

Ode to Rempang

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I'm at my late grandfather's house, where he was attacked in the 1965 genocide against communists of his generation. 60 years apart, here I am, writing after one of the most painful defeats of my life. His coconut trees nourish my midnights and his sapodilla tree provides deep, cool shade as I lick my wounds. I'm not a botanist as proficient as he, but my garden of words will nurture yet another, and another, and another. Perhaps in 60 years, a child is to sleep under my shade. For as long as there is exploitation, there will be those who fight tooth and nail against it, each connected by an invisible thread cutting through time and space.

Here lies the history of the Rempang struggle in my eyes. As with any historical account, consider mine incomplete, biased, and one-sided, inflected by my race, sexuality, class, ideology, and all the rest. Far from being an authoritative narrative, I've written my piece for my own amusement. More frankly, I couldn't sleep with the feeling of an essay tugging at my fingertips.

September 2023.

I don't remember how things got off the ground. A few months earlier, I had visited my punk and anarchist connections in Batam. I had spoken to some locals about Rempang and given the circumstances, it was clear that an impending colonial conflict was about to break. It's the classic story of primitive accumulation: a peripheral, not entirely dispossessed indigenous society living on a key mineral reserve and strategic military location. I asked my friends to get in touch with the Rempang people before a conflict broke out but didn't intend to participate much myself. Fast forward a few months, the regent's office had been torched and multiple protests flooded the streets. Malay organizations, anarchist punks, and unorganized workers had spontaneously banded together. Violent repression was inevitable, swift, and overwhelming. The potential accumulation from the Rempang Eco-City project was massive enough to summon more troops than protesters. Eyewitnesses claimed the Bareleng bridge bent under the military weight.

34 were arrested, including a disabled person accused of throwing lethal objects at the military and an acquaintance who had driven me around when I visited. I heard rumours that the prisoners were beaten, bribed, and asked to work for the state. Certainly, their hair was removed and I have no trouble believing the rest.

The main players involved are PT Makmur Elok Graha, a company under Tomy Winarta's Artha Graha Group, which runs on the ground operations in cooperation with the police and military, and Xinyi Group, a Chinese solar panel company that is promising to invest 381 trillion rupiah under a multinational deal brokered by then president Jokowi. No doubt the Chinese capitalist state knew the humanitarian consequences to come, but capital cares only about accumulating profit and expanding its scope. Xinyi Group's promised investment hasn't actually been liquidized, pending the successful clearing of the proposed construction sites. There is no evidence of direct participation by Xinyi Group nor the CCP in the Rempang ground operations.

A disproportionate amount of noise has been made about Rempang being a "Chinese project". The ideological campaign was started by imperialist mass media, specifically BBC and CNN, and compounded by ethnonationalist hatred against the Chinese in Indonesia, trickled down to regional papers. Racial privilege has always been a convenient scapegoat to distract from class war. Race itself was being constructed in real time before my eyes.

In truth, the US is as responsible for Rempang as China has been portrayed to be. The Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act in late 2022 included an additional 200% import tariff for solar panel components from China. China has overwhelmingly won the monopoly competition over solar panel production and is likely to strengthen its monopoly over the international sustainable energy transition over time. Competition over markets, productive assets, and political influence between capitalist states, however, is a zero-sum game. China's industrial rise hurts US colonial interests. US tariffs against Chinese solar panel components are part of an ever-heating economic, political, and military competition between the two behemoths that is already exploding into a world-engulfing conflict in slow motion. In response, Chinese capital sought to build factories elsewhere, quickly building five new solar panel factories in the region imperialists have named Southeast Asia.

Singapore's sustainable energy transition is yet another responsible factor. Demand for sustainable energy in Singapore is urgently increasing as the city-state seeks to meet its 2030 solar energy targets. Last year, a 9 billion USD deal was signed between Tuas Power and PT Marubeni Global Indonesia for a solar farm in Galang Island, an

island south to Rempang that is part of the Rempang Eco-City project. The second phase will be in a conveniently ambiguous "nine less-populated or uninhabited islands near Batam", according to Singapore's Economic Development Board. As the Rempang Eco-City project will include a dedicated solar farm zone, it appears likely that solar energy in Singapore will be sourced from the ruins of Rempang. Indonesian state policy further requires energy exporters to source at least 60% of the components domestically, so the solar farm deals with Singapore are providing a further market incentive for the domestic solar panel factories in Rempang Eco-City.

Aside from solar panels, Rempang Eco-City will feature zones dedicated to tourism and agro-tourism. Most of the tourists flooding Batam every weekend come from Singapore. The discrepancy in currency purchasing power allows Singaporean workers to use Batam as a pressure valve for their woes. Consequently, Batam is home to one of Indonesia's highest densities of sex workers, gambling centers, and harmful narcotics. Many Singaporean workers rent mistresses in Batam, creating hotbeds for abuse and rape given the economic, legal, and sexual power imbalances. If Rempang Eco-City goes through, these dynamics will replicate themselves there.

Singapore is a colonial state and its economy is fueled by colonial exploitation. Underpaid migrant workers with barely any rights power its industries. Abused domestic workers make its intense and long average working hours possible. Oil and weapons supply to the Myanmar junta enriches its pockets. It's worth mentioning that NUS, NTU, and other academic institutions participate in the genocidal Israeli surveillance and military industry. The capital for PT Makmur Elok Graha can be traced to Singapore. Trend Asia traced 75% of its shares to PT Wisesa, in turn owned 40% by Banyan Solution Enterprise Pte Limited and 60% by individual shareholders. Banyan is 100% owned by Grideye Resources Limited, registered in the infamous British Virgin Islands tax haven. The secretary at Banyan, Lok Teng Teng Dorothy, is linked to more companies in the British Virgin Islands and Singapore. They have their own profile in the ICIJ Offshore Leaks database. The Singaporean government's claim that it has nothing to do with Rempang Eco-City is a blatant lie. Working class movements across so-called Asia should recognize Singapore as a critical economic, political, and military node in contemporary colonialism. Soekarno once called the Straits of Malacca the artery of colonialism. In the crises to come, whichever faction secures the straits will possess a significant advantage.

There is no just sustainable transition under the capitalist mode of production. The law of value itself reduces the vast diversity of natural phenomena into a homogenous commodity measured in one dimension by its exchange value, thus creating "nature" as we understand it today. By its internal logic, capitalism is unable to care for our living environment, damages to which remain invisible to its eyes until capital accumulation is itself disturbed. Recall the climate crisis is not only a carbon problem but possesses an uncountable number of facets. The production of sustainable energy as a commodity will replicate the usual colonial flow of value, generating catastrophic ecological consequences in the colonies and inevitably the colonial states too. Calls for a sustainable transition without waging revolutionary class war are yet another excuse for colonial exploitation and imperialist conquest in a novel guise. Active complicity in the environmental catastrophe by the CCP and other states claiming allegiance to Marxist-Leninism suggests that a different solution is required. Only a highly democratic, participative, and dialogical political structure overseeing a communist mode of production could attempt a just sustainable transition.

By far the most immediately responsible agent is the Indonesian state. Rempang's catastrophic condition today results from decades of siege. What we call infrastructure under the guise of progress is the gradual abolition of space by the Bareleng bridge and internet services, the conditions for industrial production by the implementation of electrical poles and state-funded schools, and the expansion of a monopoly over violence through the construction of legal, military, and state offices. A few hundred hectares of indigenous land had already been seized in the construction of a dam. Logging companies had damaged forests relied upon by the ecosystem for continued sustenance. The forests were sold by state-appointed village leaders, called *kepala desa*. Bukit Gendang had been taken over by the airforce long ago. An indigenous elder told me that spirits stopped making music once the military settled.

Or I should say centuries of siege. The mode of production in coastal Malay regions used to include houses embedded in fields, each distant from the other and yet constantly engaging in mutual aid. These conditions were ideal for peasant guerilla forces. In response, the Dutch created dense villages by separating housing from production to impose more rigorous control over production and population. Today we call these colonial structures kampungs. The general pattern of restructuring general living conditions in response to guerilla struggle can be seen throughout the world, including the new villages and HDBs in Singapore. There is no escape from class war.

Pissed off and frustrated, I vented around. Some friends suggested we attempt raising funds in Singapore and so we did. There was an unrelated incident when a punk Instagram account from Batam reached out for help with raising funds. I had never liked the guy who reached out; he was too melancholic, rigid, and robotically repetitive in mouthing off anarchist slogans. But reason got the better of my instincts and I agreed. He ran away with the money and blamed the hit on me. When I heard the news, I was so furious I could only smile. It wasn't the first time I'd gotten scapegoated for economic matters and wouldn't be the last. Such is the fate of we Chinese in Indonesia. I commend my anarchist friends for running a democratic and transparent accountability meeting that produced a practical resolution. An amusing question during the meeting was whether to beat up the perpetrator. I was one of the few who voted against it. His wife was recently pregnant and he had run away from Batam to escape persecution. Another participant said she pitied his wife for being with such a loser. Beating him up would have only harmed her further. I tried reaching out with the intent to pursue accountability and transformative justice but he blocked me on all platforms. If he reads this, I hope his family is well and he can make reparations once his finances are in order.

January 2024.

I visited Batam for the second time. The prison bus was an unceremonious black. My friend had the same smile as he did the year before and no less of a handshake. His hair was gone and he had grown thinner. I was glad that prison hadn't broken him. We had raised money for his supplies as the prisoners weren't given adequate basic necessities. I was told he turned the money down to be given for Palestine or used by his collective instead. Once he was out, he insisted that he had never done such a thing. "We've fought halfway through, how could we fight only half the way?" was his response whenever asked about his resilience. I think about his words in my own cynical moments. I met another comrade in the courthall then but that's a story for later. Two layers of polished steel stood between a grandfather and his grandson, between my friend and I, between who knows what other stories lost to time.

In the other half of my visit, I stayed in Rempang with a few NGO workers. The NGOs and workers will remain anonymous for reasons that will soon become clear. Here is a translated excerpt from my diary:

"Preventing is impossible for us ... fighting heavy machinery is impossible for us ... kicking out the state is impossible for us' ... Impossible for us! Impossibility is the ideology of NGOs. 'Don't raise your first, mam! Fight with your voices and posters only!' Don'ts and impossibles. 'We don't need to fight using an organization.' Ha! What a joke! The people love the NGOs. This is tough. His phone background is pornographic. He can't be trusted. I don't know why. Trust your instincts. His condition is characterized by surrender, a broken individual who has given up on synthesis. The result: attention seeking and love for instant results. Like a glass mug, he likes to shine and is bound to crack. His anxiety for a better life is there but is transmuted into shields and projections, a directionless chaos in conversation and life. He hasn't confronted his anxiety, only run away from it and thrown responsibility upon others, with the secret hope that someone will fix him. Tragic. No angel will be his magical cure. Joy has to be created and the first step is to grab the bull by the horns."

I met many peasants who explicitly proclaimed willingness to engage in armed struggle. A construction worker fought with an NGO worker during a meeting as he called for attacking heavy machinery with molotovs and bombs. A fisherman proudly recollected readying bows to shoot the invading soldiers. A young man had to be prevented from bringing his machete to a peaceful protest. The general atmosphere was trembling with vigor and adrenaline. No doubt much organic direct action would have sprouted were it not for the NGOs' tempering effect. A farmer told me he didn't care for money, only peace and comfort, the capability to live by his own instincts, logic, principles, and language. Said young man opened my bathroom door, locked by a large stone, while I was showering, presumably to check my genitalia, as would happen many other times in Rempang. My androgyny resulted in harassment in almost every conversation. Some were hilariously confused: a grandmother insisted I was a woman due to my earrings despite my attempts at dialogue. She went around the kampung to excuse my very flat breasts. The same farmer who proclaimed monetary indifference, by the way, would later be unveiled as a corrupt and pathologically dishonest village tyrant. Much of the money granted for his collective farm by NGOs went into his usual farm, where as a landlord he extracted surplus value from the especially gullible and meek. But his charm at playing the NGO workers through his fingers was admirable in its own tragic way.

