

## **Displacement as Experienced by the Orang Rimba Hunter-gatherers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

As one of several hunter-gatherer societies in Sumatra, Indonesia, the Orang Rimba have experienced various pressures. Changes in their landscape have caused lasting disruptions in the lowlands of Sumatra where they live. Their religion and knowledge of the landscape are based on what they have learned through generations of life in the lowland forests, their native habitat. However, even as the forests have been substantially transformed to serve other functions (such as oil palm plantations, settlements, logging plantations and other developments), not much has changed in the Orang Rimba's attitude towards their land. Now living on oil palm plantations or in government-appointed resettlement areas, they still view their spaces using the same frame of reference they did while living in the forests. This condition has led them to experience what is known as 'displacement', caused by the incongruity between their current environment and the ancestral knowledge that has always been their behavioural reference point.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Orang Rimba community are one of the few remaining hunter-gatherer societies in Sumatra (Prasetijo 2014). They can be considered as such because they still implement some activities or traditions that are within the parameters of a hunter-gatherer society, despite all the environmental and social changes that have occurred around them. Robert Kelly (1995), for example, mentioned several requirements for a community to fall into the hunter-gatherer category, namely the ability to achieve subsistence, establishing their life based on hunting, food sharing, egalitarianism, an independent social organisation, and a closed economic system. Many aspects must be considered in defining a hunter-gatherer society. Since it is impossible for the environment to remain static, such a society must undergo environmental changes in one way or another. The influence of modern life as the background for their interactions with outside communities must also be considered.

In my understanding, a contemporary hunter-gatherer society is not necessarily characterised by a continued hunter-gatherer characteristic or tradition, but by the hunter-gatherer mindset or mentality that such a society still adopts as a behavioural reference, even if its members have evolved into a sedentary or settled society. According to Panter-Brick, Layton, and Rowley-Conway (2001: 5), the prevailing hunter-gatherer concept, based on the mode of production, has nevertheless been political, rather than ecological. In view of this, they also proposed that human groups' behaviours and flexibility are substantial bases for hunter-gatherer groups to respond to different environments through the trajectory of different cultural traditions.

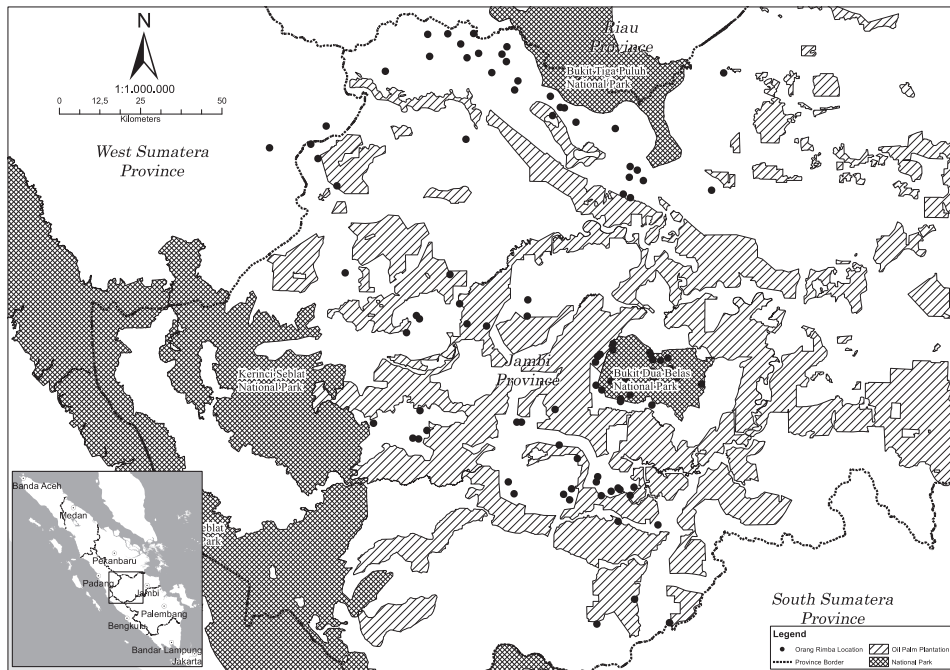
This paper will discuss much about the Orang Rimba's current condition as one of Southeast Asia's hunter-gatherer groups. In actuality, the Orang Rimba are currently experiencing a period or condition that can be described as 'displacement', namely the discrepancy between a culture that is highly dependent on the forests and the reality of how those forests have changed. The displacement has been caused by changes in the natural and social environments of the Orang Rimba's native habitat due to massive deforestation and physical developments on the island of Sumatra. Nothing has prepared the Orang Rimba for dealing with these changes and adapting to modern life. Even though some Orang Rimba groups have adopted changes in their life patterns, their mentality as a hunter-gatherer society remains the same.

