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Living Without the Forest: Adaptive Strategy of Orang Rimba¹⁾

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ABSTRACT

The Orang Rimba is one of the remaining hunter-gatherer groups in Sumatra. Their lives depend on the forests, which represent not only the foundation of their lives but also a symbol of their culture. In the 1980s, there was large-scale environmental change in Sumatra, including Jambi. The environmental changes were caused by uncontrolled land clearing for residential areas, industrial logging and oil palm plantations. The process of change in this environment then affected the lives of Orang Rimba, who began to lose the forest as a source of life and place for living.

These environmental changes are also forcing the Orang Rimba to adapt to a new environment. Sedentary life is very different to the Orang Rimba's customary lifestyle. Sedentary life, or settlement, for Orang Rimba is synonymous with the village-living Malay life. This is consistent with the belief in their cosmology that divides the Orang Rimba and the Malay world: Orang Rimba in the forest world and the village world of the Malays. So, the sedentary life changes for the Orang Rimba have changed not only the pattern of their lives, but also affected their inherited, traditional beliefs.

Development programs initiated by the State for groups of indigenous people are oriented toward the sedentary life, to have them merge and blend in with the normal lives of other people. The Orang Rimba have been directed toward a sedentary life in residential areas that have been provided by the State. The State also provides some oil palm plantations for their livelihood.

This article describes the life of Orang Rimba no longer living in the forest. It discusses and analyzes the indigenous people's strategies to adapt to a sedentary life in re-settlement in Jambi, Sumatra, Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

The many studies on the Orang Rimba, the indigenous forest people in Jambi, on Sumatra Island, Indonesia, have much to impart about their position at the lowest

level of society in the political and economic structure. Their economic life and subsistence was associated closely with hunter-gathering, shifting cultivation and nominal cash crop cultivation, especially rubber.

Forests, in this context, play a major role in the life of Orang Rimba and fundamentally define their society, culture and politics. Forests are the source of their drive to define the parameters of their social and cultural world. They serve not only to meet the needs of the people's livelihood, but forests also serve as a cultural resource (Sandbukt 2000; Sager 2008). They constitute the source of the Orang Rimba's traditions, rituals and cultural, as well as their dwelling space. In brief, it can be said that forests define and modulate the cultural identity and history of Orang Rimba.

Since the 1980s, massive environmental changes have occurred in Sumatra. They encompass the government's program of settlement construction for transmigration from other islands, highway development, increase in oil palm plantations, and the expansion of logging estates that have triggered changes in Sumatra's environment and landscape. These changes have had an impact on society in Jambi, including the Orang Rimba, as an ethnic group whose life depends on the forests (Persoon 2000; Sandbukt 2000).

In other respects, the Orang Rimba are also subjected to social and cultural pressure from outsiders. Over the years, the Orang Rimba, as an ethnic minority group, have been imposed upon by the Malays, the dominant ethnic force supported by the State, to instigate change (Persoon 2000). The government wants the Orang Rimba to adapt and become Muslim and to live outside the forest in a resettlement area. In the past, the Orang Rimba has formed an integral part of the Malay society structure, and has been recognized by the Malay Sultanate in Jambi since the 19th century. They are positioned at the lowest level of the community, part of the traditional trading network built by the Malay Sultanate, from upstream to the Malacca Straits. The Orang Rimba took non-wood resources from the forest and passed them to the Malays which sold it to the markets in the Malacca Straits (Sandbukt 1988). They were part of the major trading network of the times. The situation continued during the colonial era of the Dutch East Indies and has remained the same in the modern era. Outsiders still use the Orang Rimba to collect wood in both illegal logging operations and to acquire land for oil palm and rubber plantations (Sandbukt 2000).

The Orang Rimba's understanding about the forest and their world cannot be separated from their understanding of their origins as a different kind of hunter-gatherer group. In much of the literature on hunter-gatherer societies, the current hunting-gathering society is regarded a group having as historic continuity from their ancestors. They live in a natural environment that is isolated, and so habitually maintained their social relations within an area separate from the outside world. However, there are also hunter-gatherer groups that intentionally limit their social environment and increasingly decide to no longer have contact the outside world (Sponsel 2000; Endicott 2000; Tuck Po 2005).

The Orang Rimba have said that they are an ancient Malay community who may have separated themselves from it and chosen to live in the forest. This of course provides a different understanding of the Orang Rimba and their relationship with the outside world. It could be said that the Orang Rimba are not a pure group of hunter-gatherer, but have mixed characteristics. Based on Jana Frontier (2014), the characteristics of hunter-gatherer societies emphasize their egalitarian ways, constantly faithfulness to their genealogy, use forests as their major subsistence basis, as well as drawing on the forest for natural resources as a source of food and cultural heritage. It could be said also that hunter-gatherer societies depend heavily on resources provided by nature. But, owing to the rapid changes to the nature that surrounds the hunter-gatherer area, it is inevitably that they are forced to adapt adaptation strategies focus not only on environmental adaptation, but also require an adaptation strategy for hunter-gatherer groups toward the different and greatly changed social environment.

Thus, what are the implications for the Orang Rimba of the loss of their forest habitat? Changes have had an impact on their natural environment and society. There has been some physical displacement, such as their metamorphosis from hunter-gatherers to a sedentary life, and changes have occurred also in the pattern of day-to-day life (e.g., in traditions and subsistence, among other things) The Orang Rimba no longer live in the forest, but on oil palm plantations or other sites. They can be found in the capital of Jambi or other cities, working as beggars. How do they deal with this drastic situation?

Ernest Burch (1994) believed that studies of hunter-gatherers should focus on social changes and the practical problems faced by them, thereby contributing to the discourse on contemporary social theory. Indeed, scholars rarely discuss the form of adaptive strategy undertaken by a hunter-gatherer group in response to the domination or hegemony imposed by outsiders, viewing the hunter-gatherers less as victims, but as dynamic actors.

This article is based on the author's long research on Orang Rimba since 1998 when he joined an NGO that works with them to protect their forest as their habitat. This work became his doctorate dissertation, completed in 2014. This article discusses the Orang Rimba's strategy adopted to counter the situation threatening their indigenous values and culture.