I had never been sympathetic to the NGO industrial complex. We funded the NGOs only because there was no existing alternative and it was at least something. This is my biggest regret across all my work in Rempang. NGOs

turn class struggle into programmatic and bureaucratic commodities, compelling the working classes to adopt a parasitical, boot-licking, thoughtless, and dependent ethic. I saw NGOs neuter the inert vivacity of the working classes engaged in class war. There was an economic and political symbiosis between village leaders, indigenous landlords, rich peasants, and NGO workers, while poor peasants, farm workers, and workers in general had nearly no influence. Women tragically decorated the frontlines despite being excluded from meetings. Every meeting was full of cigarettes, ignorant of the children's and women's health. Meetings were all scheduled at night while women were assigned only day shifts at village guard posts, forcing them to work double were they to attend both. Productive relations had shifted with sporadic land occupations, but reproductive relations remained inert as men continued refusing to do domestic work. At my insistence that I help sweep the house, a few men forcibly took my broom away and called me an embarrassment to mankind.

The unlikely highlight was my meeting with an indigenous elder called Cik Kamar. He was the most peaceful person I'd ever met, so grounded and unassuming in the way he sat that the sight was enough to disarm. In the tumultuous conflict, he remained as calm as a coral reef. He was like a cat, content with his body, stretching and dancing to his own tempo. Nietzsche said life is only bearable as an aesthetic phenomenon. He himself was a work of art, a contagious and magnetic beauty. His stature reminded me of the guerilla leader Depati Bahrin. His analysis was precise: capital was driving extinct the indigenous. The peasantry would disappear after dispossession and industrialization, eventually outcompeted by skilled workers brought in from Java. His offspring would be coolies on their own land. But his philosophical advice hit closer to home. I asked him how he was so oneself and content. He laughed.

"Knowledge of oneself. Listen to your liver, not reason. Reason flows with the wind, changing direction as circumstances blow. The liver remains constant. Do what you can as long as you can. Everyone has their own journey and only we decide on the path. Keep on fighting."

I left dissatisfied with my week-long visit. Here I was, in an ocean of the working classes during a raging class war, eager to fight and better their lives, yet betrayed by NGOs and left to fight on their own devices. I brought home a shirt that a peasant leader gave me with "Singapore" written on it. Many Singaporeans might be surprised at finding distant family in Rempang. Some Singaporeans have houses there too, though often as landlords in colonial relations. Until the border around Sentosa was recently consolidated, people traveled to and fro freely by sea, using small fishing boats. A grandmother recollected selling kue in Singapore when she was a teenager, her son-in-law later became a migrant worker in Singapore, and her shop still serves broth to accompany her chicken rice. "That's the Singaporean way," she said.

Here I was, heading to the dictatorial state that would soon be fueled by the blood and fire in Rempang. And what for? Certainly, my financial wellbeing would be immeasurably improved compared to the grim labor market in Indonesia. With a prestigious degree to top my intelligence and grit, I'd never need fear for housing and food. The currency discrepancy was significant, too. A week's worth of part-time work in Singapore makes enough for a comfortable two-month-long vacation in Indonesia. But my convictions and the person I was becoming shook against my cage. Rempang was imperfect and hypocritical, but the impeccable beauty of everyday resistance, as it is and as it could be, moved me.

In the moment, though, the situation appeared much more bleak. Here was a sad diary excerpt: "All the other villagers placed me on an uncomfortable pedestal, expecting me to behave like a god who was there to save people, instead of a human being who was interested in building reciprocal relationships – that is, solidarity. Many accused me of being a Chinese spy for the big bad company."

No doubt my present ambivalence and remaining affection for Rempang, not to mention much improved mental health, have recolored my perception. The way we digest our present changes our history. More than any neat linear narrative and clear eureka moments, Rempang affected me through peaks and valleys. It's worth noting that I had had these convictions fermenting far before Rempang. But the canvas of possibility that Rempang was and the bond that had been shaped between us through a great many coincidences invigorated me.

July 2024

My anarchist punk friends in Batam invited me to go camping in Rempang. I accepted in a heartbeat. The political prisoners had been released and a few joined us. We roasted chicken and ate together over enormous banana

leaves. People sang together around the campfire. I borrowed a friend's hammock and slept like a baby hugged by the ocean wind.

While in Jakarta, I met an NGO worker during peasant day celebrations. My humble union friend who I came with became uncomfortable almost immediately. "He's very cocky," she said with an ick. I treated him to a meal at another time. An odd occasion, as I don't hang out with people I dislike and I did dislike him then. For better or worse, a great deal of organizing work is instinctive and happens at the unconscious level. He confessed that his NGO didn't pay him for 3 months when he was working in Rempang. I was shocked as the fundraising budget declared his per diem to be multiple times higher than his usual pay, in total slightly above the minimum wage in Jakarta. He asked me to keep it a secret between friends. I told him that I was going to tell those who should know, namely my collective and the Rempang people. He tried to intimidate me by repeatedly insulting my judgement, though it was more pitiful than scary.

In Rempang, I held open democratic meetings about the misused funds. We unanimously agreed to hold democratic meetings about how to use the funds instead and to transfer the funds directly without an NGO intermediary. One of the kampungs wanted to build lompongs, a cleverly put-together artificial coral reef made from coastal rocks and wild vegetation from the surrounding ecosystem. Locals described it as a playground and home for fish. The general idea was that fishermen would pay a small, nearly negligible fee while tourists would pay a heftier sum. Then once the initial capital was recovered, we would discuss again what to do with the money. I advocated for cooperative systems in an effort to resurrect the Rempang economy. A few months of inactivity during the September crisis had led to disastrous failed harvests. Compounded by the understandably sluggish work ethic that inflicts the beaten down, hopeless, and traumatized, Rempang was in an economic crisis. Land occupations arose as a necessary survival response under these circumstances, though I didn't know they existed during this period. We brainstormed a snacks cooperative for the women and an artificial coral reef cooperative for the fishermen.

Media up to this point had been in the monopoly of NGOs and state-controlled mass media. Our public discussions about the importance of narratives created by and for the working classes hit a nerve. I saw the enthusiasm and offered to run classes with ten writers, five men and five women, including both youth and the elderly. We ran a non-hierarchical and intense daily program as I was due to fly elsewhere the following week. Topics spanned color theory, psychoanalysis, working class propaganda, social media algorithms, and in general anything that interested us. The men would dominate classroom discussions and required ego checks while the women were more reserved and required personal encouragements. I learned more from these classes than I did in a usual university class. We continued meeting weekly online for a few more months. My classmates produced exceptionally creative work, from economic analyses to resistance narratives written from the perspective of inanimate objects. The collected works are accessible on @rempangmerdeka. Later writers wrote about the importance of an economic struggle for a dignified life beyond fighting for land rights alone, the rightful ownership of land by those who work the soil, and alternate histories blending fiction with realities. The account is now inactive. Whenever I text the group chat, people forward the WhatsApp number of NGO workers instead of answering. Your interpretation of the meaning is as good as mine.

Interlude

I dropped out of university. I had been trying to organize migrant workers who would get punished, fined, scolded, forced to work longer hours, and threatened with deportation for organizing with me. Some came into the line of fire only for having spoken with me. We'd speak under the stairs and in hidden abodes, far from any CCTVs. Even nearby churches were game, usually after painfully racist dialogues with the church workers. Cops shooed me out of migrant worker dormitories and I got part time work as a researcher only to visit without suspicion. Other friends I worked with had been compelled by repressive circumstances to leave the country. A friend, who used to be a domestic worker union organizer for JALA, lost her mind and became a shell of herself. I hope she is doing better now. I myself had received warning letters, disciplinary meetings, threats of deportation, and a police summon, though nothing severe ever came to be. The details of these attempts are important to document and I hope others will. I have learned as much from Singapore and especially the migrant workers as I have from Indonesia. The Sikh migrant workers above all showed me an unbelievable love for life, without fear and hate.

What I found unbearable wasn't repression but the hegemonic epistemic violence of the university. In the morning, I'd chat with my friends about their extended working hours and before lunch, I'd be speaking about migrant

work with obnoxious hypocrites who commodify workers as research material. Most workers on my campus said I was the second person to speak with them; most complained about being treated like a lab rat by the first. How could my friend, a union organizer, take his 30 minute breaks in a one meter square sheet iron hut while professors babble about capitalism and its relation to space? Frequently when I sought to speak about these matters, I was cut off and asked to speak at another time. Feeling stuck in the hierarchical classroom made me furious and hateful. Some classes were insightful and caring but most were disgusting. A few migrant workers on campus were relocated to an illegally small dormitory room and organized a few dozen others to negotiate. The state fined the company and the company fined the workers to cover the bill. I tried speaking about the conflict in class and a professor told me to speak during the dedicated migrant worker week instead. I could feel myself being shaped into an obedient office worker. I think that was the final university class I attended. I knew on which side of the barricade I wanted to be. I did it for myself in the pursuit of a life lived on my terms.

September 2024

A year after the initial Rempang protests broke out, here I was, no longer a visitor but another dispossessed worker looking to work and fight for my liberation. My general approach was to immerse myself by working the same labor, speaking the same language, and living in the same households. Only by incorporating myself into the productive and reproductive relations of Rempang could I glimpse into its historical spirit. Consciously the organizing method refused a separation between bureaucratic professional revolutionaries and the disempowered working classes. Insofar as there was any leadership, its character was ethical, economic, and intellectual, not in centralized decision making and intransparent hierarchy.

Thorough immersion allowed a quicker and experiential analysis of Rempang's class composition. Working as a farm laborer made me understand the commodity circuit and the workings of capitalist agriculture in Rempang. Poor farmers are exploited by agriculture capitalists, nationally known as tengkulak, who run distribution networks for produce and loan money at ridiculous rates. A \$9000 cucumber harvest, already underpriced by organized tengkulak monopolies, would result in only a few hundred dollars for the farmer after debt. Farm workers were exploited by rich farmers, who would pay only a dollar for every hour of work, and landlords who live as parasites of labor. By poor farmers I mean those who own only their farmland and minimal machinery, whereas rich farmers rent out excess land outside their farmland or have farm workers tending to the excess with a monopoly over machinery.

Class is inseparable from sex. Most farm workers were women who had no time to do household work, participate in organization, and still find time to work their own fields. Most women would nurture small gardens of sustenance crops and fruit trees. Women farmers existed only as poor farmers and never as rich farmers, though women landlords were numerous. Elders tell me that women farmers working their own land was a common phenomenon during their time. I never figured out how the historical dispossession of women from productive ownership in Rempang worked. Oral accounts blamed the growing housewife ideology propagated by the state, schools, and social media. No doubt the ideological shift towards a colonial nuclear family played a role in dispossession but I believe there lies a hidden domestic history of violence that came with the ideology. Perhaps the underlying economic change was the gradual dispossession of the peasantry into proletarians, whose working hours were longer and working conditions were more disciplinary, thus requiring more reproductive work to maintain.

The essential variable in analyzing class composition is pinpointing ownership over the means of production and identifying exploited labor, including labor made invisible by the law of value. All the productive relations in Rempang are built atop the unpaid reproductive labor of women. So too with the labor of animals and contributions of "nature", which goes unnoticed until the abused processes crack into dysfunction. Ideological allegiance mapped out extremely neatly onto economic classes: landlords and rich farmers worked closest with NGOs, while poor farmers and proletarians had more sympathy for class struggle.

