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## Contested regionalism in Southeast Asia: the politics of the trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline Project

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article analyses the trans-ASEAN gas pipeline project (TAGP) as a way to reconceptualise regional dynamics in Southeast Asia and the forces shaping them – what we call ‘contested regionalism’. For this task, we propose an analytical framework that delves within and beyond the state, and which places emphasis upon the role of material and ideological factors operating at particular moments in time. The framework reveals that the tensions acting within and upon ASEAN and the TAGP shape the regional approach to energy governance in such a way that the gas pipeline project – much like other ‘regional’ projects – is unlikely to ever come close to fulfilling its brief or that of its masters. What is more probable is that the project’s form will continue to be conditioned by entrenched politico-economic realities and the influence of dominant ideologies – especially during times of crisis – that have the capacity to exacerbate existing regional animosities and disparities.*

**Keywords and phrases:** ASEAN, trans-ASEAN gas pipeline (TAGP), energy governance, regionalism, Southeast Asia

There is no shortage of discussion, both popular and within the academe, about regionalism and the organisations typically associated with it. Indeed, the evolution of regional projects, such as the European Union (EU), MERCOSUR (*Mercado Común del Sur*), the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has provided scholars and journalists alike with an abundance of material over which to muse.

Much of the discussion over regionalism typically relates to notions of economic integration and security, unsurprisingly given the focused mandates of several of the regional groupings. Indeed, in the era of neoliberal globalisation and the so-called ‘War on Terror’, some have portrayed these regional groupings, and indeed regionalism itself, as being driven by countries attempting to navigate the tumultuous global political economy (Breslin, Higgott, and Rosamond 2002, 7; Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 2005, 3). In this vein, academic analyses of Southeast Asian regionalism have regularly looked at the ideas and initiatives emanating from organisations such as ASEAN and APEC, especially those associated with economic and security matters, and sought to understand how these are affected and shaped by the interplay between Southeast Asia’s constituent states.

Disentangling the complexities of regionalism, both in Southeast Asia and elsewhere, has been heavily conditioned by dominant approaches within political science, and, in particular the field of international relations. This article demonstrates the application of a framework for understanding regionalism that is somewhat of a departure from much of the existing work on the subject – a framework we call “contested regionalism”. Contested regionalism has its roots within political economy, and in particular those critical branches of it associated with social conflict theory. We apply our framework to an analysis of a regional initiative in energy cooperation – the trans-ASEAN gas pipeline (TAGP). While this is but a preliminary

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application, we think that there is significant utility in such an approach for at least two interconnected reasons.

First, our assessment tackles an area that has received less than its fair share of attention in the literature on regionalism: energy resources and the hard and soft infrastructure accompanying them. That the energy sector has had significantly less attention than other areas in this regard is unfortunate. The energy sector in Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, demonstrates the often complicated ways in which regions are constituted over time. In post-crisis Southeast Asia, the sector is conditioned by the strong influence of state actors, albeit through private corporate entities and under thinly veiled market policies, and which often operate transnationally within a regional context. Yet, this arrangement is far from a simple story of state interest and power, and our analysis of the TAGP unveils how the actions of private and state-controlled capital are intertwined within a complicated and evolving socio-political environment. Our investigation shows that the operation of capital in such regional locales in no way comes close to approximating any sort of neoliberal ideal (envisaged in a regional or global sense), despite the massive efforts of organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank in this regard. Unlike the idyllic picture painted by many energy analysts in the region, we show the reshaping of energy in Southeast Asia as being concretised into a messy amalgam, which is the product of the political and ideological conflicts and confluences of the past fifteen or so years, especially those associated with the economic crisis that struck the region in 1997. Second, an exploration of the regional dynamics undergirding the TAGP assists us in understanding the very forces that constitute a 'region' and its 'regionalism'. For those predisposed to particularly idealistic notions of regionalism, nationalism or neoliberalism, the reterritorialisations (understood as the political reconfiguration of specific sites or spaces) in Southeast Asian energy must engender unease (Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 2005, 8; Craig and Porter 2006, 24-25). Rather than being easily understood through the prescriptions and norms proclaimed by particular organisations or the battle between easily defined states with easily definable aggregate interests, the actual existing energy terrain in the region results from a complex interplay of historical animosities and tensions, politico-economic concerns and ideology. Central to this story is contradiction and complication: the production and reproduction of particular capitalist structures nationally and internationally that engender contradiction and which often generate contradictory responses (locally and regionally). This article argues that the nest of particular influences involved in this constitutive and reproductive process, especially state-linked and private capital, both drives and shapes grand regional initiatives aimed at enhancing investment in the energy sector and improving energy security. Thus, our exploration conceives of regionalism in a manner that is freed from the analytical boundaries of regionalism as simply the interplay between nation state actors, the result of particular organisational initiatives or the influence of particular ideas and norms – foci central to approaches that we feel reveal only part of the regionalist picture.

Subsequently, this paper focuses upon the TAGP – an ambitious plan to network existing and prospective gas pipelines throughout Southeast Asia – as an opportunity to analyse the way in which myriad interests, political, material, ideological and otherwise, shape the end form that regionalism takes. The article draws upon a framework that is deeply imbued by political economy approaches influenced by or close to social conflict theory (Chaudhry 1994, 1997; Rodan, Hewison, and Robison 2001; Carroll 2007). It also owes much to a well-matched

approach applied by Jayasuriya (2004) and others to analyse aspects of regionalism different to those that we are concerned with here – in particular regional economic integration. Finally, it also aligns with the approach of Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw (2005) that emphasises regions as ‘always in the making – constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed – through social practice and discourse (Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 2005, 1)’ and which emphasises the role of state and non-state actors in such a process. In this respect, our framework of “contested regionalism” aligns with those that seek to delve into the very politics of regionalism by investigating the material and ideational forces below, within and above the state across time. Such a method is a significant departure from many of those approaches to regionalism emanating from realist, institutionalist and constructivist perspectives (Jayasuriya 2004: 2), although retains room for incorporating some of the insights of such approaches, in particular perhaps, those within the constructivist camp.