THE MEANING OF FOREST FOR THE ORANG RIMBA

The Orang Rimba or the Kubu²⁾ live in the provinces of Jambi, Riau, and South Sumatra - Indonesia, but Jambi Province has the largest population.. Those who live in Jambi are scattered in three different ecological regions; namely, the lowland forest areas surrounding Bukit 12 National Park, in the southern part of Jambi Province, which is in the area around the highway that separates Jambi Province of South Sumatra Province from the Province of West Sumatra, the Jambi Province border region and South Sumatra, and the northern region around

Bukit 30 National Park, the border area between the provinces of Jambi and Riau (Sandbukt and KKI WARSI 1998). Each group of Orang Rimba living in the area has a distinct ecological character and different lifestyles, which depend greatly on the characteristics of the region in which they are located (Figure 1).

Based on a 2008 survey results from the KKI WARSI Bio-region, the total number of Orang Rimba in Jambi was 3,650 persons (KKI WARSI 2008). The Orang Rimba population in the South Jambi was 1,670. In the north of Jambi, which is the area around Bukit 30 National Park (bordered by Riau Province), there were 450 people, and in Bukit 12 there were 1,500 e. It can be said that the Bukit 12 National Park is a geographic center with the largest concentration of Orang Rimba population. This contrasts with the existing conditions of the Orang Rimba in the south of Jambi Province, where they live in separate locations.

The Orang Rimba in the lowland forest in the north part of Jambi live mostly as hunters and gatherers, but also operate shifting cultivation. Their lives depend on the forest. It is different with those Orang Rimba who live in the southern part of Jambi where the forest has disappeared. They live in the oil palm plantation area and do not adhere strictly to their traditions and customs. Some of the groups living at the re-settlement developed by the State have already converted to Islam. They live according to Islamic traditions and avoid the traditional customs followed by Orang Rimba living in the northern area.

Some Orang Rimba groups living along the Sumatran Eastern Highway, in

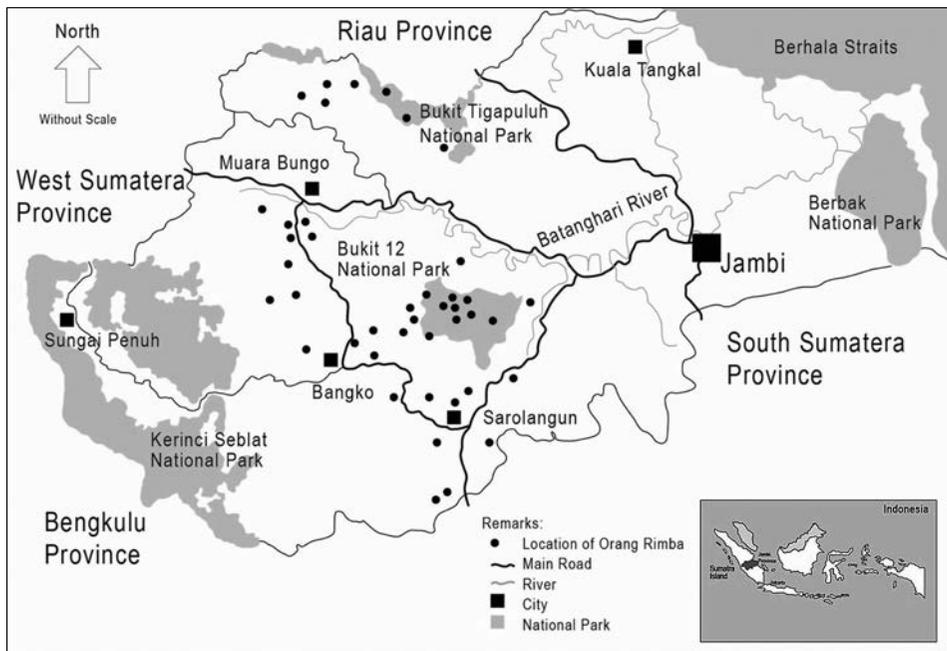


Figure 1 The areas inhabited by the Orang Rimba in the Jambi Province (KKI WARSI 2008)

the Southern part of Jambi, have experienced a pitiable life. They kept moving to more distant areas until finally they reached Jambi City. Unlike the others, they consisted of small groups with high mobility, which is understandable, as they do not have land to cultivate. Unlike other groups that still have land, although limited, some Orang Rimba living at the Sumatra Eastern Highway have no land whatsoever. Their choice is to move; occupying the settlement provided by the State or continuing to move to find food. This is the group that is considered to be troublemaking, because often they steal the villagers' crops or palm oil fruit owned by the plantation, selling them to raise the money to use for moving elsewhere. Orang Rimba who live bordering the companies land, including that of the palm company and Industrial Plantation Forest (HTI), as well as the Forest Concession (HPH), experience similar problems. Most forests where they formerly lived have become oil palm plantations and fields that now belong to others.

This is different to the existing conditions of Orang Rimba in the northern part of the Jambi Province where they live in separate places. Therefore, Sandbukt (2000) has stated that Bukit 12 National Park is an Orang Rimba cultural center. Orang Rimba in Bukit 12 National Park also maintain their social system and culture as a coherent whole.

In 2002, the state declared the Bukit 12 National Park as a conservation area for the Orang Rimba. This represented a significant move for the indigenous forest people (KKI WARSI 2008). The existence of the separate and autonomous tradition of Orang Rimba in Bukit 12 National Park implies the recognition and intended maintenance of the identity of the ethnic group as an independent cultural entity (Figure 2).

Forests not only provide their livelihood, but also their cultural resources (Persoon 2000; Sager 2008). They take many non-timber forest products for trading at market (Photo 1). Sandbukt (1988) argues that the Orang Rimba were hunter-gatherer economic groups, basing their lives on harvesting forest produce and selling it to outsiders. They used a means of bartering, and in the 17th–18th centuries, formed part of a trade route for natural resources trading which ended at the Malacca Strait. On that basis, they also preserved and protected the forest, to which they belonged. However, the forest now has a different function. It is seen by the State not as a source of life, but as an asset and it must be maintained and processed in a particular way.