Most peasants in Rempang worked in the ocean as fishermen, seaweed foragers, squid spearfishers, mollusk collectors, and so on. These peasants were likewise exploited by the tengkulak, though the productive surplus was negligible. Nearly all caught produce was sold and consumed within the local economy for sustenance. Industrial commercial fishing had already been forbidden by locals due to its environmental consequences. Damage to mangrove ecosystems and coral reefs through various commercial sources slowly eroded the fish population nonetheless. Over time, fishermen had to travel further away from the coastline to get fish. Artificial coral reefs helped bring about greater abundance closer to home, reducing working hours and increasing labor productivity. Lompangs were

traditionally made in combination with used industrial products, such as tires, broken boats, and iron fences. These, under the right circumstances, leech off heavy metals and damage the ecosystem in the long run. Recycling propaganda by tire companies greenwashed their product for public relations. In fact, tires are one of the largest sources of primary microplastics in the ocean. Indigenous epistemology didn't make a distinction between different kinds of waste, though, so it took some convincing to change the practice. Burning plastic waste was yet another consequence of following epistemologies ill-suited for the challenges posed by capital. Unfortunately, that public health disaster wasn't adequately confronted.

The cooperative ended up being no cooperative at all. Rich peasants collaborated within the upper administrative echelons of their unstructured organization. Public calls for fiscal responsibility were shut down and a poor farmer working as treasurer was fired for detailed record keeping. The treasurer was a budding poet with potential too, though he lacked any semblance of self-confidence. Despite my best attempts, I couldn't find a way to build self-confidence within him. I discovered that what I don't bestow upon myself generously, I can't share with another. Healing is not only individual self-discovery but a collective and political necessity. The lompongs were built in abundance. More could've been built and it's unclear where the other funds went. A landless farmer told me that it was given to an NGO worker. I couldn't confirm the allegation but it speaks to the suspicion with which each conflicting class held the other.

Around this time, a friend from Singapore visited. She was the one who suggested we raise funds for Rempang in the first place, making all our work there possible. Her experience of the trip is hers to write. We offered the @rempangmerdeka writers the funds to write a book. That project picked up pace but the time delay in gratification discouraged the busy and financially struggling writers. A pattern was emerging: programmatic efforts are met with strategic cooperation for individual interests while organic working class organizing could sustain itself even without external funding. I introduced her to the Rempang people at an open meeting and she told the story of Singapore, along with its oppressive political problems. The response was bafflement and disgust at the Singapore state. A few commented that even Indonesia remains more democratic. Others suggested an oration the day after, as she wouldn't be able to do so in Singapore, held during the weekly mutual aid cleanup. The oration was an unassuming declaration of solidarity and I translated it into Indonesian. Local mass media tried to spin it as a foreign intervention on social media, but the comments all showed affection for international solidarity.

A few days later, a fisherman picked me up at night. I had therapy scheduled and declined his invitation, but he insisted upon its importance. We arrived at a room already full of people. The air was tense and formalities lost their usual warmth. An NGO worker sat above a chair while everyone else sat on the ground. He condemned the speech as a dangerous foreign intervention and lied about never having received any funds from Singapore. A convenient way to spin corruption by attacking the accuser. He launched a tirade against hypothetical foreigners, Bangladeshi people, and "Negroes" – his word, not mine – who could be coming to manipulate the Rempang people. Even sitting next to them would be spun as foreign intervention, he said. I was furious and broke down every incident of NGO corruption I could remember, being cut off multiple times by the racist beast. I distinctly remember all the other participants bowing their heads down in silence, like scolded children caught in a fight between parents. Had they no love for humanity beyond borders? When someone finally did speak, it was to say that the amount given from Singapore wasn't enough to justify being in solidarity with the Singaporean people. I told them I'm cutting off all contact and want nothing to do with them.

Once home, I realized I should move from the household soon. My adopted mother had been one of the people behind the meeting. Such a pity. Love and care become thoughtless commodities under the capital relation. The household had had a political party banner when I first met them. Everyone but my queer adopted mother would ask about my gender in every conversation. The patriarch groped me at a village guard post that I had helped build. I yelled at him for being a sexual assaulter, though the women around me only laughed and he giggled too. Another patriarch told me that he misses Soeharto's time, when he could freely beat up the Chinese during conflicts such as these. I wish I could say I'd called them out at every juncture, but I tried my best to, with patience and anger, gently guide them away from these vile behaviors. Refusing to conform in shame, claiming space in everyday public life, and acting in constant solidarity changed their minds. More precisely, they changed their minds after witnessing lived out proof that their ideology was built on delusions instilled by capitalist civil society. Civil society is an ironic term, called out by Gramsci as the enemy of the working classes and today hailed as its spearhead. Far from being

a parasite of surplus value, I was working as a farm worker, often going unpaid when my landlord was dissatisfied with my work, or otherwise refused to treat my work as anything more than a tourist's whimsy. I was participating in mutual aid everyday, teaching classes, organizing cooperatives, and helping out with childcare. The party banner went down, many came to ignore my gender, and the physical threats against the Chinese subsided.

Yet individual effort has its limits. The anarchist punks in Batam were too scared and otherwise occupied to organize on the ground with me. That said, my experience working with and learning from migrant workers in Singapore had given me the strength of many. Some, who I remain close friends with to this day, offered prescient advice on organizing in Rempang based on the Indian peasant union experience. Others even provided monetary support, despite their meager wages. One told me that if his passport wasn't being withheld by his company, he'd want to visit Rempang to continue working with me. "I no fear death. Many people in Punjab union die ready. You good man. But be careful. Union man heart not same same. People inside we never know." I wish I'd listened to his suspicions more and took much greater care in identifying trusted individuals, rather than trying to nurture whoever interested into trusted individuals, which can only be effectively done by a collective. In any case, the Sikh gurdwaras had taught me how to live without fear and without hate, or rather to love the world despite my fear and hate towards it.

Above all, my friends and fellow organizers in Singapore were my primary source of strength, albeit at times avoidant and inconsistent. The knowledge that so many who believed in me and my work are likewise trying to build the world we want to see kept me going. I'd no hope for Rempang and knew not how the struggle would go. Hope is in the future, ever distant and vague. I live by the categorical desire for a dignified and free life in the present. Whether the future could be better didn't and doesn't concern me. The point was the dogged attempt to fight like hell, to do what I could as long as I could. That was what the Indonesian revolutionaries, the Spanish anarchists, and the Mexican peasant rebels did. Everything they built collapsed. Most didn't get to see their struggles bear fruit. Yet their ideals managed to touch and inspire me, decades and islands apart. A beautiful passage from Mao Dun's *Rainbow* is worth citing here:

"But she had no illusions. The experience of the last four or five years had taught her three lessons: never long for the past, never daydream about the future, but seize the present and use all your abilities to cope with it. Her past was just like a boat moving through the Wuxia mountains. She often saw precipices blocking her path, convincing her that there was no way out. But if she bravely and resolutely pressed on, she would always discover that the road ahead was actually very wide. Then as she went a little farther on, the cliffs would again loom before her, and a way out would seem even more remote. If at that point she had looked back from whence she had come, she would have seen that the mountains were already hidden by clouds. To look back on the past was unbearable. The future was indistinct and full of hazards. She could only seize the present and press forward with both feet planted firmly on the ground. She was a discipline of the present."

And so am I.

Back to limits. There was an ideological barrier against basic shared perception of the world separating me from those around me. An NGO worker called me to admit to fiscal wrongdoing while cursing every other word. He threatened a lawsuit against me for defamation, based on my inability to prove my allegations in court. This threat is why I'm unable to name the NGOs involved. The NGO industrial complex is as significant a threat to working class organizing as the military. In Rempang, the NGOs acted more abusively, posed more headaches, and damaged the struggle much more than the military and state. No wonder NGOs in the colonies receive abundant funding from the imperialist states. I wonder to what extent the cooptation of mass dissent through transforming direct action into harmless, pitiful protests resulted from their abundant grants. I'll never trust an NGO worker more than I trust a cop. The NGO industrial complex needs to be abolished if we're to build communism in the colonies. The meeting participants visited my house, asking me to apologize to the NGO workers. I asked them if they understood that these NGOs were corrupt and using their struggle for profits. They nodded and asked for peace nonetheless, insisting that my antics were hurting their interests. I regret to say that I apologized over text under public, which made me disgusted with myself. I should've had the guts to see that the world was wider than these slave-minded parasites instead of trying so hard to please them I ended up mutilating my principles. I'm still saddened by the incident. To this day, I have nightmares of being choked by NGO workers.

A few people reached out to proclaim solidarity with my cause and a whole can of worms burst forth. Dissatisfaction with the NGOs had driven some of the hardest working and most honest organizers into the shadows. What happened to me was part of a larger, systematic effort to break down working class leadership within the struggle. The broken, submissive remains remain obedient dogs to the NGOs, barking on command and proud to be paraded in front of governments, academics, and the NGO industrial complex alike. Our region needs a platform for critical voices outside these hideous capitalist environments.

I worry that my words will alienate more people than I've already alienated in the Indonesian activist ecosystem. Yet as Luxemburg said, "the most revolutionary thing one can do is always to proclaim loudly what is happening." I only hope my writing reaches those it needs to reach, no matter how distant in time and space. Writing as a Chinese and queer working class organizer in Indonesia is akin to feeling like a bat trying to explain echolocation to human beings. I'm a historical product of my times and yet out of place as a loud and proud idiosyncrasy.

I distributed the fundraising money equally between all kampungs while promoting the cooperative idea and assisting with its organization when need be. But the decision-making power was in the open meeting's hands, not mine. No matter how democratically the meeting was held, powerful class interests dominated and the exploited hadn't the requisite courage to put their views into the melting pot. Ideal theory would fault human nature and fear of being ostracized; the class viewpoint faults social relations beyond the meeting room whose existence in itself was a threat to the working classes. How could a farm worker go against his landlord in a democratic meeting? Voicing her opinion means risking her everyday living. Democracy without communism is an empty moniker; building democracy without building communism is a bourgeois attempt to secure rights only for a privileged class. A few credit cooperatives were established and remain operational today, lending funds at a quarter of the interest rates set by predatory banks and credit capitalists. The remaining funds were spent on plane tickets, cigarettes, and into the combined carnal belly of landlords, rich peasants, and NGOs.

Credit cooperative funds must grow by more than inflation to avoid depreciation and refuse lending to capitalist financial institutions, who would exhaust the funds by borrowing and loaning out at higher interest rates. The interest rate should be lower than the rate of profitability, so working class borrowers who use the money accurately can still generate profits. Credit cooperative funds grow at an exponential rate and preserving the mutually beneficial symbiosis in the long run is much more important than generating quick cash. Repercussions for failure to pay should be established in written contracts with clear and forgiving accountability measures. There are unavoidable issues with economies of scale and initial lack of financial literacy, but the credit cooperatives fulfilled the goals I set out. By setting up cooperatives, I wanted to avoid creating financial dependency on the fundraiser, which in any case has an expiry date and saturation point. More importantly, strengthening the local economy and building networks of everyday solidarity was crucial to weakening the political strength of NGOs and their wealthier local cronies.

Cooperatives in general bow down to the laws of capital accumulation. Inflation, interest rates, profits, working hours, labor productivity, the tyranny of the market, and dependence upon colonial extraction are immutable within the capitalist mode of production, no less objective fact than gravity and air pressure. Only in a different mode of production can production be subjugated to humanistic concerns without resulting in bankruptcy. But cooperatives provide an intermediary or more precisely hybrid form of production. The workplace is governed by democratic decision making and each worker is an owner of the means of production. In that sense, cooperatives provide an inspiring window into what production could be, despite still being bound within capital. Given the need to run a profitable enterprise under capitalism, though, workers have to govern themselves collectively as would a capitalist has to individually govern his workers. Democracy without communism is form without content. As pure economic phenomena, cooperatives aren't necessarily antagonistic to the capitalist order. The political potential is in running cooperatives as a way to fund political practices without dependence upon grants and political parties. Cooperatives thus have emancipatory potential beyond its minimal internal freedoms only under broader forms of ideological organization.