## **THE ORANG RIMBA AND THEIR CURRENT SPATIAL CONDITION**

The Orang Rimba, also known as the Orang Kubu (Kubu People) or Suku Anak Dalam (Anak Dalam Tribe), inhabit the lowlands of Jambi. Ecologically, they are spread out over three different locales, namely the western part of Jambi Province (around the eastern Trans-Sumatran Highway), Bukit Duabelas National Park, and the northern part of Jambi Province, especially Bukit Tigapuluh National Park (along the provincial border between Riau and Jambi).

According to a 2010 study by Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics, there are approximately 3,800 Orang Rimba (BPS 2010). In the early 1980s, massive changes began to sweep across the landscape of Sumatra as it entered a turning point with development projects comprising infrastructures, settlements, and the expansion of oil palm plantations. The large-scale development projects transformed these landscapes, including that of Jambi Province. Also affected were Sumatra's lowland forests. As the forests shrunk, many of the natural resources that provided food for those who had been reliant on them for so long declined. The landscape of the Orang Rimba's natural habitat, which had been covered by the dense trees and bushes characteristic of lowland forests, turned into oil palm plantations and settlements.

Figure 1 illustrates that a large percentage of the Orang Rimba live in Bukit Duabelas National Park, whereas the rest live in various oil palm plantation areas,

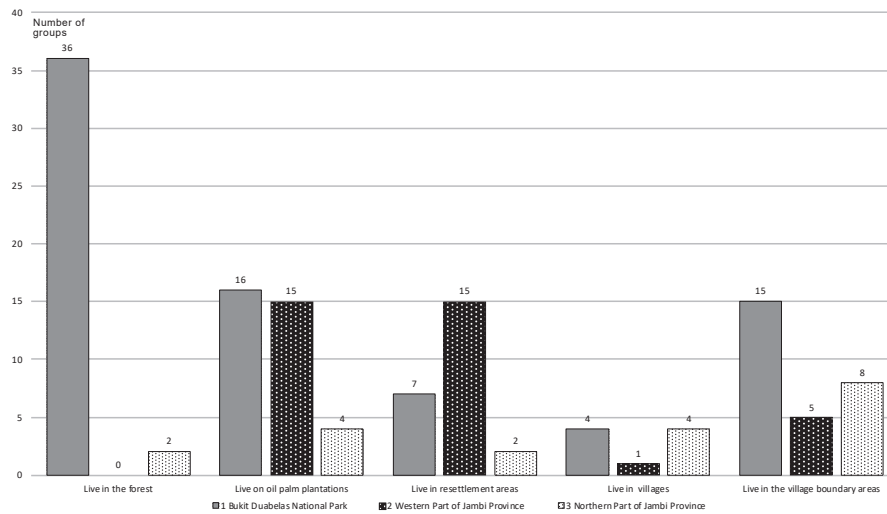


**Figure 1** Map showing locations of Orang Rimba and oil palm plantations in Jambi Province, Indonesia (KKI Warsi 2014)

logging plantation areas, and settlements. The Bukit Duabelas National Park, with a population of 1,500 Orang Rimba, is the geographic centre, with the largest concentration of Orang Rimba in the same landscape (Sandbukt 2000; Prasetijo 2014; Prasetijo 2015). This situation is different from the existing conditions of the Orang Rimba in the south and north of Jambi Province, when they live separately in smaller groups and live where the forest is still maintained.

Data from 2012 show that there are 78 oil palm plantation companies in Jambi, overlapping with locations where Orang Rimba live (KKI Warsi 2014). The lowland forests that are the Orang Rimba's native habitat have changed dramatically. Some Orang Rimba groups now live on oil palm plantations and in industrial forests, as well as in settlements. Figure 1 shows that spatially, the landscape of the Orang Rimba's native habitat has declined. Those who still live in the forest are concentrated in Bukit Duabelas National Park, which has been assigned by the government as their living space since 2002. Some still live in the remaining forests outside Bukit Duabelas National Park. This latter condition is very unfavourable to the Orang Rimba who live nomadically, which requires vast areas for them to wander and hunt.

It is a fact that many Orang Rimba now live on oil palm plantations or in settlements, intermingling with village communities. Table 1 demonstrates that many Orang Rimba today no longer live-in forests, as required by their belief

**Table 1** Graphic of Orang Rimba's locations and environments

(Processed data by Prasetyo [2014] and updated by Haryanto/KKI Warsi)

system. This condition has inevitably caused them to no longer be living in sync with the natural world that is their native habitat.

From Table 1, we can see that the Orang Rimba mostly live on oil palm plantations, in resettlement areas, or among other community groups. It is estimated that there are 134 Orang Rimba groups throughout Jambi. There are 96 groups of Orang Rimba who does not live in the forest anymore, this means 72% of the population is living within the forest while only 38 groups or just 28% still dwells in the forest, almost all lives in the Bukit Duabelas National Park. Compared with what can be seen in Figure 1, the locations of the Orang Rimba's living spaces have not changed much in the many years since 1998 (Prasetyo 2005) as they have been faithful in occupying their traditional areas of wandering or exploration. It is the landscape of these exploration areas around which the Orang Rimba live that has been altered due to changes in land function, something that has occurred since the 1980s.

