

# **The Bright Lights of Singapore: Making Meaning of the IMS-GT in the Riau Islands**

Michele Ford and Lenore Lyons

Abstract of a paper presented at *Asian Horizons: Cities, States and Societies Conference*,  
Singapore, 1-3 August 2005

## **Abstract:**

Old people in the Riau Islands talk wistfully of the *zaman dollar*, when life was simple and borders didn't matter. But younger Riau Islanders have a much more complex and ambivalent relationship with the Singaporean city-state. Although the bright lights of Singapore are tantalisingly close, the riches they represent remain unattainable for the vast majority of Indonesians living in the Riau Islands. This paper offers a critical examination of the promises of prosperity made to Riau Islanders since the IMS-GT was established. It argues that the contradictory processes of Singapore's regionalisation drive, the apparent arbitrariness of flows of capital from Singapore to the Riau Islands and the unequal status of the countries involved in the IMS-GT (and therefore their citizens) fuel Riau Islanders' ambivalence towards their glittering neighbour.

## **Contact information:**

### **Dr Michele Ford**

Lecturer  
School of Political and International Studies  
Flinders University  
GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001  
AUSTRALIA

Email: Michele.Ford@flinders.edu.au

### **Dr Lenore Lyons**

Director  
Centre for Asia-Pacific Social Transformation Studies  
(CAPSTRANS)  
University of Wollongong  
Wollongong NSW 2522  
AUSTRALIA

Email: Lenore\_Lyons@uow.edu.au

This paper is part of the joint project between Lenore Lyons and Michele Ford titled: *In the Shadow of Singapore: The limits of transnationalism in Insular Riau*. Funding to support this project has been provided by the Australian Research Council (ARC Discovery Grant DP00557368). Further information about the project is available at:  
<http://www.uow.edu.au/arts/research/intheshadow/>