Soon after the NGO incident, I spoke at a public meeting about the need to prepare for a military incursion. I had and have no doubt the state is readying another expedition into Rempang. As NGOs have corroded the resistance and state-funded cooptation efforts have expanded to weaken the working classes, so too the military strength of the working classes is undermined. Military operation requires morale as much as guns. Weapons without morale are nothing but dead iron and lead; morale without weapons leads to mass martyrdom. In any case, we had only molotovs,

bows, arrows, machetes, farming tools, construction helmets, a few trucks and cars, a few hundred motorbikes, and one or two large farming machines. In other words, conflict with a coordinated modern army without any preparation would've been suicidal. At minimum we should ready defensive and recuperative measures, such as medical supplies, helmets, and shields. A practiced escape route was necessary and mutually agreeable, as a military invasion in Rempang would seek to secure territory with as few casualties as possible. Topographical mappings by state forestry workers and drones had the military purpose of understanding the local ecosystem and geography. Economically these maps would later prove invaluable for industrial construction. A guerilla operation under these conditions were impossible. We'd score a few casualties at best and no doubt nearly everyone involved would be lost causes.

People in the NGO-governed faction became furious at my analysis. They refused to consider and prepare for the possibility. A few months ago, by the way, an invasion did occur after the NGO-governed faction kidnapped a paramilitary soldier. The paramilitary had zero casualties and I doubt were wounded at all, while the working classes scrambled to hide under machete swings and flying arrows. A completely avoidable, foreseeable, and pitiful disaster. Those who deceive themselves to avoid facing their fears are invariably defeated by the feared object. Our powerful unconscious summons forth exactly that which we repress. My words were twisted into a forecast for inevitable dislocation, which was not at all my point. Dozens heard me and the delusion remained nonetheless. Much more comforting was the NGO and state lullaby that all would be well. Deception in the long run undermines the trust necessary for solidarity and prevents the collective confrontation of shared problems, even if they serve temporary ease and benefit. Cabral's dictum to tell no lies and claim no easy victory is a principle tested by fire.

I left that kampung for another because the requisite building block of shared perception of a world we all live in had been eroded beyond recognition. Sight, hearing, and sensorial experience were distorted by race, class, and ideological hegemony to the production of collective schizophrenia, which necessarily gaslights those who perceive differently. When I offered to help iron my clothes and keep my adopted aunt company, she cringed away in fear. Later I heard from others that she told the kampung I had called her a maid. Maid is a term I've never used in the last four years, as my experience learning from domestic workers has taught me better. The surrounding witnesses concurred with her lie. Another incident was when I gave my adopted family chocolates, explaining that a domestic worker organizer in Singapore had given them to me as a farewell gift. In a few minutes, I saw them telling others that I'd bought the expensive chocolate in Jakarta. Capitalist hegemony is a schizophrenic phenomenon and the "normal" archetype is a chronic patient. Freud thought schizophrenics couldn't be cured based on the alleged impossibility of transference with the analyst. The libido was too withdrawn and persecuted within the patient. While psychoanalysis has made tremendous progress since in understanding schizophrenia, I realized a similar underlying mechanism was operational in Rempang. The collective common sense that the Chinese are rich oppressors overrode all conflicting sense perceptions and created a new shared fantasy in which everyone else lived. My own libido withdrew in response and created the conditions for depression. I had to leave.

My parents contacted me after a long period of separation during this time. They asked me to pay back the funds they'd invested into my education and life more generally. Their eyes can only see a failed and unprofitable investment in the complex human being I am. I paid what I had to pay. My paid work in Singapore made it doable though no less painful. Here I was, ostracized, gaslit, and abused by the working classes I wished to fight with, stuck with neither degree nor money. Worse still, my host family kept asking for more money despite knowing my financial situation. I quietly sobbed myself to sleep that night. My instincts foresaw a future where I'd crystallize as a lightning rod for every bit of dissatisfaction in Rempang. Such is the fate of we Chinese under capitalism in Indonesia. I vented to a friend, who warned me that staying there would be suicide.

I left for another kampung made up of foreigners, hoping the mixing of races and cultures there would have counteracted the racist mosque and education system enough to be tolerable. I couldn't have been more incorrect. The condition of we Chinese in Indonesia are uniquely ours. Underneath the idea was the economic reality that most of the richest men in Indonesia are Chinese. For centuries, the colonial Dutch systematically used us as scapegoats for the indigenous population, nurturing ethnonationalist sentiments and inhibiting working class solidarity. One of the first working class rebellions against the Dutch was waged by Chinese workers and suppressed by indigenous collaborators. The first unions in Java wouldn't have existed without the Chinese. So too the first cooperatives, then called kongsi. Soekarno's socialist state parroted the same colonial rhetoric, in part due to sheer idiocy and otherwise sheer political convenience. Every political crisis in Indonesia is marked by genocide against its Chinese population.

No doubt even a genuinely successful communist revolution would be marked by a similar distribution of casualties. It's a feverishly odd feeling to fight with a working class who, given the first opportunity, wouldn't hesitate to beat up my working class family. The cards that history bestow upon us are upsetting and foul realities. We can do what we can with the cards. But the cards themselves are set in stone.

I started working more closely with the farmers, nearly all of whom were foreigners. Soon it became clear that the indigenous despised the foreigners, who didn't follow the feudal indigenous customs, linguistics, and economics. The word farmer had in practice become an offensive slur. Foreigners were especially exploited in the NGO-governed regions, isolated from meeting invites and grant benefits but relied on for mutual aid and protest participation. In the foreigners, I found an agreeable affinity for resolving practical and everyday economic concerns. Protests and orations, erecting banners and posters, posting on social media and running publicity stunts were seen as performative luxuries that take away from necessary economic efforts. We made credit and fertilizer cooperatives here, which function to this day. By then I had understood the class composition and could immediately dive into organizing class struggle. As usual I worked in the fields to make a living, just like everyone else, and brainstormed collectively what can be done about the problems that plague us. To be clear, I wasn't fighting for Rempang, but for myself and the people there who I cared about. We wanted a better life for ourselves. Some wanted immediate economic improvements; others and I wanted everything life has to offer. On the other hand, Rempang is an abstraction, not conceptually unlike society and the masses, that I couldn't care less about. I regret the #SaveRempang hashtag we popularized with its saviorism and focus on Rempang as such in a sense isolated from class struggle elsewhere. The working classes and class analysis are abstract generalizations too, as is language in general, but these had predictive and explanatory use. Still I'm always suspicious of those who proclaim love for vague notions like the working class. The religious emotional structure of ideological dogmatism is ugly and lifeless.

The first candidate for class struggle were rural industries run by capitalists and indigenous landlords. Factory farmed animal production enslaved as many proletarians as farm work while producing manure important for our farming efforts. Persuading proletarians that it was doable and desirable was almost too easy. Under the economic crisis and political uncertainty, almost everyone rapidly sympathized with the preparation efforts. The factory farms had been shut down through legal sabotage by the state. Even the spiteful owners might have been more sympathetic to our factory occupation than losing land and capital for free to a more powerful entity. In this specific node, a mutually beneficial compromise with the rural bourgeoisie was possible. The idea was to offer a gradual transition toward collective ownership by proletarians and a gradually declining share of profits to the bourgeoisie as compensation for initial capital, coordinating technical expertise, and their political cooperation. In this specific node, we had a united front between the bourgeoisie and proletariat against the state. Nowhere else were we more powerful. Once occupied and converted into a cooperative, the manure and animals could be used to sustain a network of rural cooperatives in cooperation with the farming cooperatives, creating exchange relations that didn't depend upon capital, though the federation of cooperatives would still be embedded within capital relations with entities outside its domain. Here was the possibility of building a microcosmic communist economy. Many preparations were made and I spearheaded the research. Technical capacity would be no problem given my scientific experience with biotechnology and the then-secured cooperation of managerial workers.

The more I read about capitalist factory farming, the more apparent was its unrestricted cruelty in the exploitation of animal labor and reproduction. Female shrimps invariably refuse to reproduce under captivity and so workers remove their eyestalks to stimulate the development of mature ovaries. The dominant scientific explanation is that a gonad inhibitory hormone is produced in the eyestalk and its removal forcibly simulates the breeding season. Removing the eyestalk, apart from the pain it must cause, increases the shrimp mortality rate and vulnerability to disease, which would spread like wildfire in the highly dense and genetically homogenous environment. Writing about chicken factory farming makes me nauseous, so I can't undertake that effort. I recommend the uninitiated to research it in their own time. Apart from moral considerations, these conditions create unhealthy and dangerous food for human consumption, especially in the absence of tight supervision and laboratory testing. Factory farming has to be abolished under communism. COVID was an example of its consequences and won't be the last. Given our overuse of antibiotics and the increasingly poor factory farm conditions under capitalist progress, these medical time bombs will only grow in severity over time. Despite the general enthusiasm, I pulled out of the project while explaining my reasons and the efforts haven't led to anything since.

The second candidate was agroecology on occupied land. While organizing and doing paid work, I was reading and translating furiously for my writing classes. There were nearly no learning materials I could use in Bahasa. Theory had to be created in tandem with practice. I came across the *Movimento Sem Terra* and the concept of running agroecology on occupied land resonated as a promising possibility. By then I knew many were running land occupations organically, including my students, whose enthusiasm increased once we collectively articulated the political significance of their actions. Many started invading state forests for free lumber after we learned about the colonial history of conservation. We researched the pesticides and other synthetic inputs that go into our crops, finding out that most had been banned in imperialist states. The health impacts included everything from cancer to infertility. Yet these synthetic inputs were still being manufactured by capital in imperialist states and exported to the colonies. Colonialism is not only the guns and warships. Its most pernicious and invisible form lies in the colonization of our everyday experiences. Without realizing, we eat poison shoved down our throats to generate profits for our colonizers. Its impact toward farmers was more severe still and a few sensitive farmers had to take long breaks after utilizing synthetic input.

Hegemonic agroecology adopts the ideology of petty bourgeois peasant economics. We wanted to build a communistic version that didn't preclude industrial machinery, got rid of intermediary *tengkulaks*, and incorporated collective land ownership. A few students had convinced their richer farmer counterparts to collectivize land and abolish rent. In practice, legal rights never shifted hands and the richer farmers always had more authority. Others negotiated for abolishing rent with their landlords, temporarily suspending rentier exploitation. Most promising was the occupation of government and capitalist land, usually around 1-2 hectares and going up to 4-5 hectares maximum per individual farmer. Rempang was militarized but military presence wouldn't mobilize without hefty funds from the capitalists. Government workers and paramilitary thugs surprisingly sympathized with the land occupations. Most acknowledged our need to feed ourselves and agreed to turn a blind eye. Some even started occupying land to farm themselves, learning from our production methods.