The Orang Rimba understood that forest timbers were looted from their habitat, which was a living place and symbol of their cultural life. Each tree has a meaning and significance. The *Setubung* tree, for instance, is a marker tree where a newborn's placenta is planted. Each Orang Rimba must have a *Setubung* tree as a marker of his life. And the *Sialang* tree, a giant tree where the bees produce honey, is a priceless treasure for Orang Rimba. However, the efforts they made were not strong enough to combat the onslaught of the illegal loggers.

The major change that occurred is in how society and the State, including the corporation, make sense of the forest itself. However, the State and society are

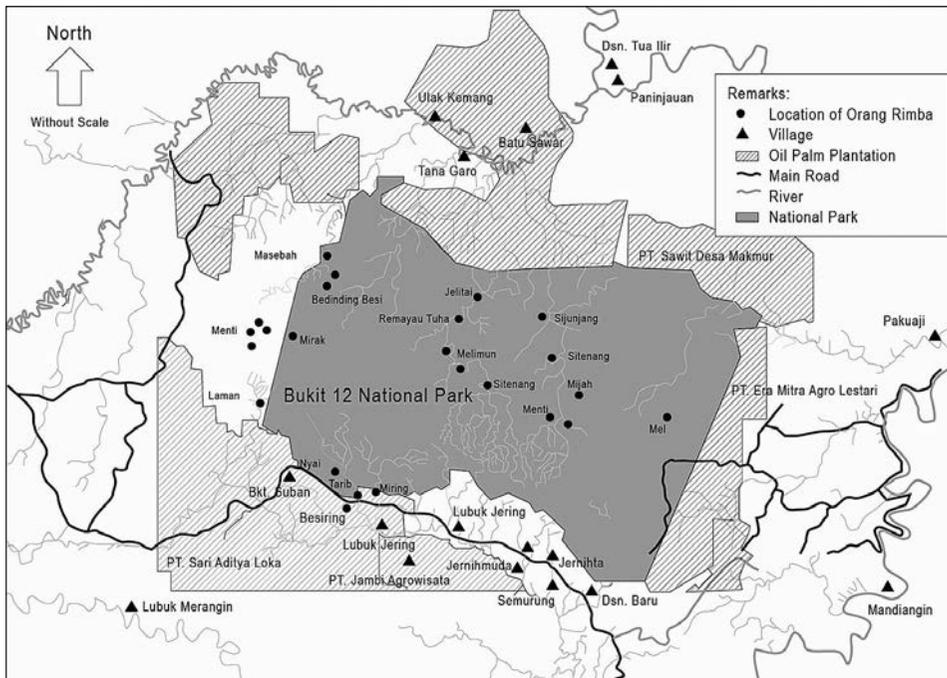


Figure 2 The location of the Orang Rimba Group around Bukit 12 National Park, which are surrounded by palm oil plantation. (KKI WARSI 2008) (Modified by the author)

now looking at the forests as assets that must be secured and used profitably. This is clearly different from the way in which the Orang Rimba see the forest, as a resource for living, and for its existence they must maintain and preserve their custom of taking the forest produce (Persoon 2000). Orang Rimba saw the forest as a productive instrument and utilized it. They used every available resource that the forest offered, in contrast to the State and the capitalists who saw the forest as an asset, a piece of land, which must be processed to make a profit.

DEFORESTATION IN JAMBI AND ITS IMPACT ON ORANG RIMBA

Deforestation in Jambi is caused mostly by the expansion of oil palm plantations. Originally, the oil palm plantation was developed along with the transmigration project initiated by the State. The State supported oil palm plantations to support the life of transmigrants arriving, mainly from Java. In the 1970–80s, the State, particularly the Ministry of Transmigration, asked the transmigrants to focus on agricultural production.

The development of the oil palm industry in Jambi can be traced to the early-1970s. Anna Casson (1999) argued that the oil palm industry was a leading factor for the Indonesian economy, increasing 20-fold in area and accounting for 12



Photo 1 An Orang Rimba male with the results of a long day hunting for wild boar. (Photograph by the author, 1998)

percent of the average annual increase in Crude Palm Oil (CPO) production. The area of plantation had increased from 106,000 ha in 1967 to 2.5 million ha in 1997. Jambi is one of the largest oil palm plantation areas in Indonesia, along with North Sumatra, Riau, South Sumatra, West Kalimantan and Aceh.

The impact of oil palm plantations managed by corporations does not only change the area around it, but provides also an opportunity for independent farmers to open the remaining forest area. Such activity led to an uncontrollable forest encroachment. The oil palm company used a scheme of plantation area control, in which the management was fully in the hands of the company, or cooperated with the transmigration program, to provide land and palm plantation, which could also be managed, for the transmigrant farmers.

However, the company and the State could not control adequately the expansion of oil palm plantation made by independent farmers. In order to meet their needs, local people opened the forests located in the border area of the national park, and even the area itself, which served as the living habitat of the



Photo 2 An Orang Rimba camp in the border area between a Malay village and the forest. (Photograph by Riza Marlon/KKI WARSI, 1998)

Orang Rimba.

The large-scale oil palm plantations have also displaced local communities, resulting in social conflict. According to Aritonang (2009), since the mid-1970s there have been approximately 28 logging companies exploiting forest land in Jambi, encompassing a concession area of approximately 2.6 million ha. Of these, 14 companies are in the Orang Rimba's habitat. This situation has caused growing conflict.

The massive change of the forest into a plantation, settlement, Industrial Plantation Forest (HTI) and public plantation increasingly suppressed the Orang Rimba. According to a survey conducted by KKI WARSI in 2008 the Orang Rimba had to compete with all this.. This did not occur in just a few groups, but spread widely across all groups living in Jambi. What the Orang Rimba did to respond to the situation was different (Photo 2). Some groups moved to find remaining forested area in the river basin, in the upstream areas of the Merangin, Tabir and Batang Bungo rivers. Some of them remained in the oil palm plantation owned by either the company or villagers. Some other groups, like Orang Rimba living in Singkut, chose to move and stay at the temporary settlement provided by the State.