Crucial to the analysis below of the TAGP and regionalism are perspectives gathered during fieldwork in Southeast and East Asia in 2007 and early 2008. Such perspectives have been complimented by a survey of the broad array of work on regionalism (including ‘new regionalism’) and Southeast Asian energy infrastructure. The article begins by describing the regionalism out of which the TAGP has emerged and which, in turn, shapes its form. The point here is not simply to describe the form that regionalism takes but to further elaborate the importance of a framework that allows the consideration of the complex and often contradictory politics of regional political projects over time. The second section delves into the politics of TAGP, and in particular two sections of its existing form: pipelines between Indonesia and Singapore and Myanmar to Thailand. These cases reveal the pressures that operate upon TAGP as a regional project, shaping the form of regionalism that emerges. They also suggest prospects for other regional efforts. Here we see the utility of placing political interests (in particular those below, within and above the state) at the centre of our analytical framework for understanding the nature of regionalism in Southeast Asia.

Indeed, the framework reveals a significant disconnect between the grand ambitions of ASEAN for the TAGP and the extant politico-economic topography regionally and globally, a topography dominated by both private and state-connected capital operating in relation to ever shifting politico-economic tectonics. This suggests that while regional prescriptions emerge in response to various anxieties and interests identified by organisational structures such as ASEAN, it is the battle of a much broader and highly divided array of interests operating within the competitive and contradictory global political economy that defines the form of Southeast Asian regionalism. In the final section of the article we offer some conclusions as to the future trajectory of TAGP and Southeast Asian regionalism more generally.

#### *A framework for understanding Southeast Asian regionalism and the TAGP*

It is essential to analyse TAGP as an example of regionalism that is somewhat distinct from the institution at the centre of its promotion (ASEAN). This requires the adoption of a framework that breaks free of the binds of heavily ‘state-as-black-box’ and organisational/institutional-centric approaches, and which allows us to delve deeper into the political machinations that deliver the tapestry of relationships and initiatives evident in Southeast Asia and which mould a project like TAGP. In the section below we first present what we see as the most critical formative experiences

and pressures influencing regionalism and enunciate a useful analytical toolset for investigating it and a project such as the TAGP. We should be clear that we see institutions, organisations, states and ideas as important. However, our starting point is with the politics – that is, the very manifestation of power – that produces particular forms of institutional and ideational consolidation, and ergo, the regionalism that we see. In short, we seek to describe regionalism as a historical-political process.

Commentators on ASEAN's foundations have understood the organisation's origins within the context of attempts by member states to provide assurance against the vicissitudes of the global geopolitical environment while at the same time attempting to mitigate regional security threats and suspicions (Severino 2006). Yet while those close to ASEAN trumpet its successes in satisfying such demands, especially the prevention of conflict between member states, achievements that can be unambiguously attributed to the organisation have been modest. Further to this, it is important to consider ASEAN's evolution as being related to, yet somewhat distinct from the Southeast Asian regionalism that is the setting for the trans-ASEAN gas pipeline network. Indeed, despite ASEAN's intensely collegial-sounding output, from ASEAN's formative 'Bangkok Declaration' in 1967 to its recent charter and the myriad conferences and meetings that it holds every year, in many ways it remains an organisation that is but one player influencing the regionalism unfolding in Southeast Asia.

Throughout its forty-one year history, ASEAN's pronouncements have been replete with phrases emphasising 'the spirit of equality and partnership' and the importance of working together for the mutual benefit of member country populations (see for example ASEAN 1967, 1976). Yet, such pronouncements have often been in significant tension with the actual actions within and between ASEAN's member states, not to mention other interests within member countries. This has been attributed by some to the loose or 'soft' regionalism that characterises the so-called 'ASEAN way', an approach that emphasises non-interference in the affairs of another member state, consensus-based decision-making, institutional minimalism and non-legalistic and informal cooperation (Acharya 1997, 320; Beeson 2002, 560; Acharya 2004, 256).

The most recent, but by no means only, example of such tensions between ASEAN's rhetoric and the actions of its members occurred just prior to the release of the organisation's charter in late 2007 – the preamble of which explicitly mentioned adhering to human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law – when Myanmar brutally cracked down upon dissenting groups within its borders that were protesting the ruling junta's decision to remove fuel subsidies (Arnold 2007; ASEAN 2007). Another well-known example of ASEAN's efforts at an organisational level contrasting significantly with the actions of its individual member states and the interests within them is the signing of the 2002 Agreement on Trans-Boundary Haze which failed to prevent severe burn-off related hazes in the region in 2005 and 2006 as ASEAN members continued to pollute the air with impunity. Indeed, as commentators have noted, despite efforts to pursue stronger regional engagement ASEAN is well known for a distinctly mismatched brand of regionalism exhibiting 'lofty targets and pedestrian achievements' (Arnold 2007).

However, a distinct form of regionalism does operate in Southeast Asia and ASEAN plays a role. Important for our purposes here, however, is to understand regionalism not as emanating from ASEAN (or any other single organisation for that matter), so to speak, but to understand ASEAN initiatives as historically immersed within a complex amalgam of interests that have shaped and produced Southeast

Asian regionalism's evolving form. Contrary to the way that ASEAN envisions regionalism, we envision it as a contested process, of which ASEAN is merely a product.