The primary difficulty in starting agroecology was identifying local seeds to begin the transition with. There was no market for local cucumbers and spinach varieties, which had less edible biomass and more spikes. As intermediary steps, polyculture experiments were helpful in increasing the total produced biomass per unit of land, though the produced biomass for each crop decreased. We experimented with replicating the three sisters system for corn cultivation, for instance. Building the collective knowledge of organically produced pesticides went smoothly despite initial cynicism. Part of the cynicism was due to technical and scientific lack. Some farmers thought the soil had been permanently contaminated and our efforts wouldn't matter. More serious was the distrust between farmers, which could only be remedied by nurturing everyday forms of solidarity. Many farmers synthesized their limited familiarity with indigenous agriculture production with their own experiments. Knowledge went from farmer to farmer through farmer meeting circles, nightly chats in the guard post, and field visits. Eventually, we stumbled upon winged beans as a promising candidate. The plant was adaptable to climate variance and pest resilient. Everyone was familiar with winged beans as a backyard sustenance crop. It's a nitrogen-binding legume, which was ideal for polyculture experiments and soil health more generally. It could even tolerate some neglect if the farmers had to spend more time on political work.

A farmer suggested we try exporting our produce to Singapore. Our success with cooperatives had nurtured the initiative and financial literacy required for petty bourgeois consciousness. Nearly everyone thought it would've been best to build a company instead, with myself in a leadership position. I resolutely refused and used the opportunity to have a conversation about why we were doing what we did. I'd come to live without ruling nor being ruled, not be another *tengkulak*. If we could work out the logistics on our own, we could tap into the sizeable market for winged beans in Singapore, which remained limited in Batam. The projected rate of profit was multiple times higher than current rates under *tengkulak* exploitation. Our credit and fertilizer cooperatives would further compound the increase in share of profits. Getting our goods into Batam would be no problem, as I was already trying to organize the anarchist punks into running a vegetable distribution cooperative. Container ships were our last resort for getting the goods over the strait. Most shipping companies contacted exclusively ran fossil fuels and palm oil anyway. Given our limited economy of scale, container shipping was an expensive and inefficient route. We looked into the possibility of running small fishing boats over, which had been a regular mode of travel centuries before states consolidated ocean borders.

We tried sabotaging PT MEG's attempts at indigenous-washing their capital too. PT MEG was running entrepreneurship workshops in high schools across Rempang, including a batik making workshop that made a cloth indigenous to coastal Sumatra. Students would produce cloth in exchange for grades while the school supplied initial capital and teachers split the sale profits with PT MEG. PT MEG would later parade the artworks for its public relations campaign. I thought the student artworks were beautiful and would have no trouble selling anywhere. We offered to supply the initial capital and distribute the cloths across markets in Nusantara. At first, the initial enthusiasm was high but the students couldn't organize themselves for reasons that remain unknown. Highschool drama and infighting between cliques were the cited explanations given. For every initiative that works out, there are a dozen other failures. The key is understanding that the successes are inseparable from the failures. "There's no sweetness without bitterness," as one of the Rempang writers used to say.

I started cold-calling supermarkets and distributors in Singapore. We had a handful of interested buyers and eventually distributors. Farmers running their own supply chain from Johor were especially helpful and enthusiastic about sharing knowledge. Supermarkets weren't ideal given their capitalist requirement for crops in homogenous and standardized form. But selling our own produce boxes appeared difficult given the harsh economies of scale involved. Either way, there was the nagging suspicion that localized food production intertwined within reworked urban infrastructures was the future for sustainable food in Singapore, not exported crops from scarcely industrialized colonies. In any case, the farmer circle had accumulated winged bean seeds and planned out production. Around two dozen farmers were ready to start producing. Then on a Sunday morning, I heard people calling out my name at dawn. A loudspeaker was audibly calling for the Chinese infidel to surrender herself to the mosque or be forcibly picked up. A group of men were screaming at my doorstep. My host family was playing loud Muslim prayers on their loudspeaker. The scene was surreal enough that I thought I was dreaming and went back to sleep. I woke up to my host arguing about my stay there with her husband. She said all I did was piss and sleep anyway, so why keep me there? Anger, grief, and disappointment swirled within. It was unusual. She wasn't perfect and against my advice had, together with most women from the NGO faction, signed up to volunteer for a mayor candidate's election team. But this was uncharacteristic for an otherwise caring and brave woman. When I came out of my room, silence swept the house. They tried to pretend that nothing happened, hoping I hadn't overheard.

I was in a daze all day long, barely able to work. Gaslighting blurs reality with imagination, turning it almost liquid. Everyone I met pretended that nothing happened. Here was the collective schizophrenia all over again. The absurd experience is akin to waking up one day to see a sky full of meteors while everyone around you insist that the sky is a plain blue. I doubted my sense perception too, unable to tell if I was dreaming. My host sat me down that night and said a racist, fanatical aunt was coming to his house in a few weeks. He assured me that he'd help me find accommodation elsewhere. I understood the scarcely coded message. Everyone in that kampung eventually cut contact. The two dozen farmers on my side were nothing compared to the innumerable and incomparably violent racist Muslim mob under mosque leadership.

Something in my actions had offended the demagogue. In retrospect, it might have been my insistence on not using the feudal and patriarchal pronouns *bapak* and *ibu*, meaning father and mother, when referring to older people. Many had warned me that my language was dangerously impolite. I persisted nonetheless. Nothing worthwhile can be done between people who hide behind titles of authority. In any case, I'd freed myself from Chinese feudal traditions in my family years before. The entire practice struck me as a repugnant and cramping tradition. I didn't care that it was an indigenous custom. Preserving indigeneity for its own sake is an ethnonationalist practice. Indigenous means nothing more than an economic class deemed unfit for modernity and efficient wage labor by capital relations. No doubt indigenous people have fought tooth and nail against colonial exploitation for centuries. There's much to learn from their theories and practices. But the worship of indigeneity in itself is a reactionary nostalgia for an imagined golden age, not unlike Trump's call to make America great again nor the Nazi historical fantasy. If it appears harsh to equate the practice with fascism, recall Mussolini's observation that fascism is most tempting for a defeated race. That the barbarity is done by the oppressed makes it no different from fascism.

Another possibility was my being in itself. Perhaps the mosque found my earrings and androgyny disagreeable enough to attempt breaking into my house. Perhaps it's their hatred against the Chinese, even an actively organizing Chinese worker. Perhaps it's their intolerance for my open atheism. They did specifically call for a Chinese infidel. It's impossible to determine and in any case a question for the Islamic mob to answer, not myself.

Thrown out of two different villages, I wasn't about to kick the bucket. Solidarity remained stubborn and undying. Another village where I'd organized another credit and fertilizer cooperative offered me free housing in a collectively maintained hut where they usually housed visitors. But by then I had recognized the importance of solitude as much as social immersion for an organizer. The ability to think for, with, and by oneself had saved me from collapsing into the collective schizophrenia that infected others. I wanted rest too. My pace of life had been intense, with wage labor, organizing, research, translation, and running the writing classes.

My energy had been extinguished. I didn't have enough sustenance to run on all cylinders. With my previous host family, I had experienced starvation for the first time, the peculiar and alien sensation of not having enough money for enough food. Harvest had gone too well and the tengkulak monopoly insisted on buying beans for half the price. Here we were, surrounded by abundant vegetation and animals in all their vivacity, working as hard as we could for a living. And yet we starved on one and a half meals a day. I was close enough with my classmates in writing class and other farmers in the cooperatives that I myself was never at risk of starving. On principle, I stuck with my host family's limited diet for a few days to incorporate myself as one of them, with their joys and miseries. I learned nothing and wish I'd asked someone else for food instead. Starvation doesn't ennoble and has nothing to teach. Only misery and lethargy came with it, a hazy mind unable to work nor enjoy life's beauty. Glorifying starvation is best left to Christian saints and ascetic monks.

I took a week off in Batam to rest and think about my next steps. I reflected on the absurd reality we were facing. We could count the number of people who want the Rempang dislocation to proceed on one hand. A very small handful of the most powerful bourgeoisie and statesmen alone wanted the humanitarian tragedy to go on. Everyone else was only "doing their job." The paramilitaries and government workers would almost invariably express support whenever I spoke with them. A soldier told me he'd do the same for his kampung and that he'd do what he could to support us. Kicking us off occupied land wasn't in the job requirement, so nobody bothered to do it. Only later after reports streamed into upper management and strategic shifts from up top required harsher measures were we eventually confronted. Geographers, botanists, researchers, teachers, construction workers, thugs, and soldiers working for capitalist institutions were, by "doing their job", playing an essential role in fighting for their own oppressors. We vastly outnumber the capitalists and statesmen, who are utterly powerless without our labor and submission, and yet without adequate organization could barely scratch their interests.

Capitalism uses repressive state measures against insubordination, but more than military domination, we're stuck behind the invisible trenches of ideology. Workers toiling in ports supply weapons to Israeli drones and migrant workers were building their own prisons in Singapore. Rempang showed me the way everyday life – wage slavery and paying taxes – under capitalism contributed to unspeakable atrocities, undesired and unseen to the workers themselves. Hegemony had sterilized my understanding of agency. It was common sense that wage slavery had to be done to survive under capitalism. In Rempang, that illusion broke down. We're all complicit, like it or not. The things we do to survive under capitalism make us so. Suddenly, the line separating the soldiers in Rempang and myself appeared only as thin ice.

I'm still not sure what the line is. Innumerable contingencies had played an indispensable role in my own political awakening. I wasn't who I was by my own conscious decisions. History had swept me along for a confusing adventure. If there was any difference, it was in the degree to which we deceive ourselves about our lives and its ramifications. Whereas nearly all soldiers justify their complicity in one way or another, my life had gone in such a way that I faced my unbearable pain and emotional turmoil head-on, at least within certain limits of the unconscious. Circumstances beyond my control had forced me to choose between doing so or turning into an unrecognizable cog in the machine. In my case, submitting to the alternative would've probably led to suicide. I appeared to myself as no better than the NGO workers and fascist mob that had wronged me earlier. We share an essential common humanity, all creatures of flesh and blood being shaped by historical forces beyond our control. We're all perpetrators and victims in our own ways. These ruminations helped me process my predicament empathetically and made comprehensible the seemingly incomprehensible traumatic events I suffered. No doubt I had nonetheless made the right call in leaving those environments. While my oppressors deserve care and dialogue, there was no obligation to burn myself to keep them warm. I hope those who wronged me learn to do better and face the repressed suffering that they project upon others. In turn, I hope I do the same whenever I hurt others. On my end, I swore to myself that I'd never be another cog in the capitalist machine. I'd do everything in my power to avoid wage slavery and contributing in any way to the

state. The thought of being complicit in the oppression of those in my position and countless others, only to survive under capitalism appeared horrifying.

The main ideology in the Rempang struggle was the petty bourgeois right to private property and ethnonationalist independence. In microcosm, a process similar to the nationalist anti-colonial revolutions of the last century was unfolding before me. Rempang certainly wasn't revolutionary nor were the conditions ripe for revolutionary activity. The economic clash was between small rural capitalists, rich farmers, and landlords, who owned most of the land, against their incorporation into a growing monopoly over the means of production by the national bourgeoisie. The land had been grossly undervalued at around twenty cents per square meter. The intrusion into private property and state betrayal of the petty bourgeoisie were no less significant in offending the oppressed party. NGOs found an elective affinity in the capitalist right to private property and administrative misdemeanor, packaged in an ethnonationalist casing, sold more palatably as indigenous rights. Ironically the Malay indigenous tradition doesn't even recognize private ownership of land. Capital had been fought tooth and nail by Malay rebels, who were delegitimized in colonial history as pirates and gangsters. Nonetheless, the discourse provided convenient suppression of class struggle into commodified identity politics. After all, there is a lot of money in the NGO industrial complex dedicated to indigenous rights. Erased in the sleight of hand are the proletarians and poor farmers in Rempang, whose ideological, economic, and political concerns have been repressed by both oppressive parties. It's worth noting that nearly all poor farmers in Rempang are foreigners and so too are over half the proletarians. Many attempted deals by the Rempang people to preserve only the ancient indigenous kampungs and throwing the kampungs where foreigners lived under the bus expressed the extent of discrimination there.