The development of the Trans-Sumatra highway, resettlement, forest industry and large-scale oil palm plantations are the four main causes of deforestation in

Jambi. As already mentioned, this affected local people who depended on forests for their resources. In addition, there had been an increase in population because of the placement in Jambi of transmigration settlements and plantations that influenced agricultural land use and put pressure on the remaining forest. This situation exacerbated damage to the forest in Jambi. The existence of conversion forest deficits³⁾ in many parts of Sumatra partly explains why large areas of production forest and limited production forest are now being allocated to plantation companies in Aceh, North Sumatra, Riau, Bengkulu, Jambi, South Sumatra and Lampung.

The impact on the Orang Rimba is considerable. They do not have land to live on and cannot roam around. Many were forced or intimidated to move to other areas. When they did move, they did not receive adequate compensation. For instance, in one case, the Orang Rimba in the Bujang Raba area were evicted but they received only approximately 15 US\$ per household while the land taken by the company covered 30,000 ha (Supriyadi 2012). The Orang Rimba now live separately in small groups. The impact on the Orang Rimba is the loss of their sustenance. Compared to the dense forest a few years ago, they say that it is now very difficult to find animals there: wild deer, for example, are very rare. One of the Orang Rimba in Bukit 12 National Park said that it is very difficult now to hunt a deer. He said that he would get a deer at least once a month but it has now been over a year since he last saw one in the forest. The situation is similar concerning wild boar. Once it was normal to find a wild boar, often two or three times within a few days or a week. They are now very difficult to find regularly.

Similarly, the pattern of subsistence that they followed is now rare. Once they could farm for two years, it is now very difficult to do so. It is difficult to open fields because of the limitation of land. The forest has been reduced in area and they must compete with others. To obtain staple foods, such as rice, they must buy them in the markets at nearby villages. For the Orang Rimba, rubber is a sensible choice because they understand how to care for it and have a clear channel for selling it. The choice to live in the forest is now becoming increasingly limited.

DEVELOPMENT AND ITS IMPACT TOWARD ORANG RIMBA

Sedentary life for Orang Rimba is synonymous with a settled life. A sedentary life brings a steady income, a decent living just as other ethnic group, with land for subsistence. Such a life is wholly different to the nomadic existence. For Orang Rimba, sedentary life is a symbol of the life that they see in the Malay culture. This is reflected in the projected life of people in the world within their cosmology. Modern life is vastly different to their experience and understanding and is based on a service or salary and fixed income. All items have value. Orang Rimba must work to earn goods. Development has triggered the need for other goods, which do not exist in the forest, this same thing has happened in Malaysia

among the Orang Asli (Nobuta 2009).

Sedentary life is a process that has long been forced by outsiders onto the Orang Rimba. Forbes (1885) noted that since the Dutch East Indies colonial period, such a process has been carried out by the Dutch East Indies State. The State taught agricultural programs and a way of life to the *Kubu* (Orang Rimba) settlement. The Malays of Jambi and the State have long imposed this process on the indigenous people: they were forced to live in accordance with the standards set by the State. Orang Rimba life in the forest is considered as unworthy because it does not meet those declared standards. The State itself saw the Orang Rimba, as one of KAT (*Komunitas Adat Terpencil*)⁴⁾ or remote indigenous communities, as a social illness that must be cured.

The Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) classifies the Orang Rimba, as indigenous people, into two types based on the characteristics of life pattern and culture; namely Wild Orang Rimba (*Orang Kubu Liar*) and Tame Orang Rimba (*Orang Kubu Jinak*) (Muntholib 1993; Nasruddin 1989; Sager 2008), also called *Kubu Rimba* and *Kubu Delom* (Palle and Roni 1993). The ‘tame’ *Orang Kubu* means not wild, not cruel and not fierce, and having a non-stubborn and non-offensive attitude. Being ‘tamed’ carried the connotation that the behavior of the Orang Rimba⁵⁾ could be changed from wild and stubborn, particularly by the Malay, into docile and non-offensive Orang Rimba with new values.

The classification of “Wild” *Kubu* and “Tame” *Kubu*, presented by State scholars, is an accurate description of how the State and Jambi people perceived the existence of the Orang Rimba. In daily life, Jambi people thought that permanently resident Orang Rimba would be better and more civilized than those who still lived in the forest. In the Jambi people’s view, the tame Orang Rimba were those who had obeyed the prevailing common norms; i.e. the culture of everyday society. For example, they would be willing to settle in the village and to change their lifestyle according to the customs and culture of the Jambi people, and would be willing to change their religion to Islam. Jambi people thought that living in the forest was an inappropriate life that was incompatible with existing norms.

The State considers isolated people with characteristics such as the Orang Rimba as a community prone to various social problems, otherwise known as “social-prone”, which means their conditions are considered unstable or that they exhibit social-political instability that may invite social problems, as their culture is no longer deemed suitable to the current era owing to geographical or cultural isolation. Even in some statements regarding the problems resulting from the minority ethnic group issues, it is clearly seen that the MOSA regards them as social troublemakers and that such social problems would interfere with the image and process of development (Ministry of Social Affairs 2000; 2014).

Again, according to the MOSA, poverty, ignorance and backwardness occurred as a result of the Orang Rimba’s culture, which does not support change into the “normal” life as an ordinary community (Palle and Roni 1993). The

Orang Rimba's strong commitment to their tradition is considered one of main factors that cause them to be poor, ignorant and backward. In a seminar, held by the Jambi Social Affairs Agency and Jambi University on December, 1993, on the Orang Rimba and its culture, some of their values and cultural patterns were revealed and deemed, by the State, to hinder development. They were the *melangun*⁶ tradition: a culture of laziness and a nomadic life pattern. In the state's view, such tradition inhibits the advancement of the Orang Rimba because they will always move to other places.