For example, Southeast Asia and its constitutive elements, with their highly varied levels of economic development, has been shaped and forged over time by myriad ideological and material pressures. These have been, in no small way associated with both colonialism, Cold War geopolitics, and more recently, the region's increasing internment within the evolving structures of global capitalist production and consumption (Beeson 2002, 549-553, 555). Moreover, racial divisions (between ethnic Chinese and indigenous populations, for example) and intra-regional animosities and conflicts have also played a conditioning role in a region that is famous for a robust post-colonial legacy of authoritarianism (both 'soft' and 'hard') and a regional political economy defined by states heavily interwoven with sections of the capitalist class (Rodan, Hewison, and Robison 2001, 27; Beeson 2002, 551, 557) in what some have described as '*nomenklatura* capitalism' (Jayasuriya 2003). Finally, Southeast Asian regionalism has been recast in the face of the globalisation of neoliberalism, with the 1997 Asian Crisis and the intervention of the International Monetary Fund being particularly formative (Beeson 2002, 553-554).

This complicated historical legacy has bequeathed Southeast Asian countries with highly divergent states of economic and political development. In simple economic terms, consider the difference between Laos with a per capita GNI of US\$500 and Singapore, whose GNI rests at around US\$28,000 (World Bank 2007, nd). Likewise, a crude political survey of the region presents the observer with a sultanate (Brunei), a military junta (Myanmar), socialist and communist states respectively in Vietnam and Laos and a messy variety of democratic and quasi-democratic systems in the rest. Despite this complexity, organisations and initiatives have been inaugurated and consolidated over time in an attempt to reap the supposed benefits of regional connectivity. Crucially, they have regularly been tasked with addressing security issues and providing a bulwark against the vagaries of the prevailing global economic system (Acharya 1997, 323).

Understanding the diversity of economic and political form in Southeast Asia and its relationship to the TAGP as a regional initiative requires us to employ a particular framework. We see TAGP as an example of 'contested regionalism'; that is a regionalised manifestation of a set of relationships that includes, but which is not limited to, the institutional structures such as states and the regional bodies to which they are attached and which emerges from the very same politics affecting those. In saying this we are arguing that organisational/institutional-centric approaches tend to be rather limited in what they can reveal about regions and regionalism. Talking about states or organisations as actors in their own right is to imbue such structures with 'personalities' and capacities as if such bodies were sovereign individuals. However, our argument is that such structures and their associated brand of regionalism that is associated with them only have definition in relation to the politics that constitutes them and that this politics results from very concrete interests below, within and around these structures and the linkages between these. Thus, our framework, borrowing from Jayasuriya (2004, 2004), is fundamentally distinct from other approaches to understanding regionalism, especially those broadly characterised as rationalist (including realism and variants of institutionalism, such as neoliberal institutionalism) and constructivist (Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998).

For instance, realists tend to emphasise the existence of a 'national interest' as an aggregate imperative pursued by the state (Morgenthau 1948; Waltz 1959, 1979).

Subsequently they regularly see regionalism, other forms of multilateralism as an inherent constraint on the motives behind power-projecting states (Jayasuriya 2004, 2; Mearsheimer 1994-1995; Ikenberry 1998-1999). In contrast, we emphasise the importance of opening up the state (and the regional bodies that it is associated with) and argue that the actions of these groups must be placed in a deeper political context. Here, we are specifically concerned with revealing the structure of competing political economies (domestic, regional and global) and the multifaceted manner in which this impacts upon states and organisations, leading to a mix of conflict, cooperation, compromise and contradiction. Such conditioning factors assist us to understand why some actors within the state (and supra-state bodies) can pursue grand regional projects such as TAGP that are in significant tension with real politics. They also explain competing interests within, between, and beyond the state. The point here is that the state (and its organisational affiliates) needs to be dissected to reveal the political environment(s) to which they relate and of which they are products.

Subsequently, our approach also departs from those works (often highly descriptive) that extend a state as 'black box' analysis to the regional level by imbuing organisations such as ASEAN, either implicitly or explicitly, with a particular 'logic', which is often seen almost synonymously as constituting regionalism (see for example Sumsky 2006; Sridharan 2007, especially 48-61; Severino 2007). While it is convenient and simple to think of regional organisations and regionalism more generally in this way, it does little to assist an understanding of why organisational grand narratives and projects are announced yet are so difficult to implement. Some working within realist frameworks have presented us with some revealing critical analyses of ASEAN and the problematic nature of many analyses of regionalism (Martin Jones and Smith 2007), however they too often stop short of elaborating the very political constitution of the state (as noted above).

Our framework also departs from those approaches – broadly understood as institutionalist – that see institutions (such as those that seek to connect ASEAN member states through trade liberalisation or particular security arrangements) as rationally responding to particular problems (see Katsumata 2004). Instead, we see institutions not as abstract entities but as the product of particular power relationships, especially those associated with public and private capital. Finally, while our framework appreciates the influence of ideas and norms, which are central to constructivist analyses (Acharya 1997; Katzenstein, Keohane, and Krasner 1998, 679-680; Acharya 2004), we see the questions of whose ideas, which norms and why as the most central consideration to be made within a much broader structural framework. It is with this delineation of the variables that we consider analytically important that we turn to our example of 'contested regionalism' – the TAGP.

### *The TAGP as contested regionalism*

Natural gas is playing an increasingly important and evolving role in Southeast Asia, a role which differs between countries. In 2003, natural gas constituted approximately 27 percent of the fuel used for producing ASEAN's electricity (Roberts and Cull 2003: 16). In Myanmar, natural gas earned the military junta, famous for its human rights abuses, an estimated US\$2.7 billion in 2007, constituting almost half of its total exports (The Economist 2008, 28-30; Myint-U 2007). The foreign exchange earned from natural gas exports directly enables the junta remain in power in a country where 30% of the population live below the poverty line and infant mortality is almost 1 in

10 (The Economist 2008, 30). The gas exported by pipeline out of Myanmar goes to fuel the 3,645 MW Ratchaburi power plant, the largest in Thailand and a key supplier of electricity to that country's capital, Bangkok. To further complicate the mix, China and India (countries outside of the core ASEAN grouping) are interested in pipelines from Myanmar and a gaggle of sovereign and private actors are interested or have interests in Myanmar's gas fields (Lall 2006; Myint-U 2007).

