, and livelihood adaptation. Highly skilled in both qualitative (ethnography) and quantitative methodologies, he possesses extensive experience in project coordination and training research teams. Ly Vouch Long has provided essential fieldwork support to prestigious international institutions, including Royal Holloway, University of London, the National University of Singapore (NUS), and Michigan State University (MSU). His academic contributions are published in leading international journals.

W. Nathan Green is an Assistant Professor of Geography at the National University of Singapore. His research examines how development finance transforms environments and people's lives in Southeast Asia, and how people in turn contest these transformations. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, he works at the intersection of political ecology, economic geography, development studies, and critical agrarian studies. Nathan has contributed to debates on agrarian change, debt, land dispossession, precarity, social reproduction, and the commodification of nature. His current project, funded by a Singapore Ministry of Education Tier 1 grant, critically investigates impact investment and climate finance in Cambodia. Nathan's research has appeared in journals including *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, *Development and Change*, and *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. His work has received awards from the American Association of Geographers and the National University of Singapore.

**Settlers Without a Metropole:
The Ta'ang in Northern Thailand**

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How should we understand settlers who are also subalterns? Across northern Thailand, decades of overland migration from Myanmar have produced a situation where marked non-Thai highlanders are pejoratively viewed as expansionist settlers by neighboring Thais. Drawing on a year of ethnographic field research in Chiang Mai province, this paper tells the story of Nam Tok, a Ta'ang village whose residents are engaged in a struggle against the Thai Department of National Parks (DNP). The villagers' primary antagonists are the militarized DNP ranger-administrators who control a national park that fully surrounds Nam Tok and several other ethnic minority highland villages. At the heart of this conflict are divergent conceptions of territory: on the ground, the DNP espouses an imperial statist view, which criminalizes Ta'ang farming using regulatory technologies like mapping and demarcating and disciplinary techniques such as imprisonment and intimidation. On the other, the Ta'ang understand territoriality according to traditional ideas of usufruct, which form a potentially "unbounded" (Buscemi 2025) territory whose extent is determined through labor, care, and face-to-face negotiation. The situation in Nam Tok complicates theories of colonization by centering expansionist settlers who are also stateless and ethnic minorities, and a statist imperial power whose policies enforce emptiness and pristine nature rather than assimilation.

Michael R. Dunford (Mike) is a Visiting Fellow at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. His research brings together theoretical perspectives from economic anthropology, science and technology studies, and interdisciplinary Southeast Asian area studies. Mike's projects explore the relationship between knowledge production and market formation, and particularly how these processes intersect with ethno-racial differentiation. He has a PhD in socio-cultural anthropology from the Australian National University, and has conducted long-term ethnographic field research in Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.

ABOUT THE ORGANISERS & CHAIRPERSONS

Colum Graham is Postdoctoral Fellow in the Food Politics and Society Cluster at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He received his PhD from the Australian National University in 2024. His work focuses on understanding agrarian transition in Indonesia and elsewhere in the region. He is also interested in other issues in political economy and rural society, including food crop trade, corruption, and rural-urban dynamics. His work is interdisciplinary and seeks to understand and support small-scale farmers as they encounter states dealing with legacies of colonialism, and emerging challenges of automation and climate change.

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Faizah Zakaria is Assistant Professor jointly appointed to the Department of Southeast Asian Studies and Malay Studies at the National University of Singapore. Her research interests centre on religion and ecology, environmental justice and indigenous movements in island Southeast Asia. Her first monograph *The Camphor Tree and The Elephant: Religion and Ecological Change in Maritime Southeast Asia* (University of Washington, 2023) also won the Harry J. Benda Prize in 2025.

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Jacob Rinck is an anthropologist studying global inequality through the lens of migration, agrarian change and development economics as storytelling in Nepal. He is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore. Before joining ARI, Jacob was a Visiting Scholar and lecturer at George Washington University. He has a PhD in anthropology from Yale University (May 2020), and an MSc (Violence, Conflict and Development) from SOAS, University of London. In a professional capacity, Jacob has worked for the International Crisis Group, and as a consultant for DFID and the World Bank among others. He is currently working on a book manuscript and articles on his research on transnational migration, agrarian change, and histories of developmental thought in Nepal, with an article in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* forthcoming. His new research focuses on the emergence of new transnational publics around a 2018 bilateral labor agreement between Nepal and Malaysia.

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Jamie S. Davidson is Associate Professor of Political Science at the National University of Singapore. He re-joined the Asia Research Institute in 2021 and now heads its latest cluster – Food Politics and Society. He has nearly twenty-five years of experience teaching and writing on the politics of Southeast Asia, especially that of Indonesia. His books and articles have focused on various issues, including ethnic violence, indigenous peoples' activism, law and society, infrastructure, democratisation, and, most recently, rice politics. Jamie sits on several editorial boards for book series and journals.

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