According to the MOSA, one of the measurements of a community's advancement is a stable life, as indicated by a permanent settlement pattern (Photo 3). The nomadic tradition of the Orang Rimba is to keep moving in order to seek



Photo 3 Orang Rimba housing in the resettlement project in a development program developed by the Jambi Province Government. (Photograph by Riza Marlon/KKI WARSI, 1998)

natural resources existing in the forest. The MOSA argues that such tradition makes it difficult for the State to develop the Orang Rimba because one of the fundamental approaches is to place them in a permanent settlement.

In addition, the MOSA also observes that the Orang Rimba have a strong culture of laziness. Such an impression emerges from the evaluation of outsiders, either the State or the general public, when they view the Orang Rimba to be less than diligent in working. Such ideas emerged when they saw that the Orang Rimba kept walking in the forest to go *melangun*, to hunt searching *louk*, or to make another living. Outsiders consider such activities insignificant because they do not generate money to meet daily needs.

The State believes that the impression of a laziness culture plays a significant role in obstruction and means that the aid given by the MOSA cannot be used appropriately (Palle and Roni 1993). To resolve such problems, the Orang Rimba should be guided and directed to live “properly”, resembling other community groups. The MOSA think that the inhibiting factors of the Orang Rimba should be eliminated and changed into a new, better culture. The question is how to eliminate Orang Rimba’s *melangun* tradition, change their nomadic life into a permanent life pattern and to change their belief system to another religion. One of the State’s projects is a permanent settlement through the development program, which is a suitable effort to develop Orang Rimba life for it to be ‘proper’, focused and normal, like other ethnic groups in Jambi.

The development strategy for this “isolated people” is conducted through a social settlement system, realized in the form of a settlement type in the place of origin and in the new place, the development of social facilities and infrastructure, and development of cooperation between the related institutions and communities. Using such an approach, the State fully determines the indicators of success and the scope of development (physical and non-physical aspects). The most outstanding, visible and quantifiable indicator of success is “the settlement”, because the results take the form of a settlement village, number of houses, number of settled people, number of people converted to Islam, and indicators like that, all of which can be quantified and measured.

The State has started to introduce a program entitled the *Isolated People Resettlement* to the Orang Rimba in Jambi. The development program is aimed at resettling the group (Department of Social Affairs 1981; Ministry of Social Affairs 2000). The state’s resettlement of the isolated people serves as the success indicator of the development. Orang Rimba received houses and a one-year allowance from the State. They also received an oil palm plantation allotment to earn a living. Such a program becomes a kind of “*entry point*” in which the scope of its success includes the entire development results. It seems that the State believes that a permanent life is a stable and steady life, indicating real evidence of prosperity. It is seen clearly in the objectives of the settlement through the resettlement program and collection of separated communities within one location, which is expressed as a first step toward social, economic and cultural stability.

The oil palm plantation is an additional form of development in agriculture. Plantations represent a modern life for rural communities, followed by the imposition of the culture of innovation by the State. Agriculture must be adapted to advances in technology, and management systems to maintain efficiency and produce a profit. Development in the form of agriculture is important because it employs the largest number of people and combines new technology with the surrounding environment.

STRATEGY TO SEDENTARY LIFE

In adapting to environmental change, both natural and social, Orang Rimba has a different strategy and has adopted three approaches to adaptation (Table 1). The first covers nomadic categories, specifically that the Orang Rimba survive in the forest, maintaining a traditional lifestyle. They isolate themselves from both living and social environments by limiting interaction with other communities. They still practice the nomadic life of hunters, gathering and searching for food resources

Table 1 Types of Orang Rimba groups.

| No | Activities | Nomadic | Semi-Sedentary | Sedentary |
|----|--------------------------------------|--|---|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Religion | Local religion (Animism) | Partially practiced | Assimilated to Islam |
| 2 | Ritual and practicing Taboo | Fully practiced | Partially practiced | Not Practiced |
| 3 | Housing | Temporary shelter | Partially nomadic | Fully settled |
| 4 | Living at the resettlement site | Rejected | Having house at the resettlement site | Fully settled |
| 5 | Assimilation | Rejected | Partial Assimilation | Full Assimilation |
| 6 | Access to public facilities | Limited access | Partial access | Full, supported by government. |
| 7 | Forest context | Living in the forest | Livelihood | Rejected |
| 8 | Nomadic | Opportunistic nomadic | Partially nomadic; dislocation at the plantation and settlement area. | Fully rejected |
| 9 | Local market | Temporary visiting | Regularly visiting | Dependent |
| 10 | Subsistence (Hunter-Gatherer) | Fully dependent | Partially practiced | Avoided |
| 11 | Non-timber forest product collection | Fully practiced on regular basis | Partially practiced | Not practiced |
| 12 | Rubber plantation | Secondary based – location at the forest | Secondary based -location at the border | Fully dependent |
| 13 | Oil Palm plantation | Taboo | Some groups practiced | Fully dependent |
| 14 | Domestication | Taboo | Partially practiced | Domestic animal |

Source: Compiled by the author, 2014

that emanate from the forest. They have a traditional life in the forest and limited contact with the modern, outside world.

The second is semi-sedentary, identifying the Orang Rimba staying in the forests and villages. They live in village communities or stay among the woods or plantations. They do not adhere to strongly-held customs and adapt to the life of people who live in the village. Orang Rimba life is maintained between that of the forest and sedentary life. They have the characteristic of maintaining an economic and cultural connection with the forest. Some groups live in the area and have adapted to re-settlement between forest and villages, yet still maintain the norm of the Orang Rimba.

The third approach is sedentary: The Orang Rimba adopt a completely sedentary lifestyle and wish to be seen by other ethnic groups as being a civilized society and just as modern as any other ethnic group. They adapt fully to Malay culture. They avoid all connection with the forest and the character of Orang Rimba, and live entirely in the settlement.

With natural resources and forests becoming limited, the Orang Rimba's choice of sustenance is also extremely limited. Under such conditions, the assimilation option to a sedentary life in a re-settlement area is a rational option for survival when facing the challenge on a social, political and economical basis. Sedentary life is a stable social system introduced by the State. A stable social system is defined as a realization of the village's formal norm system, like other Malay villages. Physically, it is realized in the development of a similar settlement pattern, like the exercising of village norms, the shape of houses, settlement patterns with a mosque and community hall in the center of the settlement. The mosque and community hall function as a place for villagers to gather and to mobilize people for activities instructed by the MOSA.