In Indonesia, a long-time supplier of gas to countries such as Singapore and Northeast Asia (in 2002 the country accounted for around 21 percent of the world's liquefied natural gas [LNG] supply) and was by far the region's largest producer of natural gas, there is increasing domestic political pressure to set aside of gas resources for domestic consumption, despite the drive to secure foreign exchange (Bernama.com 2005; Thomson 2006: 73-74; ASEAN 2006; World Bank 2008) and the need to fulfil existing long-term contracts.

Simultaneously, Singapore, which draws significant amounts of gas from Indonesia, is choosing to diversify its energy supplies, in part by building an LNG terminal (to be owned and operated by a subsidiary of the national power company) as part of its future energy strategy (Singapore Power 2007; interview 2007?). The country already uses natural gas to power 80 percent of its electricity sector and utilizes natural gas as a feedstock for industrial production, and it is completely reliant on pipelines (for the moment) to import this precious fuel into the country.

All of this is conditioned by soaring demand for transportation fuels and electricity in the region and ideologically conditioned battles over how to manage this demand. Between 1990 and 2006, energy demand in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand topped 250% (Tan 2008). Furthermore, gas reserves in the region are being depleted whilst being subjected to greater demands resulting from intensified competition within the regional and global political economies intensifies (Thomson 2006, 73-74) – a trend further propelled by the heightened incentives to burn natural gas, a relatively cleaner fuel than alternatives such as coal or oil. Crucially, despite the market-friendly language used throughout the region post-1997 by government officials in relation to energy and the TAGP (see for example Lim 2002), gas distribution and energy supply more generally occupy a sensitive and contested space in which the state plays a core role. This said, the energy sector in many ASEAN countries, post-Asian crisis, constitutes a reterritorialised space (Craig and Porter 2006), taking on hybridised forms that often exhibit the competing legacies of neoliberalism, centralised state-control and the requirements of popular legitimacy in the face of energy constraints all at once (something explored in detail later in the article)

Within this evolving and politicised energy landscape, ASEAN envisions the TAGP as an extension to existing gas pipeline infrastructure (including existing bilateral connections), an interlinking network of pipelines capable of distributing gas throughout the region. It accompanies other transnational programmes, such as the ASEAN power grid, and is part of a broader strategy of energy cooperation operating under the umbrella of ASEAN. As of August 2007, eight cross-border gas connections are in place and operating), constituting important bilateral energy conduits from country to country (Beasley 2007). Organisationally, the TAGP is associated with the ASEAN Council of Petroleum (ASCOPE), which incorporates the national petroleum companies of ASEAN, and its Gas Centre located at Putrajaya, just outside of Kuala Lumpur. A TAGP Task Force (TAGP-TF), set up in 1999 and chaired by Malaysia's national oil company, PETRONAS, operates under ASCOPE,

reviewing recent discoveries, changes in gas demand and progress on infrastructure and institutional factors (ibid.).

ASEAN conceived the TAGP as a bid to better ensure regional energy security (ASEAN 2002; Roberts and Cull 2003: 17). Various ASEAN documents date the germination of the TAGP back around twenty years (ASEAN 2002; ASEAN Centre for Energy 2003). In the late 1980s, ASCOPE produced a study looking at the feasibility of regional gas pipeline connections (ASEAN Centre for Energy 2003) and between 1993 and 1996 a master plan was developed for regional gas development and use by a cooperative energy body, which was later incorporated into the ASEAN Centre for Energy, established between ASEAN and the European Commission (ibid.; Severino 2006, 332-333). Notably, the plan emphasised that gas trade within the region could yield healthy returns for investors, and recommended the investment of US\$10-15 billion in pipeline infrastructure (8,000-10,000 kilometres worth) between 2000 and 2020 (Severino 1999). The plan was endorsed at the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministers of Energy Meeting in mid 1996 and the TAGP could be seen in ASEAN's Vision 2020 statement of 1997, which articulated a desire to move towards greater economic integration and regional cohesion (ASEAN 1997; ASEAN Centre for Energy 2003). In the Hanoi Action Plan, released by the organisation a year later, a section was dedicated to highlighting the importance of energy security and efficiency in which it was determined that the 'policy framework and implementation modalities' be implemented by 2004 in order to facilitate the progression of the TAGP and the ASEAN Power Grid (ASEAN 1998).

In 2002, a TAGP memorandum of understanding was signed in Bali, which referenced earlier ASEAN agreements (such as the Agreement on ASEAN Energy Cooperation and the ASEAN Petroleum Security Agreement, both signed in 1986) that called for a strengthening of 'the economic resilience of the individual member countries as well as the economic resilience and solidarity of ASEAN' (ASEAN 2002). The MoU stated the importance of the project for achieving energy self-sufficiency and the importance of gas as an environmentally-sound fuel, plentiful in Southeast Asia (ibid.). The MoU established provisions for cooperation on studies on gas production, distribution and use. Importantly, the document was extremely vague on how such issues relating to the TAGP would be addressed. In this respect, there was an emphasis upon both individual and collective action on the part of ASEAN and its members to 'encourage cooperation and pooling of resources by the governments and/or private sector for joint projects subject to commercial viability pertaining to the TAGP Project' (ibid.). The document also stated a preference for, once again, taking individually and collectively driven measures in relation to studying the institutional issues of TAGP, while remaining mindful of issues pertaining to 'commercial and economic feasibility' (ibid.).