I was going to give it one last hurrah. By then the circumstances were grim enough to make the life I sought nearly unfathomable. My simple desire to live without exploiting nor being exploited appeared more remote than when I was in Singapore. The anarchist punks I spoke with cried when we hung out and caught up. My friend who was imprisoned for Rempang, himself part Chinese, was furious and bitter. Without exception, they advised against returning to Rempang. So did a lot of friends who I reached out to. Yet a flicker remained in my beaten self. In retrospect, it was the feeling of an imminent turn without the finality. There was still wine in the cup and I would regret not finishing my drink. I didn't feel the need to avoid failing. My life has been a series of interminable failures, one after another. Beauty is in the attempt and joy is in the relationships forged. Success in any case is the death of an artist. No thinker worth their salt has ever succeeded in thinking. The moment a person believes they've succeeded, growth stagnates and everything that follows is endless repetitions of the same.

So I rented a house from an indigenous landlord, given to me on fifty percent discount. The offer of collective housing I turned down due to a lack of internet access. A nagging itch prevented me from accepting the house. I'd decided not to lay down in anywhere except deep shade. My instincts told me that this wasn't. The offer was immensely generous and the farmers involved had left the NGO puppet organization Rempang Galang United Alliance. But I sensed a submission in their words and body language similar to those in the NGO faction. They kept on saying "we can't fight the state, the state is our father." I've learned not to trust anyone docile and submissive to the powers at be. Enduring masochists who keep their heads down and take whatever life throws at them are unanimously hiding repressed anger. The repressed anger is then transferred toward small animals, children, and whatever demographic capital has shaped into a scapegoat. No offense against my friends in BDSM relationships, whose sexual rituals can be a carnivalesque pressure valve for these emotions. I've attempted a more thorough psychoanalysis in another piece, "Subjective Conditions of the Indonesian Working Classes." That piece was written in the fury and grief of another week-long break from Rempang, while this piece is being written a few months after under a different somatic condition. It's fascinating to see the differences in somatic condition translated into artistic form and content.

The Rempang Galang United Alliance was then and now the hegemonic resistance organization in Rempang. When the crisis began, the NGOs were staunchly against organization. The political project was to create a mass who could be mobilized at will instead. At meetings, NGO workers would speak for hours while workers listened in silence. I attended a few NGO workshops and every time had to leave multiple times. The questions asked to the crowd were always yes and no questions with obvious answers. "Will we surrender our land?" – "no!" – "will we let our kampungs be relocated?" – "no!" – and so on. The unconscious effect was to create a mass who had a transference relation with the NGO workers as substitute parental authorities. A hypnotic hijacking of the superego moved the mass.

Freud posited that such collective superegos moved and defined all masses. His critique of psychological similarities between socialist movements and churches, militaries, and mobs remains one of his most searing classics.

After I moved into Rempang, though, the NGOs realized I'd attempt to build an organization. In a week, the Rempang Galang United Alliance was made. Its structure had no elections, only unchallenged volunteers. Fiscal transparency didn't exist nor were decision-making discussions democratic. The foreign farmers I worked with were almost never invited to meetings. Its Indonesian acronym, AMAR-GB, will be used from here on. The word united in its name was telling and would constantly be an accusation against those trying to organize alternatives. We were "splitting" the movement. When foreign farmers attempted to build an organization, an AMAR-GB representative came to say we were dividing up the Rempang people and weakening the struggle. Yet in economic terms, the Rempang society was already split between different classes at war with one another on an everyday level; politically the foreign farmers were only being milked and falsely represented by AMAR-GB. By "unity", fascists refer not to collective solidarity, but to the silence of the oppressed, complete submission, and unquestioning obedience to the collective superego represented by the substitute parent. Similarly, fascist economies run on class collaboration and the pretense of a political family. Indonesia's own constitution, written under the fascist and criminal Soekarno regime, mentions its economy as familial. Abolishing the bourgeois family is an inseparable call from fighting fascism.

Here I was in my newly rented house. It was my first time having my own place to live. Decorating was a pleasure and my anarchist punk friends were more than charitable in helping us find necessary furniture. Three drove all the way to Rempang to bring me a bed. Before then I'd been sleeping on a floor mat. My neighbors donated chairs and tables so I could write. Well water was provided for free by a neighbor, who spent a day helping me fix up the house. I lived by the solidarity of the working classes of which I was part. In no case did I ever give out an order or provide undiscussed instructions for behavior. We saw ourselves as friends and comrades in a shared struggle – that was all. They knew from experience that I'd be there during their times of need and vice versa. Many who helped me didn't understand my gender expression and would change my pronouns by the hour. But our differences didn't stand in the way of solidarity. Differences and its subsequent conflicts only enriched our relationships. There was no unity, no central command, and no leadership. I'm hesitant to even say I organized them as if they're inert rocks to be arranged for my mosaic. It was more accurate to say we organized ourselves. My work was made possible by so many who did things I couldn't do and had ideas I'd never dream of having. Our agroecology efforts were led by farmers, as I could only provide references from other ecologies and help track experiment results. All the meticulous farming, polyculture experiments, identification of local seeds, hearsay about indigenous methods, and the like I couldn't have done alone.

We had been in conflict with AMAR-GB since its founding day. AMAR-GB had asked all guardposts under its alleged dominion to surrender the weekly dues that had been accumulated. While villagers patrolled guard posts, weekly dues were collected to pay for instant noodles and coffee during shifts, or any other necessities that the guard post required. No explanation was given for this blatant extraction by AMAR-GB. Indeed, requests for transparency were refused. There was no budget nor plan, only centralization. In one kampung, the boycott we organized was so popular that only AMAR-GB executives surrendered their funds. Another kampung had been organizing marginalized foreign farmers independently. They refused legal aid from the NGOs and sought counsel from the religious organization Nahdlatul Ulama instead. The Nahdlatul Ulama banner was proudly displayed in their guard post. Nahdlatul Ulama was preferred over the NGOs as their lawyers never gave the farmers commands. They'd come in when legal trouble was afoot and stayed out otherwise. AMAR-GB wanted the banner down. The offer to split the banner space half and half was refused. Harassment from AMAR-GB came whenever the kampung held orations and events that were posted on social media. NGO workers were pulling the strings, on one occasion even asking AMAR-GB members to "attack" the kampung until the banner came down. The attack came but the banner didn't fall. An exodus from AMAR-GB ensued.

Nearly all the banners and posters in Rempang were designed by NGOs. Some had NGO logos displayed on the equipment. It was shameless advertising. The language itself acquiesced to the state. "Relocation" conveniently replaced dislocation and seizure. The following image was that of peacefully shifting a kampung from one place to another. Language covered up the brutal violence of soldiers shooting tear gas into schools and beating up grandmothers. Once AMAR-GB came into power, the language on banners, orations, and social media became directed

at the president and land army, begging them to save Rempang. While driving with the anarchist punks once, we saw a gigantic banner wishing the army a happy birthday and asking for rescue once again. We joked that we'd love to burn the posters down one day. Ideological content came inseparable from the psychological dynamics at play in the NGOs organizing efforts. The sight was pathetic and fatalistic.

Underneath was the assumption that the working classes were powerless to resist. It remains a fair assessment that the Rempang struggle is a very difficult one to win. In my view, unless shocking circumstances occur, the struggle is lost by now. But powerlessness is an act of becoming, not a given. Precisely by presuming the struggle is lost are struggles defeated before battle. The barrage of soldiers, political parties, paramilitaries, and NGOs had broken the working class fighting spirit that had defended Rempang from the September invasion. Class conflict, like war in general, obeys certain objective conditions that no amount of idealism can argue with. The given political-economic atmosphere, number of combatants, resources, and degree of organization are fixed amounts, though subject to changes over time. An immediate war of maneuver was indeed hopeless.

Industrial workers and university students in Batam had to mobilize together with the Rempang working classes if we were to stand any chance. But my meetings with union leaders and the unorganized anarchists in Batam unveiled only broken graveyards. It could be rebuilt, of course, and no doubt novel shoots will bloom in the future. We lacked then the organization and numbers to build organized working class solidarity in both Rempang and Batam. In any case, the required wars of position to prepare for eventual conflict are by nature wars of attrition, prolonged and difficult travels over harsh terrain. The willingness to undergo these processes had perhaps existed during the September invasion. Alas by then even the potential willingness appeared remote. People had grown used to having heroes fight in their name. NGO handouts and charity along with the subsequent corrupt ecosystem destroyed nearly all semblance of grassroots initiative. Nearly everything had to be built from scratch.

We did our best to do what we could. Our agroecology work continued and the cooperatives eventually grew independent enough that my technical supervision wasn't required. Lemongrass production provided another promising venture that could go without synthetic input. A daring experiment with chili peppers is still ongoing today. If successful, it would be the first time chili peppers are grown without synthetic input on Rempang soil at such a scale. The climactic instability of the Riau islands made agriculture challenging even with synthetic input and even harder without. Its bauxite soil is highly alkaline, full of aluminum at levels poisonous to many plants, and low in nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium alike. Traditionally only backyard plants, fruit trees, and sweet potato varieties were cultivated. Sago was harvested from the wild. Recent celebrated attempts at introducing rice into Rempang are another example of Javanese colonialism over indigenous diets. But I digress. The only relative benefit of agroecology in Rempang was the abundant seafood waste and potential for seaweed fertilizer made from rengkam. Fermented seafood waste became a staple on our farms. Rengkam is widely used to good effect too, though I'm skeptical about its heavy metal content.

I'd slept over at the guard post where the exodus from AMAR-GB had occurred. Some peasants had experience working with NGOs and explained their refusal in terms of poor past experiences. The resulting dependency, discrimination, and authoritarian structures were the main reasons for refusal. A curious peasant called for revolution – the declaration alone took all the courage he could muster. The atmosphere was scared, defeated, and yet hopeful in knowing each was there for the other, now and in the times to come. It was a fragile arrangement. Politically, we were pinned by NGOs on one side and the state on the other, both with vast economic resources to which we couldn't compare. What we could offer was the slower but more resilient construction of democratic structures that could chip away at everyday economic problems. Or so I thought. We were certainly building sustainable solutions that were visibly chipping away at debt, landlessness, and dependence on synthetic input. But from the political and military standpoint, we had far too little to defend our economic work. Soon this weakness would be mercilessly attacked.

I don't know if my focus on building economic work first was an error. Certainly, it was the only available route. No working class demographic in Indonesia would be politically aroused by an individual classed as unemployed, Chinese, and queer. Nor would military resistance have any content without economic improvements. Nonetheless, I regret my tunnel vision upon these three categories. No less important and much more neglected was care work within the organization. Heart-to-heart conversations were abundant at first and I had the patience to provide care for many. But after the intensely dangerous circumstances, I was in fight or flight mode. To my credit, my grasp

of political economy was no less precise. But I couldn't provide the care and emotional work required to build the ties of camaraderie required by the situation. The error was less in my inability and more in the priorities I had. I should've given myself the time and space required to rest, recalibrate, and heal from my wounds instead of diving straight back into my previous schedule. I wish I'd listened more to my bodily instincts. The fundamental void was my lack of love for myself. These days I'm dedicating a lot of labor to learning these important practices, which come naturally to children and have been beaten out by capitalist hegemony.

The choice to prioritize economic work emerged from discussions with the people I worked with. Conversations in fields, living rooms, guard posts, on fishing boats and under soursop trees designed our collective practice. By then I'd realized no rote imitation of movements elsewhere nor historical inspirations could do the trick. In any case, I remain today ideologically ill-defined. No doubt I work towards, or at least try for, a communist society without states. Within the intermediary processes, I think establishing a dictatorship has the opposite effect; Marx himself meant something very different by dictatorship of the proletariat. But otherwise I borrow from idiosyncratic traditions and the present context. Our writing classes likewise discussed translations of Kafka and comedic plays by Tagore, who became our class' favorite writer above Mao and Lenin.