Orang Rimba will then receive an offer from the government to live in a re-settlement or at least accept the offer of a house, though not to inhabit permanently. They will be moved to the settlement with their family. They will begin to settle down in a location considered to be more permanent and then start to build wooden houses, some of which are already walled and have cement floors, just like other people's homes. The houses are divided into several rooms: bedrooms, dining room, living room and kitchen. However, they are empty houses without furniture, and there is no house decoration or other household goods. Only a fireplace, some dishes and cookware fill the kitchen.

Some groups of Orang Rimba, mostly at the northern part of Bukit 12 National Park, choose to assimilate into the Malay community by adopting a Malay lifestyles and customs. One route is to adopt the Muslim faith because for Islam.

The choice to assimilate into the Malay culture is occasioned by removing the association with a minority identity and replacing it with traits identified with the Malay group (Prasetijo 2005). Their efforts to change identity are part of the process of assimilation to the majority Malay culture. They tried to remove the

attributes or traits of their old identity, but instead, a new Orang Rimba identity emerged with different attributes to before. Orang Rimba identity now carries the attributes of “modern” and “civilized”, in society’s view. They are themselves aware that they can be fully accepted by outsiders, and especially by the Malay community.

A formal village norm is also introduced which functions to regulate the Orang Rimbas’ life and to mediate the interest of the State, such as village head, religious scholar and other officials. In the event that there is no religious scholar, as in the case of Air Panas re-settlement, in the Air Hitam Region, Jambi, where the Orang Rimba are considered not totally Islamic, the MOSA will introduce a religious teacher from a Malay village.

The next concern is a belief system that is considered appropriate. This is realized in the introduction and teaching of Islam to Orang Rimba in the settlement. According to the MOSA, the Orang Rimba’s belief is animism, the worship of gods of and in the forest. The government argues that Orang Rimba’s belief is not a proper religion and not suitable as any of the religions acknowledged by the State. There are five official religions acknowledged by the State of the New Order, namely Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Therefore, it is fitting that the Orang Rimba should be directed to embrace one of the recognized religions. Islam is always the main choice. An indication that the Orang Rimba has converted to Islam is that their names are changed to an Islamic name, such as Besiring to Muhammad Ali.

The Orang Rimba’s culture, based on the State’s view, reflects backwardness and alienation that is not suitable for the times and is does not parallel other ethnic groups’ culture. Therefore, it is appropriate to expect that the Orang Rimba can abandon their traditions, which are considered to obstruct advancement. One is the Orang Rimba tradition of *melangun* (leaving the settlement location because a relative has died). By abandoning the tradition of *melangun*, it is expected by the State that the Orang Rimba can live permanently in the constructed settlement in order to become more developed (Sandbukt 1984).

The last change is a life pattern, reflecting an advanced civilization. The Orang Rimba life pattern of living nomadically in the forest is considered inappropriate for the present times. In the view of the MOSA, such a nomadic lifestyle will not make Orang Rimba civilized and more developed. The key is to live permanently, like other community groups. Therefore, they are obliged by the State to stay in the settlement provided by it. By following the advice and programs created for them by the MOSA, the Orang Rimba will experience advancement and the stabilization of social life as considered appropriate for other ethnic groups.

The other strategy adopted by the Orang Rimba is to live a dual life between nomadic and sedentary, i.e., the semi-sedentary type. They have become used to living at the re-settlement, but also maintain their own identity as Orang Rimba, always connected with forest life. They continue to maintain some forest

subsistence activities.

The good case for understanding the situation of assimilation, or Orang Rimba's sedentarization process, is represented by Tarib, one of the leaders (*Tumenggung*) in Bukit 12 National Park (Table 2, Photo 4). Formerly, he was an Orang Rimba maintaining and protecting forests in accordance with his group identity. He was involved in an event that he had not experienced before; a social movement to preserve forests for Orang Rimba as indigenous people, supported by NGOs. The first activity involved participation in KMAN I (Congress of Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago); an event held on March 15, 1999 and the KEHATI Award on January 31, 2000, considered to be supporting the conservation of the environment with its *hompongan* program. (*Hompongan* in local language means 'the dam'.) Tarib and his group are making a plantation between the national park and the border area to prevent an invasion by the Malay. In 2006 he also received an award (*Kalpataru*) as an environmental hero from the president of the Republic of Indonesia. He said that the basis of Orang Rimba's life is the forest. If the forest vanishes, the identity of the Orang Rimba will also be lost.

The assimilation process undertaken by the government is very intense. The government, through a social affairs agency, offers housing programs and the provision of oil palm plantations for Orang Rimba groups who want to live in the neighborhood and turn to Islam. Finally, in 2005, Tarib declared that he had

Table 2 A chronology of Tarib's changes.

| Year | Episode | Subsistence |
|-------|---|--|
| 1980s | Become Tumenggung | Full Nomadic Hunter-Gatherer |
| 1999 | – Attending KMAN I (Congress of Indigenous People in Jakarta) – Open land in the border of national park | Nomadic and partial settled. Hunter-Gatherer and rubber plantation. |
| 2000 | Received Kehati's Award as environmental protector | Hunter-Gatherer and rubber plantation, and started becoming rattan trader. |
| 2004 | Moving to the rubber plantation (close to area of re-settlement) | Live settled at boundaries of forest. Hunter-Gatherer and rubber plantation and rattan trader. |
| 2005 | Converted to Islam and built the house at re-settlement | Live at re-settlement. Tried to assimilate to become a Malay. |
| 2006 | Received Kalpataru Award as environmental hero | Life settled. Hunter-Gatherer and Rubber plantation and rattan trader. |
| 2008 | Moving to re-settlement and starting to assimilate | Oil Palm plantation and Rubber plantation. Starting to reduce hunter. |
| 2009 | Built the permanent house at re-settlement and converted to Islam | Based on oil Palm plantation, rubber plantation, and became trader (oil palm and rubber trader), and opened a grocery store. |
| 2010 | Has made the hajj | Fully assimilated. |

Source: Prepared by author, 2014

converted to Islam. He then moved from his residence in the woods to the settlement, although he already had a house before the housing area has started. He slowly lost all identity as an Orang Rimba, and is now living as a completely acculturated Malay.