Despite an MoU, action plans and apparent determination at the organisational level, TAGP's progress has been extremely slow (Krismantari 2007: 3). While pipelines are in place, they in no way comprise a network to achieve the goals laid out by ASEAN – especially those attached to regional solidarity and energy self-sufficiency. Crucially also, of the pipeline connections already in place, it has been the simple drivers of supply and demand within a particular political-economic environment that have been most critical in determining progress bilaterally on pipeline connections – not the promotion of the project by ASEAN. To affirm this point, the next section looks at the evolution of two discrete sections of the TAGP, suggesting that the idea of a truly networked TAGP as a basis for closer regional cooperation is highly unlikely. What is possible, however, is the greater

interconnection of more buyers and sellers via pipelines around the region. Crucially though, many of these connections may not be the great promoters of collegiality, security and sustainability that many, like former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir (Mahathir 2002), have pitched the TAGP as potentially accomplishing.

### *The Sumatra-Batam-Singapore pipeline*

The manner in which the Sumatra to Singapore pipeline, another part of the TAGP, unfolded is particularly instructive of the manner in which a regional initiatives in Southeast Asia are driven not by ideas of cooperation and security or indeed by simply the actions of states (acting autonomously or in concert), but rather by the sometimes parochial and contradictory pressures from different and powerful interests. As this section explores, in this case we see the manner in which the state's interests actually manifest in contradictory ways, with certain sections of the state promoting agendas that are in tension with other sections. While entities within Jakarta no doubt were keen to generate foreign exchange from the project, the present shortage of gas supply to Batam (the original destination for the piped gas) has resulted in other sections of the state demanding that gas supplies to Singapore be turned off. The point here is that in a reterritorialised, post-crisis Southeast Asia, the public/private linkages generate a complicated regional dynamic, where state and non-state interest require analytical disaggregation.

Two years before the Asian financial crisis swept through Southeast Asia, having deleterious effects upon countries such as Thailand and Indonesia, the Export-Import Bank of Japan (now the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation) approved a loan to the Indonesian government for US\$195 million to finance the construction of pipelines (totalling 800kms in length) connecting the Grisik fields in south Sumatra with the central part of that island (Duri), with a spur line to supply gas for industry on Batam island, close to Singapore (Export-Import Bank of Japan 1997). Under the project the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was to contribute US\$218 million and the European Investment Bank US\$58 million (ibid.; Asian Development Bank 2002). The rationale behind the pipeline project was to facilitate the distribution of gas in Indonesia at a time of increasing energy demand and to assist the economy in diversifying away from domestic oil consumption, freeing up oil for export in order to earn foreign exchange (Export-Import Bank of Japan 1997; Asian Development Bank 1995, 2002). The freeing up of oil for export via the use of gas was to occur two key ways; firstly, by using some of the gas to assist in advanced oil extraction at Duri and, secondly, to replace oil consumption for energy generation.

During the early 1990s energy consumption was increasing in Indonesia by almost seven percent per annum and was projected to rise as the decade progressed (ibid.). It was feared that the country's increasing energy demands would force it to become a net oil importer around the turn of the century (something that happened in 2005, culminating with Indonesia even ending its affiliation with the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in 2008). With projected national gas reserves at the time of around 114 trillion square feet and ascending demand for energy, the project to push through pipes from Grisik to both central Sumatra (where it was to be used for recovering oil at Caltex's operations in Duri) and Batam (a 'special economic zone') appeared to make sound economic and environmental sense (ibid.; Asian Development Bank 1995, 2002). However, while the first pipeline to Duri was completed in 1998, the onset of the crisis brought with it a decline in gas demand in Batam, stalling that section of the project.

Despite an emphasis upon domestic supply, to both Duri and Batam, the original ADB project document mentioned the possibility of exporting gas from Batam to Singapore via pipeline (Asian Development Bank 1995, 17). However, this only received minimal attention, with the bulk of the justification of the project orientated towards the dual requirements at Duri and Batam. Given the economic situation at the time, this is unsurprising. Batam had been consolidating its position as one of Southeast Asia's 'special economic zones', a mere twenty kilometres from Singapore and offering attractive investment and production opportunities, especially through duty and tax exemptions and a supply of cheap labour (Guerin 2008). Such locales, offering cheap labour close to global shipping lanes and a port such as Singapore's only became more attractive in a post-Plaza Accord world, as Japanese capital went in search of cheaper production costs. In central Sumatra, the gas was also to be targeted towards the needs of that region's refinery, pulp and paper operations (Asian Development Bank 1995).

However, the arrival of the crisis saw much of the economic exuberance flooding through the region evaporate. The rapid change in circumstances that Asian crisis entailed, caused the section of the pipeline to Batam to be put on hold (Asian Development Bank 2006). By 1999, further gas discoveries in Indonesia and the identification of the Singapore market as a potential end target for the gas led the Indonesian government to request an extension to the duration of the original ADB loan, with the plan being to push the pipe originally envisaged to terminate at Batam all the way to Singapore (Asian Development Bank 2002).

This transnational extension of the pipeline – one of the first pieces of the TAGP – has been described by some as a 'fluke' (interview, 2007). Yet labelling the outcome as such treads dangerously close to undervaluing the very real pressures that conditioned the pipes evolution, not to mention the fact that the option of connecting to Singapore was always on the cards, no matter how timidly. Indeed, our framework of contested regionalism would suggest that such "flukes" are rather conditioned by evolving structural conditions. Thus, Batam's attractiveness to foreign capital pre-crisis had assisted in creating demand for energy. When this demand temporarily abated, energy rich/capital poor Indonesia was keen to earn foreign exchange in a post-crisis environment and energy poor/capital rich Singapore was eager to expand its array of energy importation options (which also included the first trans-national regional gas pipeline from Malaysia), the trans-national extension became an attractive option.

Interwoven into the mix are the interests of private players and the very real ideological influence of multilateral organisations such as the ADB and the World Bank and their ongoing impact within crisis and post-crisis environments. While the ADB agreed to extend their loan, conditions had been stipulated as part of the original agreement that the state national gas distribution and transmission company, Perusahaan Gas Negara (PGN), would be restructured from a 'state corporation to a limited liability company' (Asian Development Bank 2002, 2). Further to this a subsidiary company, involving a substantial private investment component, would be established to own and manage the pipeline assets. Here, there was a very strong push, evident in the loan documents and commensurate within the growing ascension globally of neoliberalism, to get private sector participation into the energy sector in Indonesia.