There was something overtly religious and Christian in the revolutionary traditions I'd learned from. Chernyshevsky's heroic Rakhmetov slept on nails in *What is to be Done?* and denied himself worldly pleasures. Stepniak's martyr in *Career of a Nihilist* shared the orthodox Catholic inability for pleasure, sexual repression, and the barely disguised view that death arrives with salvation. "The Revolutionary Cathecism", written by Nechayev and Bakunin, is one of the most disgusting works I've read. It starts with the proclamation that the revolutionary "is a doomed man" who must be "tyrannical toward himself" and "must be tyrannical toward others." The document is concerned with stripping the revolutionary from every sentimentality, friendship, love, and desire that doesn't serve the singular purpose of revolution. Frankly, I'd sooner leave the world than follow such fascist precepts. The list goes on and on, though of course there are notable exceptions. These historical examples are replicated in our present movements. Such individuals are without exception unpleasant to be around, no matter how efficient at building organizations they might be.

I returned to my house only to find a broken, forcibly opened window. The house was full of alcohol spills, plastic bottles, cigarette butts, and for dessert, a huge clump of human excrement in the bedroom. I ran outside and nearly vomited. Others very kindly volunteered to clean my house. I felt guilty for my class background and intolerance for painful smells. Fortunately my friends were generous and charitable with me. Most were furious and a few suggested that the paramilitary did this as an intimidation tactic. At first, I'd suspected the racist mob. My intuition was proven wrong. That night and on every night that followed, paramilitary thugs would loudly drive in front of my house and sit there for a few hours. The next morning, an indigenous leader brought me breakfast. He started by saying he respects my work and wants no harm done to me, which wasn't a good sign. He claimed that the land army was paying him for intelligence work. What followed was a detailed hour-by-hour report of all my activities the day prior, complete with everyone I'd met and what I had for dinner. He read Anti Peasant Peasant Day, an essay I'd published a few months before, over breakfast and suggested I take down my Instagram account if I wanted to remain safe from persecution. Every subsequent morning, the fiasco would repeat itself. I treated him casually with respect and shared the food I had with him regardless.

The situation struck me as tremendously funny. This old, university-educated, and well-off gentleman before me was being paid to follow me around as I read books, worked in farms, ate my meals, spoke in meetings, and wrote my essays. I entertained driving in circles to spite him. I wish I did. The pile of human excrement piqued my curiosity too. Had they shat together in one go, naked butts encircling a targeted spot? Or had they taken turns going to the bathroom in the same place? Surely the effort required coordination and technique. The thought of hired macho men collectively shitting themselves was amusing. The paramilitary had been sleeping and working together for months. There was something homoerotic in their intimidation tactic, which had it not been repressed could've been a source of great pleasure for them. In that case, though, they probably wouldn't have channeled their hatred and violence against their own desires onto unarmed children in Rempang.

Humor made the grim situation bearable and even fun. Far too often we revolutionaries treat ourselves far too seriously. We're only specks in a chaotic and unpredictable ferment, each trying to enjoy our short, often miserable lives. There's a revolutionary quality in an indomitable laughter from the belly. Laughter and the comedic standpoint

turn tragic circumstances into expressive carnivals, our repressed lives into collective art that refuses to bend the knee. The Greeks thought comedy and tragedy were two sides of the same coin. Could you imagine a world where workers freely laughed at the serious rigidity with which politicians conduct themselves? From Chaplin to Marx, contemporary comedy has produced biting critiques of fascism, transmuting horrific circumstances into shared joy and incisive political theory. Egyptian mythology proposed that the world was created by laughing gods. Aristotle thought newborns only become human beings after learning to laugh. Nietzsche went as far as naming one of his books *The Gay Science*. The *Zhuangzi* is comedic in form and the *Dao De Jing* declared “anything that causes no laughter cannot be considered the course.”

The children in Rempang taught me resilience and strength came not from forcing oneself to feel and act a certain way. Rather, the strength I sought emerged endlessly from play and laughter. Rempang was most of the time an arid valley without smiles. Yet the children I cared for took the circumstances in light stride. Their capacity to care for one another, play with flowers, swim in the beach, sing without purpose, roast little foraged shrimps together, and make an unrepenting joke out of life amazed me. By far, the Rempang children were the strongest of us all. There is much to learn from them if only we adults would drop our arrogant pretense. As Herzen wrote, “laughter contains something revolutionary ... Voltaire’s laughter was more destructive than Rousseau’s weeping.” For my views and citations on laughter, above all I’m indebted to Bakhtin’s history of laughter. Bakhtin, a Soviet exile, remains an underrated Marxist thinker worth engaging with.

More friends and a journalist from Singapore came to visit. We passed by the NGO faction on the way home. Someone, likely paid by the state, had put up banners condemning the NGO’s presence. I don’t wish for a monopoly over resources, so I asked the journalist to interview them. After we finished speaking, people started asking us for money. A grandmother said the money was for booze. I thought the shameless parasitism was a joke. But they insisted. Dependence upon the NGO and its charitable activities had turned these once daring fighters into pitiable parasites. The sight was truly pathetic. I refused to translate their requests and we soon left. Later rumors would emerge about my alleged monopoly over money provided by international journalists. All the money from external media went into our cooperatives and I have detailed notes marking every transaction to the penny. When friends gave me money to help me stay fed and housed, I’d always ask for confirmation that this was for my own use and not Rempang’s. Their accusations are projections of their own fiscal wrongdoing. As always we Chinese in Indonesia are but convenient scapegoats.

My highlights in Rempang were the few visits I got from friends in Singapore. Perhaps we share a similar emotional world from our shared class background. We were all trying to figure out how we could build a better world together. That shared motivation and our history of having organized together in Singapore, though usually brief and unproductive, led to a sense of camaraderie. I was always happy to get a fresh set of eyes to rethink our circumstances and struggles. Greater yet was the joy in being able to share this small glimpse of the world we want to live in that we had spent the last year building. Our dreams weren’t mere fantasies. The theories weren’t ancient bygone relics. A better world is possible. The air felt electric and the gargantuan bourgeois state appeared like a mortal foe. The cooperatives had on average 18% returns per month on initial capital. There were many hiccups and difficulties but nothing unsurpassable. People’s debts were shrinking and the landless tilled occupied land. Dependence on synthetic input decreased over time. The shift in political consciousness was more subtle and ephemeral, impossible to quantify, and resistant to change. Still, the written works produced show an evident shift over time. A farmer joked that if Rempang falls, he’d love to continue fighting in Palestine. That such jokes were possible! This proto-revolutionary historical spirit, the mood of times yet to arrive and the agentic sense that we were midwives of our own lives, is my most memorable treasure from Rempang. Even in the depressing times to follow, an unperturbed faith in myself, my work, and the lovely collectives in which I was part never departed. I’ve no doubt that the future of Nusantara belongs to we dreamers of the earth.

The next day, paramilitary thugs came on three lorries to break down a house. Brief conflict ensued and some were held back. Others slipped through. People requested we follow the thugs to take pictures. The thugs weren’t happy to see our cameras. We were followed by men shouting from bicycles. Our scared driver anxiously blurted that we were tourists. We were clearly not. A rodeo chase in the forest ensued and a few farmers made sure we got out safely. A fisherman hiding in the shrubbery overheard the paramilitary plan to stop our vehicle once we left for Batam. We were all scared to the marrow. My hand was slightly trembling. I tried to joke about it but the humor

fell flat. We were in the NGO faction territory too and the farmers close to me were distant. I wanted to evacuate before the paramilitary consolidated. The NGO faction had the gall to negotiate for money when we asked to borrow their car. Thankfully the anarchist punks had been on their way a few hours before the conflict and arrived just in time. The car had a few pieces of self-defense equipment. Farmers armed with hidden machetes guarded our car. Only one kept going with us to Batam, a disabled farmer with a disabled child who was our premiere agroecology researcher. He wanted to feed his kids healthy vegetables and money was a secondary consideration. Doing so on four hectares of occupied land was a daring feat. He told us during the trip that if anyone were to block our car, we should run them over and he'd finish the job.

We had a large meal to celebrate our trials. My friends had to sprint to catch the night ferry. They'd sail back to Singapore, land of the colonizers who made the prior chase possible. We were stuck in Batam with thugs on our trail. The following days were rough. I moved hotels every day, going strategically around streets I was familiar with to make sure I wasn't trailed. My anarchist punk friends were followed, however, and their shop was physically torn down. The items on sale were destroyed. Thugs had shat on the floor again. I suppose it's similar to a painter's watermark. My stack of clothes, wet in the rain, were still in their car trunk. Of course, laundry wasn't a priority. Half my clothes today are marked by fungal rot from a week of wet decomposition. I'm looking forward to thrifting once I visit the city. Two large men in black clothes were identified by eyewitnesses. I encouraged my friends to make a police report and media campaign around the violent act but they thought it'd be safer to lay low. It's almost never safer to lay low, though there are moments when we must. Submission educates our oppressors on what we will accept without resistance. Like carnivorous predators, they'll continue poking and prodding for additional compromises. That road only ends in our quiet demise. In contrast, the political cost of suppressing the loud and articulate is much higher. Ideas and artworks can't be murdered. Indeed, repression only makes the voices grow louder, with or without the author. Martyrdom immortalizes works into at least cult status. Pramodya is no longer alive and yet there is no revolutionary in Indonesia who hasn't read his work. As he would say, the dead speak in their own way.

Support from Singapore made our work possible. Without it, we couldn't have afforded the security cameras, safehouses, and transport routes that kept us safe. The work would've happened regardless. Perhaps we'd have starved a little more and the thugs would've had less fears about hurting me. For all my friends, acquaintances, and the strangers in Singapore who believed in our work, I've written this piece in English. Later on, I'll translate it into Indonesian. I should confess that translation isn't my strong suit; mostly it's a laborious annoyance. Should anyone wish to help me translate, I'd gladly welcome a collaboration. Solidarity from Indonesia was no less astounding. Airport unions offered to extract me out of Batam, a writer offered his mother's house in mainland Sumatra, other unions offered safehouse networks to pass me around, political organs offered aid with a media campaign, and peasant organizations offered to hide me in their remote villages. Suffering doesn't teach and there's nothing to romanticize about repression. But the solidarity I experienced during those days empowered my faith in my fellow man like no experience had before. It was touching to be held so dearly by so many who believed in me as a person and in my work. I cried a lot in my hotel room. The situation was dangerously absurd and the violence disproportional to the minimal revolutionary qualities in our practical efforts. I laughed a lot at how tragic and funny my life had become. I think the hotel workers thought I was a rich teenager gone mad, moving in and out of hotels every other day, invariably leaving a messy trainwreck in my rooms and walking around the neighborhood in circles. One of the hotel workers would quietly put on a sour smile while cleaning my room, as if saying, "*really*, this shit again?" I hope I didn't cause them too much trouble.