The Orang Rimba face chaos when their cultural and physical boundaries are violated. Orang Rimba view social boundaries that separate their world from the outside world as taboo. If the taboo boundary is violated, then the world will be more open to outsiders. One Orang Rimba mentions that once an Orang Rimba becomes Muslim, he should have to live outside the jungle because it would disrupt the harmony of the Orang Rimba who reside in the forest.

Orang Rimba use tradition and taboo as well as social and physical boundaries to separate themselves from other groups (Prasetijo 2005). The belief that the Malays and the outside world (who used to be called *Orang Terang*) are people who bring diseases or disasters influences the actions of the Orang Rimba in their interaction with them. To avoid diseases or disasters, they fortify themselves with various prohibitions or taboos, aimed at limiting their interaction with the outside world, or they try to maintain the purity of their region by placing the Malays or *Orang Terang* in the downstream area of their settlement site. It is assumed that the Malays will not infect their river with diseases. Other taboos include protecting Orang Rimba women from being contaminated by restricting their interaction with the outside world.

The cosmological world of the Orang Rimba and the world of *Orang Terang*



Photo 4 Tarib and his wife front in their house, which is the most modern compare to other Orang Rimba houses in the resettlement area in Kampong Air Panas in Jambi, around Bukit 12 National Park. (Photograph by the author, 2014)

have a strong dichotomy. There are strong boundaries constructed by the Orang Rimba in perceiving their relationship with the Malays. The world of the Orang Rimba exists in the forest and the world of the Malays, or *Orang Terang*, exists in the village. Orang Rimba will feel uncomfortable in the outside world (the world of *Orang Terang*). In order to maintain both worlds smoothly, in accordance with their nature, the Orang Rimba established *pantang'on* (taboos). In this context, Orang Rimba's *pantang'on* can be recognized as their efforts to become the real Orang Rimba in accordance with the standards set in their culture.

These values refer to the classification of the world of Orang Rimba and the world of *Orang Terang*, along with their accompanying attributes. These taboos function as regulations for the Orang Rimba to keep their lives in line with each world's different characteristics, and to keep each world functioning well and not overlapping. Therefore, any Orang Rimba who breaks these taboos is called a person who *mencampok adat*, or has "violated the customs". It means that the person has abandoned his/her old customs and turned to the other customs, those of *Orang Terang*.

Although there are strict boundaries between the world of Orang Rimba and the world of *Orang Terang*, there is always a way in which Orang Rimba can enter the world of *Orang Terang* and *vice versa*. There are many rules that must be followed by each ethnic group so that they will be accepted in the opposite world. For instance, an Orang Rimba should dress like a Malay when she/he goes to the village or world of *Orang Terang*. They consider it improper to wear *cawot* (cloth to cover genitals) in the village. Another example is instead of speaking the Orang Rimba's language, they would use the everyday Malayan language that Malays understand.

Similarly, the Malays or *Orang Terang* adapt when entering their world. There are many taboos set by the Orang Rimba on *Orang Terang* who enter their world of the forests. For instance, *Orang Terang* is not allowed to stay in the areas upstream of the river, unlike the Orang Rimba. They have to live in the areas downstream to avoid diseases or the taboo of the Malays seeing Orang Rimba girls and women. The same discipline applies to Orang Rimba who have returned from a trip to the world of *Orang Terang*: they must isolate themselves for several days to eliminate the diseases and smell of *Orang Terang*.

For most of the Orang Rimba who still live in the forest, becoming *Orang Terang* is considered an easy way of life, as they do not have to work as hard as the Orang Rimba. They do not have to go into the forest every day to search for *louk* (meat) and work in their fields. In their minds, becoming *Orang Terang* and living in a *kampung* means that they must live the way of others who live in *kampongs*. They must have a job, house, garden and the like, as other Malays do.

The life of the Orang Rimba always involves *pantang'on* (taboo). Taboo is generally interpreted as prohibition in the form of punishments that have something to do with things, people or certain activities. Usually, it will concern certain food, sexual intercourse with certain people (incest taboo) and relationships

with certain groups. Orang Rimba taboos are varied. These taboos apply from the simple to the most complex things. They range from restrictions on food, maternal behavior, cutting down certain trees and determination of the housing to the most complex of kinship and custom taboos. Compared to other taboos, a kinship taboo is considered to have the greatest consequence for those who violate, that they are going to be charged with *hokum bunuh*⁷⁾.

In this case, those taboos function more as protectors of regularity between their world and the world of *Orang Terang*. On the other hand, such taboos also function as an ethnic boundary between them and *Orang Terang*, such as taboos related to food and where to live.

Food taboos and customs function as the signs for the indigenous people living their life as real Orang Rimba, in accordance with their life in the forest, safeguarding it from the influence and contamination of the world of *Orang Terang*. *Pantang'on* on certain foods is like prohibition on consuming food made of animals kept by the Malays, such as chicken, egg, goat, cow and milk.

In the view of Orang Rimba who live in the forest as nomadic, being *Orang Terang* is having a good life and not living with difficulties. They mostly compare this situation to their life, which they thought was a comfortable and a good life, having a house in the city with a good settled job.

Nevertheless, from what they see of Orang Rimba who decided to live in the re-settlement, they view their lives as far removed from good and easy. They think mostly that their lives in re-settlement are still hard. They see that the Orang Rimba who live in resettlement should have left behind all attitudes associated with Orang Rimba connected by forest, including their religious belief, customs, lifestyle and livelihood. However, they see Orang Rimba living in re-settlement as the direct opposite. Orang Rimba who live in re-settlement still cultivate and hunt in the forest, also still eat cassava, just like those who live in the forest. The Orang Rimba who live in the forest feel that they must live like *Orang Terang* who have eaten rice every day. From their perspective, there is a solid distinction between their identity and the *Orang Terang*. By implementing the taboo, there will be an apparent boundary between their world and the world of *Orang Terang*. Taboo then works as a strengthening of identity between them and the *Orang Terang*.