While PGN was transformed into a limited liability company by 1996, the process of finding a strategic investor for the subsidiary company took time (ibid.). However, ADB documents credit the Bank with pursuing an 'extensive and high-

level' policy dialogue with the Indonesian government, resulting in the approval by the government for the privatisation of a maximum of forty percent of the subsidiary company, Transmisi Gas Indonesia (ibid.). Indeed, further to this, in the project completion documents, the pipeline project was seen as crucial in contributing to securing neoliberal gas sector reforms and was credited with pioneering a 'unique method for introducing private equity into a previously state-owned operation.(Asian Development Bank 2006, 12-13)'

In this post-crisis environment, various interests, including the private sector and multilaterals, were agitating to deregulate and open up various sectors of the economy, especially within the energy sector (Roberts, Longstaff, and Khalil 2003). A significant change to oil and gas legislation in late 2001 meant that the state monopoly (held by the state oil company, PERTAMINA) in areas relating to the transmission of gas ended, allowing for private investment in the new subsidiary company (ibid.; Roberts and Summerly n.d.). A bidding process was held to sell off the forty percent of the transmission subsidiary which owned the existing pipeline assets from Grisik to Duri (the transfer of the Grisik to Singapore pipeline to the new company happened in June of 2004 (Indonesia 2005). The successful bidder, the very regional-sounding Transasia Pipeline Company, is a consortium made up of Malaysia's state oil company, PETRONAS, the government-linked Singapore Petroleum Corporation, Gulf Indonesia (now ConocoPhillips) and Talisman Energy (Roberts and Summerly n.d.). The purchase price paid by Transasia, US\$187.6 million, included US\$57.6 million for the construction of the pipeline to Singapore (Roberts, Longstaff, and Khalil 2003) and PGN retained the remaining sixty percent of the subsidiary.

The crucial condition for private participation in tandem with restructuring PGN as a limited liability company (which later issued shares) demonstrates well the manner in which the globalisation of neoliberalism, in tandem with the pressures placed upon state actors to secure energy supplies and foreign exchange, has shaped emerging regional formations. What is evident in this case is the way in which domestic and regional reterritorialisations occur when neoliberal ideology fuses with private sector capital and state interest within particular temporal politico-economic environments – especially at times of crisis. In the project, ADB brought to bear its conditions of restructuring (in addition to the restructuring of PGN, the project included a broader technical assistance component that advocated other neoliberal reforms). Transasia was given an opportunity to buy into forty percent of the pipeline that was transmitting gas from blocks operated by ConocoPhillips and PetroChina. Singapore Power (a government-linked company) was able to secure a diversified source of gas for 20 years (for a reported contract worth around US\$9 billion), and Caltex (in Duri) and PGN (on Batam) received gas as a result of the project. Finally, the pipeline allowed for approximately 436 million barrels of oil to be saved for the international market (Asian Development Bank 2006, 40).

The crucial point here is that this story is not one of a particular regional dynamic emerging in response to simple organisational or state interests. Rather the regional reconstitution emerged out of defined interests, ideological and material, unfolding within a shifting politico-economic environment in the midst of crisis. Notably, nowhere in any of the core documents associated with the project is there any serious consideration of the pipeline playing a significant role within a broader regional gas network, and the constellation of interests involved with the pipeline suggests that this would be highly unlikely to emerge in the future. Indeed, if anything, the nationalist murmurs in Indonesia about setting aside gas reserves for the

domestic market suggests reason for concern in the existing transnational arrangement, not grounds for an organisationally or state-ushered regionalist TAGP-style expansion. In this regard, in early 2008, threats were issued by a regional assembly leader on Batam that unless PGN increased gas flows to Batam the gas to Singapore would be turned off. Allegations were made that the gas shortages on Batam were due to the higher price that the gas attracted in Singapore, with the Chairman of the Batam Authority, Mustofa Wijaya stating that the island's reputation had been negatively affected by power failure due to gas shortages (Trading Markets.com 2008). These sorts of tensions are no doubt in the minds of policymakers in Singapore backing developments to diversify supplies of gas through initiatives such as the upcoming LNG terminal.

### *The Myanmar-Thailand pipelines*

The manner in which the pipeline between Sumatra and Singapore unfolded is demonstrative of the contested regionalism evident in Southeast Asia. Yet that example is equally complemented by another operating set of pipelines considered to be part of the TAGP: those that run from two separate locations in Myanmar to a large power plant in Ratchaburi, Thailand. Here again, we see how a complex mix of private and state/state-connected interests operates within a particular historical political economy in a process of contested regionalism. Again, the story defies simple organisational or state-centric conceptualisations of regionalism. As this section makes clear, previous acrimony between Thailand and Myanmar was set aside within a process that saw one Thai state-linked body (along with its private sector concession partners and a section of the Burmese state) in conflict with another section of the Thai state. The likelihood of the Myanmar to Thailand connections playing any broader regional role in the manner envisaged to fulfil the guiding concerns of TAGP is thus very low. Much like the situation with the Sumatra-Batam-Singapore pipeline, the pipelines between Myanmar and Thailand are more likely to continue satisfying Thailand's increasing demand for energy while providing a steady source of revenue to the regime in Myanmar – currently one of ASEAN's most prominent political embarrassments – but are unlikely to promote more productive regional cooperation.