The situation escalated as my parents told me they'd started working with the cops. My mom was worried and asked the cops to look into my well-being. I had cut off contact apart from monthly texts to let them know I was okay. Or not okay, rather, but still alive and kicking. The cops asked my parents to convince me to erase my writings, take down my social media, and leave Rempang. An intelligence officer got in touch with my mom, and if my mom is to be believed, company reports were requesting the state to charge me as an alleged provocateur of illegal actions. She read the reports and confirmed that it had my correct phone numbers. My dad visited Batam, asking me to leave Rempang immediately. Our conversation assured him that I wasn't delusional enough to burn myself for a losing fight. He tried to convince me that I should at least try becoming a leftist party leader like in the pink tides of Latin America. He thought my skills, intelligence, and knowledge were wasted on racist workers who would only

take without giving back. I was a natural statesmen, he said. The claim is a funny miscomprehension. Not only am I repelled by authority, I'm nearly incapable of giving orders. My anarchist punk friend followed me along to make sure he wasn't working with the cops. She hid herself very poorly, walking in right after we did and sitting next to us with her child. Once I'd confirmed that he wasn't with the cops, my main worry was the mental toll that my life decisions had taken on his health. We departed on amicable terms and he bought me Indian flatbread for breakfast the day after. Apart from my friends in Singapore whom I painfully miss, I miss the abundant South Asian cuisines the city-state has. I hope I'll soon find good Indian and Punjabi restaurants in Indonesia. My parents are innocent – at least in this matter – victims and I hate the Indonesian state for using petty intimidation tactics against them. Up until a few weeks ago, my mom had continued receiving daily intimidation calls.

During the next two months I'd visit Rempang once every few weeks, with nearly everyone I worked with advising me against returning. I myself was in fight or flight mode, severely traumatized and unable to live without fear even in my hotel room. War neurosis and shell shock are more apt phrases to describe the condition than PTSD, a medical jargon that covers up our violent and traumatizing society. Friends from Singapore Climate Rally visited but I was so distraught that I fear I barely remember our trip together. I do remember idiotically picking a fraudulently expensive tourist trap for dinner. I hope their memories of the trip aren't as painful as mine. I was forcing myself to keep fighting when I needed rest and it was starting to hurt the people around me. During calls with friends, I could barely listen and my sentences appeared scarcely coherent. It's difficult not to regard those few months without apology. By then, I realized I wanted a safe space to pursue my hormone replacement therapy and a quiet, peaceful place to heal while embedded in nature. Pride and a stubborn refusal to admit defeat kept me going. Underneath was the fear that without everything I'd built in Rempang together with so many, I'd end up a failure in my own eyes, a dropout with nothing to show for their recklessness.

Residents from the NGO faction soon caught a paramilitary thug while he was tearing down an AMAR-GB banner. Things got ugly. Dozens of thugs attacked the kampungs at midnight, armed with machetes, iron bars, and bows. Many were severely injured, the guard posts were torn down, and valuables were destroyed. Police presence in Rempang became ironclad in the subsequent weeks. My anarchist punk friends and I were warned not to step foot on Rempang. I came a few more times anyway but most had become too scared to meet me. Those closest to me had been followed by paramilitary thugs, from their farms to their homes. Nearly everyone made it clear that they didn't want to see me suffer more than I already had, including those in the NGO faction. I felt rejected and abandoned. How ironically painful to be exiled against your will from collective efforts you helped build. It was time to go.

I knew I'd needed a different environment to evolve then. I wanted to confront the shame and guilt that had kept me in Rempang past our expiration date. I wanted to try hormone replacement therapy too. My friends had told me and I'd realized I couldn't do so safely in Rempang. I went elsewhere with the mutual aid of friends who have since kept on supporting me during my time of need.

Fast forward a few months, many in Rempang cut off contact. I asked for an explanation and none was given. Whenever I asked if I had wronged them, they'd anxiously say no. Only later would I learn that the company had started bribing people around 4500 SGD, enough money to keep a family afloat for a year in Rempang. The terms remain unknown to me. All the cooperatives, land occupations, and agroecology research remain ongoing. The only noticeable change is that they're no longer in touch with me. Again, the reader's interpretation is as good as mine.

Upon receiving the news, I barely ate and could scarcely bring myself out of bed. In the moment, all our work appeared pointless, I appeared broken to myself, and life seemed scarcely worth living. My favorite fermented barnacles and iced lime teas turned bland. The morning breeze, so cozy and cool only a few hours before, became an annoying hindrance. I'd still held the expectation that I'd return to Rempang again to try, with my anarchist punk friends this time. Those dreams, the final remnant of what remained of our future together, were shattered. Personally, I saw myself as a failure, who'd dropped out only to spend months building a sand castle now destroyed by waves. I've been depressed before and even suicidal. The grief felt unbearably familiar. But something was different from my previous crises. An inner crystalline belief that my labor, ideas, and person were invaluable persisted amidst the turbulence. Integrating the traumatic experiences and emotional turmoil took a long, painful time. More frankly, it remains an ongoing process, as with all my other wounds and experiences.

No doubt we could've done much more had my own timing coincided with the September protests. Had it been possible to scout and organize an ideologically and interpersonally committed cell before diving right into the organizing work together, events might've taken a different course. My own collective in Singapore couldn't speak fluent Bahasa and in any case, didn't seem interested in abandoning Singapore to work in Rempang. My efforts in organizing as an individual strengthened my sympathies for organized revolutionary anarchism further, specifically the *especifismo* tradition in Latin America. Our brief efforts to congeal into a specific anarchist organization, unfortunately, started to bear fruit only after I'd left Rempang and the bribes went through. Soon after we lost interest and momentum. Nearly everyone had to take time off to wrap their heads around what happened and so while we remain friends, an organization appears unlikely for now.

There remain lessons for a specific anarchist organization, which I hope will soon materialize in our region. There is almost no openly accessible education and propaganda material in Bahasa for the rural context. The available materials for working class education is minimal and the quality is poor. I had to translate Mao, Lenin, Marx, Kropotkin, and others on my own. Discriminated minorities should be accompanied by organizers from the hegemonic demographic. Every time I was with my anarchist punk friends, they could help manage and absorb the abuse directed at me. Otherwise, I was left to handle the intense and constant pressure alone with minimal emotional support. Vice versa, I could see things that others couldn't given my unique positionality. Our diversity is a weapon to be celebrated and strategically used.

Some of our cooperatives have been assimilated into the NGO faction ecosystem. Work that started out as directly democratic and progressive by collective design can, due to changes in the localized balance of class power, become another tool for exploitation. There is no political vacuum. The influence of democratic communism and capitalist hegemony exist in inverse proportion. That said, there's a lot of grey to be found in government workers, company thugs, soldiers, journalists, researchers, and everyone in general. Anarchism would benefit from rejecting the reduction of politics into exclusive friends and enemies, which dehumanizes and draws our borders far too rigidly.

Eventually, I came to accept the conditions that made the bribes tempting. The more I reflected on each individual circumstance, the more understandable our losses appeared. Take S, a key organizer who's honest to a fault. His wife had been sick for years, requiring 200\$ in medication every month. They have a young daughter studying in school. He'd borrowed 100\$ from the credit cooperative and was unable to pay back the money on time. His beans had been toppled by howling winds. He had basically no money then. An amnesty on interest was agreed upon and through mutual aid, another field of crops was coming along. The vegetables grew in promising fashion until harsh storms fell upon the archipelago. Climate change hurts the working classes the most and is a threat against working class organization. He explained the crop failure with trembling shame in his voice. Even coming to the meeting must've taken incredible courage. The \$4500 bribe could kickstart his farm, cover his wife's medical bills, and ensure their family's survival through another year. Knowing him, any surplus would probably be given to the cooperative and mutual aid efforts once he gets back on his feet. It's impossible to say whether I would've acted differently in his shoes, though I hope I would.

Any attempt at closure from my end would be disingenuous. As always the future appears hidden behind impenetrable mist, always becoming, fermenting, and vulnerable to the unforeseen. That said, the specific current circumstances appear bleak and so too the broader historical context with Indonesia's nationwide efforts to industrialize. These shifts incur immense dispossession, exploitation, and bloodshed to the working classes, but aren't where history ends. If Rempang Eco-City is built, the required conditions for industrial production will be a hotbed for labor unions and working class organizing. In the distant future, solidarity between workers there and in Singapore has the potential to play a crucial role in the crises to come. The experiences from organizing streetfights, protests, cooperatives, and land occupations in Rempang will remain painful memories. But the lessons imparted will live on and shape the history of class struggle in Batam for decades.

I don't regret dropping out and having tried my hardest in Rempang. In the brief moment I was there, I got a glimpse into the world of my dreams. Democratic control over production became more than a theoretical ideal. In Rempang, my ideological convictions obtained concrete, emotional, embodied, and experienced form. And who knows how the seeds sown will grow? A kid told me that she wanted to grow up to be just like me, free from wage slavery, writing and reading in leisure, playing chess and chasing kids around, going from village to village to build a better world. Perhaps one day she'll find this very piece.

I've learned much about the life I want to live. I'm not so bothered by military repression, playing hide and seek with thugs, or the threat of poverty. These ills still arrive daily in my nightmares. But I know that with luck, effort, and solidarity, those hurdles can be overcome. Far scarier is the thought that I'd waste my life as yet another exploited cog in the machine, complicit, helpless, and apathetic to the travesties of our age. Not for once did I consider backing down to the threats and intimidations. Doing so was unthinkable. No doubt to live such a life entails unavoidable and serious dangers. "Please don't die" became a bittersweet goodbye that was all too often unknowingly repeated by my well-intentioned friends in Singapore. Yet before a life worth living, where every morning was an exciting dawn and every night a curtain of dreams for tomorrow, death appeared laughable. I'd lived every day, to the best of my ability, to its absolute fullest. Back then it appeared silly that my friends would fear such a supposedly grave misfortune, which I'd have begrudgingly welcomed as inseparable from life.

Regardless of its fate, Rempang will live on in us. Our naive attempt at revolutionary activity came perhaps a few decades too early. A revolution requires apt political and economic timing as much as organized collective efforts. Yet it's precisely through these losses and individuals who hold the revolutionary fire alive in their everyday lives does revolutionary transformation become possible.

Gone is my meritocratic belief that things will necessarily work out if I do my best. The same circumstance had been faced by my admirable precedents. All those I'd learned from were outlived by what they sought to defeat. Yet the miracle that continues to inspire many like myself isn't the triumph. What shines through the mist is how in every age and circumstance, some have tried to live with integrity, courage, and care. Frankl mourned how the best don't survive concentration camps. Pramodya's notes are full of eulogies to the inmates who gave too much and died too early. Gramsci rotted away, bit by bit, teeth by teeth, in his prison cell. In a sense, it's disorienting to live in such a naked and senseless world. We ask if our lives have meaning, a question only posited under empires and capital, to seek an external justification for our miserable lives. While others are free to live as they so choose, I don't believe any amount of meaning and impact can compensate for a wretched life. What matters is to live in a fearless, comedic, and ungovernable fashion, which is its own reward.

For every celebrated Pramodya, there are dozens lost to history, their notebooks and deeds buried by time, never to be discovered. Yet somehow I don't doubt these nameless rebels would've been glad with the lives they've lived. I'm certain, too, that even the silenced speak in their own way. Without medals and monuments to commemorate how we lived, those buried in the soil compost to nourish the roots that would later bloom vibrant flowers and sweet fruits. No life worth living is ever lost to time. Gramsci himself compared his work to chicken manure. Tris Metty, a lesbian cofounder of the Indonesian Women's Movement, has been erased by our cisheterosexual history. Yet these icebergs surface nonetheless to find those whose lives were destined to touch. Having sent every journalist I've encountered to interview others less connected than myself, little about my work survives in the written press. A friend from an anarchist collective where I used to live asked an NGO acquaintance if he had met me in Rempang. The NGO worker said there was nobody called Juan in Rempang. So are our lives erased in real-time. But what happened in Rempang lives on in my heart and that of countless others, us sweet potatoes hidden from view. Who knows how else our lives will ripple onward and onward?

Here is my work for the few who will discover it, fewer still who will read it, and even fewer still who will understand it. I trust in due time my work will find those who need to find it.

To the children of Rempang, whose magnanimity knows no bounds, I dedicate my ode.

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Juan Lee
Ode to Rempang
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