The people who violate customs, in the Orang Rimba view, try to confuse the outside world and the world where the Orang Rimba have clear boundaries, both for those living outside the forest and those living in the village. If Orang Rimba lives in the village or re-settlement and the Malay or *Orang Terang* lives in the forest, the elders, mostly, will see the world turning to tragedy, due to mixing. An elder quoted an example in the case of an Orang Rimba girl who lives in villages now. Before, the girls of Orang Rimba were not permitted to see, or be seen by, outsiders; thus, that security is well maintained. However, times have changed. In fact, women now provide evidence of that fact. Now they feel the world has become very 'jumbled'.

I think this condition occurs for the Orang Rimba when they attempt to live in both two worlds. They maintain life in both spheres; the forest domain and the outside world. They can live in villages but have a relationship with the forest, or live in the woods but have a relationship with the outside world, permanently. The relationship can be defined by a permanent home or plantation. As for Tarib, despite living outside his natural habitat, he said he was a descendant of Orang Rimba because he has a plantation and his kin in the forest.

Ngrip's situation is similar. Ngrip is an Orang Rimba who chose to live in the forest. Although he still lives in the forest, he has a reason to go to the re-settlement in the outside world continuously, since he has a house in the village. He saw the greater opportunity when he still lived in the forest. He saw the transformation of the Orang Rimba living in re-settlement and becoming Muslim because they were ready mentally, culturally and economically; as well prepared as he thought necessary for living in re-settlement with its many economic demands. Orang Rimba who live in re-settlements are in more need of daily goods than when they lived in the forest, relying only on natural resources. The Orang Rimba must have an oil palm plantation that can consistently generate a permanent income to make ends meet. He was not ready to meet the new demands: the choice was then how to stay alive in the woods with strong roots in the rural economy.

CONCLUSION

Jana Frontier (2014) in her paper has tried to present the facts which can be understood in the life of modern society, many groups of hunter-gatherer have evolved fully or take part in sedentary life and begin to keep livestock, plant crops or develop plantations. But paradoxically the memories of a hunter-gatherer lifestyle continue to exist and are maintained. These include an egalitarian bond, then relationship as hunters, or searching for food in the forest, and similarly maintaining the ritual activities that are used in the forest for their sedentary life.

In the case of Orang Rimba, the memory of being a hunter-gatherer has remained, and been given shape as a different identity of being Orang Rimba. Orang Rimba who live in a sedentary settlement still link to their as a hunter-gatherer. There are some livelihood activities that cannot be fulfilled by the life settlement, so they had to go to the rainforest.

Changes in the natural and social environment are having some impact on the Orang Rimba; physical displacement, economic impacts and social political displacement are among the most distinct transformations. Physical displacement means that Orang Rimba must make changes to their lifestyle, from hunter-gatherer to a sedentary life, and live at the oil palm plantations owing to the land shortage. In terms of economic impacts, Orang Rimba have already lost their income from forest produce, meaning a loss of sustenance and basic needs. Their lives depend entirely on the market. Moreover, social political displacement means

an unclear position for the Orang Rimba in a modern political system, as they are under pressure to follow the dominant culture, i.e., Malay traditions. The process of assimilation for the Orang Rimba encompasses a stable village social system, a 'proper' belief or religion, a modern-oriented cultural system and a life pattern that reflects the advancement of local and national civilization.

Orang Rimba have their own ways of responding to any repression they encounter. It can be said that the Orang Rimba's response to change is varied. However, there are some differences regarding the case studies. Some of the indigenous people living in the national park are less resistant in facing the changes, but still want to maintain their identity as Orang Rimba by preserving their ancestors' customs and limiting interaction with the outsiders. They continue to use taboo and tradition as tools to determine their ethnic identity.

The Orang Rimba's approaches can be interpreted as self-determined action to retain their own identity. They maintain their traditions and taboos and have constructed a boundary between themselves and other groups. Emphasizing their indigeneity will further strengthen their effort to secure their position in the modern political structure.

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NOTES

- 1) The paper was presented on IUAES2014 (The International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Science) in International Conference Hall of Makuhari Messe, Chiba City, Greater Tokyo, on May 15th–18th, 2014.
- 2) The State considers that the word "Kubu" is not 'civilized' because it reflects something bad and improper. The Orang Rimba is ashamed of using the word "Kubu" in public places. Responding to such instances, the State (Ministry of Social Affairs) tried to introduce a new term to replace the word Kubu. The chosen term was Suku Anak Dalam (Anak Dalam Tribe).
- 3) Forest conversion are changes in forest functions. Changes of natural forests in to managed production forests. This has caused the natural forests in Sumatra to decrease in size (Uryu, Y., Purastuti, E., Laumonier, Y., Sunarto, Setiabudi, Budiman, A., Yulianto, K., Sudibyo, A., Hadian, O., Kosasih, D. A., and Stüwe, M., 2010)
- 4) The Ministry of Social Affairs classified the community groups as an isolated people. Based on the Decree of the Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia No.5/1994, and President Decree No 186 Year 2014, Empowerment Program to Indigenous People Group, Ministry of Social Affairs Republic of Indonesia, an isolated tribe is a group of people who live or roam in places that are geographically remote, isolated and socio-culturally alienated

- or more backward than Indonesian people in general.
- 5) Further, in one of the reports, the Ministry of Social Affairs tried to classify the isolated people into two groups or categories based on their condition of residence, development level and living. The three categories included (1) wandering; (2) temporary residing; and (3) residing. The residing group was an isolated people whose livelihood and residence was permanent in a village, but whose living conditions and life was still very simple
 - 6) *Melangun* tradition is a custom closely observed by the Orang Rimba that they would immediately leave the settlement location after one of the brothers in the group died.
 - 7) *Hokum bunuh* is a metaphor implying that a person has a right to be able to determine other people's lives based on the degree of harm done to him or his relatives. The determination of a person's right to live can be expressed in a number of specific items equal to the value of 500 pieces of fabric.

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