As Greacen and Greacen (2004, 521) note, impressive growth in Thailand from 1985 and 1995 (the fastest in the world) was accompanied by an increase in energy demand that exceeded the capacity of existing infrastructure. The construction of a power plant at Ratchaburi, south of Bangkok, to assist in appeasing the booming demand for electricity in pre-crisis Thailand was planned in the early 1990s (Arnold 2000). Discussions regarding the supply of gas from Myanmar to Thailand – gas that would eventually feed the plant in Ratchaburi – had taken place at least as far back as 1990 (Fahn 2003, 193). An agreement for the exploitation of the Yedana field in the Andaman Sea, one of the two source fields for the gas to be piped to Ratchaburi, was signed by the state-owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) and Total in 1992 (Total 2007, 12). In 1994, subsidiaries of Total and Unocal formed the Moattama Gas Transportation Company (MGTC), with a subsidiary of PTT (PTT-EP) and the MOGE joining later, to construct a pipeline from Yedana to the Thai border. The developers of the field, which is governed by a 30 year production sharing contract, originally included Total and Unocal, however, this coupling was later joined by PTT-EP and MOGE (with the same shareholding structure as the MGTC) (Total 2007, 12-13). In 1995, PTT signed a purchasing contract for the gas from

Yedana (which would see supply beginning in 1998), with another contract signed in 1997 for gas from the smaller Yetagun field – the second source point for the gas (Asian Development Bank nd).

The pipeline's construction was mired in controversy, much of which related to environmental and human rights issues associated with dealing with the Junta in Myanmar (Udomittipong 1999; Arnold 2000; Earthrights International 2002). Legal action over the pipeline was brought against both Total and Unocal, by Myanmar nationals, that involved allegations of various human rights abuses (including forced labour) committed by government troops, including a multi-million dollar law suit in the United States that was settled out of court in favour of the plaintiffs (Total 2007, 37). Such controversies were undoubtedly an important part of the reterritorialisation that accompanied the pipeline and power plant projects. In this situation, criticism was levelled at transnational companies engaging with a regime known for committing gross human rights abuses and bringing the military into close proximity with sections of the population that, previous to the pipeline's construction had been relatively unaffected by military abuse (Redford 2005, 130). While the physical construction of the pipeline further re-carved the relationship between Burmese state and citizen, in often brutal ways, the trans-national pipeline project was also shaped significantly by the onset of the Asian financial crisis. As this section shows, the crisis provided nothing less than the ideal setting for a fundamental reconstitution of the very nature of the Thai state and its relation to energy resources.

As was also the case with Batam, energy demand in Thailand plummeted with the onset of the economic crisis, with several energy agreements and infrastructure projects placed in jeopardy. Furthermore, the financial stability of the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) was challenged in a major way, leading to the World Bank and the Thai government developing a bond scheme to generate capital to sustain some of EGAT's infrastructure projects and, importantly to keep the privatisation and restructuring of the energy sector on track (World Bank 1999; Greacen and Greacen 2004, 525). In this process, the bond issuance was seen, especially by the World Bank, as a way of disciplining the electricity reform process with the market (World Bank 1998, 1999). Crucially, the bond proposal and the Thai Government's Letter of Intent to the International Monetary Fund included commitments to privatise the Ratchaburi power plant (Government of Thailand 1998; World Bank 1998, 2004). Much like the operation in Indonesia, a holding company wholly owned by EGAT would be created with a view to preparing it for privatisation. The privatisation was originally associated with a great deal of resistance, which softened when a preferential purchasing arrangement for employees to purchase shares was put on the table (Greacen and Greacen 2004, 525). The plant was privatised at the beginning of the decade, with an initial purchase offering unveiled soon after that promised a generous sovereign-backed nineteen percent return on investment (*ibid.*).

However, the crisis brought about delays in Thailand's demand for the gas from Myanmar, resulting in a situation where PTT refused to pay the first instalment of US\$62 million under the purchase agreement to the concessionaires (which included PTT's subsidiary, PTT-EP). PTT strategically argued that one of the core elements of the contract, the supply of gas of a certain quality, had not been fulfilled (Koetsawang 1999). Here, the competing interests of two very closely-related sections of the Thai state — private investors and state-connected energy suppliers — and a broader tension between public and private interest demonstrated the complicated

reterritorialisations that can occur amidst crisis and within an environment of neoliberal influence.

Further to this, the trajectory of this reterritorialisation process was indicative of the contested nature of the market extension process in the energy sector in Thailand more broadly. This process has included strong nationalist and populist elements, a politically strong energy sector able to resist elements of neoliberalism and ‘a significant cadre of politically powerful individuals well placed to personally benefit from the massive transfer of public assets to the private sphere (Greacen and Greacen 2004, 539-540).’ In the case of the Ratchaburi plant that feeds off the gas from Myanmar, the state-owned Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) holds forty-five percent of the company that operates the plant and, together with two other government entities holds a majority of the company’s shares (Ratchaburi Electricity Generating Holding PCL. 2008). Its board is also composed of an impressive array of senior personnel from EGAT (including directors), in addition to figures from the ministries of energy and finance. PTT, which is responsible for the pipeline and the gas from the border to the power plant, was privatised in 2001. It holds shares in new power facilities coming online in 2008 at the Ratchaburi complex and, in 2007, had an almost sixty-six percent holding in PTTEP, a key member in the consortium that has developed the Yedana field and which has shares in the pipeline (PTT 2007, 45; Ratchaburi Electricity Generating Holding PCL. nd, 10). Furthermore, despite PTT’s privatisation in 2001, its connections to the Thai state are perhaps even more impressive than those of the company that operates the Ratchaburi plant. The Thai Ministry of Finance holds more than fifty-two percent of PTT’s shares and has nominated, and had accepted, directors to the board (PTT 2007, 81). Notably, PTT’s board of directors hark from state bodies such as EGAT, and the energy, finance and industry ministries (ibid., 66-73).<sup>2</sup>

What has resulted in this reterritorialisation can hardly be described as a ‘model’ example of neoliberal reform, nor is it the solid basis for a critical section of a regional project such as TAGP. Instead, what has emerged is trans-national infrastructure ensconced within a rather complex array of private/public interest partially operating under the veneer of market mechanisms. In this arrangement the Thai state retains significant clout and private capital earnings while the regime in Myanmar feeds off a steady supply of gas revenues. Such a situation hardly seems to fulfil in any meaningful way ASEAN prerogatives for the TAGP. Furthermore, for all the rhetoric emanating from ASEAN regarding respect for human rights (evident in the recent ASEAN charter) there remains a great deal of potential for the regime in Myanmar to continue to expand its exports of oil and gas as a way to retain its current control over its citizens. Unocal has gone so far as to admit in court that revenues from the Yadana and Yetagun pipelines are incontrovertibly used to purchase light arms, helicopters, and armoured vehicles for the regime (Maassarani, Drakos, and Pajkowska 2007). Rather than confront such an unpleasant fact, however, the response from regional leaders, including those in India and China, has been to negotiate for further oil and gas contracts.(Smith and Htoo 2005).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, several figures on PTT’s board of directors have positions in PTTEP and the companies associated with the Ratchaburi operations.

<sup>3</sup> Further to this, at a public seminar given by Myanmar’s Energy Minister in Singapore in 2007, a number of new concessions were put on the table by the government for the consideration of prospective investors. At the conclusion of the seminar there was a massive charge of individuals towards the minister eagerly proffering business cards.

While some have asserted that the negotiations between the aforementioned countries and the regime in Myanmar constitute ‘a callous drive for energy security that disregards the severe social and environmental consequences of gas development in Burma (ibid.)’, such a reality is far from a problem for the major interests involved. Indeed, in the case of the Ratchaburi operations, the military junta in Myanmar is seen as a plus by people at the centre of managing the plant’s operation. On this last point, when asked about whether they were concerned about regime stability in Myanmar affecting the supply of gas to the plant, one person well-placed at Ratchaburi remarked that the supply was so important to the regime’s stability that Myanmar would never dare turn it off. Here, the very same authoritarianism that sustains human rights abuses in Myanmar, which were again on parade recently, comprises an important guarantor of Thailand’s energy needs.

### *Conclusion*

The two operating examples of pipelines that are considered part of the evolving TAGP have been put forward to demonstrate the utility of a framework for reconsidering regionalism. We have presented cases that demonstrate the need to look beyond the interaction between states, regularly perceived as having discrete interests, or the organisations to which they are attached, often framed as having individual personalities. Furthermore, we have emphasised the importance of understanding regionalism without overly indulging in an exaltation of norms and ideas and/or institutions. Instead we have put forward a framework that attempts to demonstrate an example of regionalism as contestation involving the enmeshment of public, private and ideological interests within particular historical moments. This does not tell us how to build more effective regional organisations nor does it suggest how to best pursue regional integration. What the analysis does reveal, however, is that current regional initiatives are highly unlikely to yield substantive results in line with purported objectives or the norms and ideas that are apparently so central to an organisation such as ASEAN.

In short, we suggest that much can be understood if we move beyond sports commentary-esque coverage of the manner in which states, typically treated as black boxes, relate to one another and analyse the very interests that give states and the organisations to which they relate meaning. Understanding how these relationships are forged at particular points in time – especially during periods of crisis – demonstrates that organisationally-mandated projects are invariably subjected to intense political contestation that is invariably in the interests of some parties more than others. In the TAGP story above, state-linked and private capital are central, conditioned in part through neoliberal reform occurring in the midst of crisis and an attempt to engender opportunities for increased private participation and investment. However, the hybridised results of this process bear no close resemblance to ‘idyllic’ neoliberal forms; indeed state control, especially in the second case, remains, albeit somewhat masked by the market.

Nor do such results accord with a simple reading of state interests in an aggregate sense – in both cases bodies tied to the state were in conflict with other sections of the state at various points in time (and in one case continue to be). Crucially, the implications of such a reading for expanding regional energy cooperation are grave. While we see the potential for more pipelines in the region to unfold, it is highly likely that they will be organised not according to the desires of organisations such as ASEAN but rather in line with the forces that have conditioned

the existing pieces of the project, such as those above. The politico-economic drivers simply are not evident during this present historical moment, nor are they likely to be anytime soon, to generate an integrated network of pipelines that would operate to satisfy some organisationally-ordained regional interest.

What is evident, nonetheless, are persistent material and ideological interests that continue to shift in relation to many of the pressures shaping them. The external factors conditioning prospective elements of the TAGP include massive energy demand from the likes of India, China, Korea and Japan. In the case of Myanmar, it is already evident that its gas reserves are sought by countries to both the northeast and the west of its borders. At this point in time, it is unclear how outside pressure will impact upon regional energy dynamics. However, the demands upon an already rapidly depleting resource such as natural gas do not bode well for broad regional cooperation in the face of the potential for earning profits from trading natural gas outside of ASEAN. Neither does the agitation evident in Indonesia, the region's biggest source for natural gas, for setting aside natural gas for domestic consumption. It will be the battles between those attached to the exploration and sale of natural gas, the state and popular pressure operating within an increasingly complicated economic environment that will be central in seeing how nationalised natural gas actually becomes in Southeast Asia's most populous nation. A renewed economic crisis could well accelerate nationalist tendencies dramatically.

Some reading this article might question whether we think that a form of regionalism actually exists. We would argue that it does but that it does not simply accord with the organisations that are created in support of it. Nor is it easily understood as a composite of aggregated national interests. The reality is slightly more complex than both of these. Crucially, we see the present region as historically and geographically constituted in line with material and ideological interests that shift in relation to ever-evolving pressures within the global political economy at particular moments in time. While we have only presented two examples of 'contested regionalism' here, we feel that the framework has potential to be more broadly applied to understanding other phenomena within Southeast Asia and beyond, and we see the attempt to understand regionalism in a globalising world as a worthy one – one which can benefit from the analytical toolsets offered by critical political economy.

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