## THE ORANG RIMBA'S BELIEF SYSTEM: AN ATTACHMENT TO THE FOREST

The Orang Rimba believe in the existence of God. However, their view of this entity and their descriptions of it are very abstract and vague. If asked to describe their God, they might reply that their God is more agile in movements than a tiger, and faster in speed than the *selalayaq* bird (hornbill, or *Bucerotidae*). The Orang Rimba believe in ethereal beings in nature, which can be in the form of gods, the spirits of dead people, and those that they refer to as *malaikot* (*malaikat*, or angels) and *silom* or *silumon* (*siluman*, or shapeshifters). The gods, or *dewo*<sup>1)</sup> as they call

them, as well as *malaikot* and *silom*, live in the realm of the gods, which they call *halom dewo* (the god realm).

The Orang Rimba believe that these gods possess certain things in the forest; these can be certain animals or plants that are sacred or the guardianship of specific locations. They also refer to the condition of being in a trance, namely possessed by those certain things, as *berdewo*. For example, the elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatranensis*) belong to *dewo gajoh* (the elephant god), and then there are the tigers (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*) and the *rangkong gading* birds (*Rhinoplax vigil*). The elephants are essential to the Orang Rimba since they belong to the most magnificent and sacred *dewo*. They also believe that there are gods who own or look after springs (*orang de mato aik*, or the protectors of the springs), honey on *sialang* trees or *Koompassia excelsa* (*orang de repo*, or the protectors of honey), or rice in the fields (*orang de padi*, or the protectors of rice).

The Orang Rimba interpret malignant spirits as *silom* or *silumon* as shapeshifting demons to the Orang Melayu (the Malays). The understanding of shapeshifting demons of the Malays by the Orang Rimba can show that the view of the Orang Rimba towards the Malays is like a binary opposition, where they see the Malays as having both good and evil sides at the same time.

The Orang Rimba usually describe *silumon* as if they are referring to Orang Melayu. *Silom* are described as wearing clothes, living in houses and villages, and using various tools just like Orang Melayu. To the Orang Rimba, *silom* are ethereal beings that watch over certain places that they consider to be sacred; but they are evil, and if a person does not maintain proper behaviour then they may become sick from the curses of the *silom*. These *silom* are named after their *genah*, the places they reside in. A *silom* that lives in the upstream part of a river is called *silom talun*. *Silom talun* are considered to be kinder since they do not cause any trouble or illness to humans. *Silom payau*, or *silom* that live in estuaries or swamps, are considered to be the most evil, and are therefore, the most feared since they like to make humans fall sick.

In addition to *silom talun* and *silom payau*, the Orang Rimba also recognise several other *silom*, such as *silom tanah* (land *silom*) and *silom tunggu kayu* (those that reside in tree roots); they are malignant spirits that like to cause trouble to humans by making them fall ill. Accordingly, the Orang Rimba avoid places where these *silom* reside whenever possible. *Silom* are considered to be harmless as long as humans do not disturb them.

According to the Orang Rimba, the gods are very much like Orang Melayu in terms of their wealth and prosperity—a reflection of what our world looks like today. In the gods' realm, there are tall buildings, luxurious houses, beautiful clothes, and passing vehicles. Descriptions of *halom dewo* or the realm of the gods are provided to Orang Rimba through the visions of a *dukun* or shaman through certain rituals. These visions can also come to the shaman's inner eye as he experiences *kamimpi'on* (dreams).<sup>2)</sup>

A shaman's dream is never insignificant, as it is always imbued with meaning.

*Kamimpi'on* usually occurs after a shaman performs *berdeki*, a prayer that involves chanting specific mantras. The activity is generally performed when a community member requests a shaman to find a solution for his or her problems, or if a shaman sees a peculiar incident that requires an elucidation from the gods; for example, if an odd illness has befallen someone.

To reach the state of *kamimpi'on*, a shaman need to venture into the woods and prepare himself through a process called *bersudungon*, namely building a tent to sit in, before performing a prayer ritual called *besaleh*. Later at night, the shaman will climb on a stage with several other people and begin dancing to the accompaniment of chants until one participant experiences a trance or possession. In such a state, they believe to be channelling to their gods. Some may act like an animal (monkey, tiger, elephant, etc.) or display other uncommon behaviours. To the Orang Rimba, the highest god is the elephant god or *dewo gejoj*. They believe that the elephant god can possess only certain people with special powers, and the term for such possession is *tergejoj*.

As they dance or act according to what possesses them, these people eat flower petals that is presented before them. The shaman and several other people on the stage try to prevent the possessed person from leaving the stage. Some carry those who are exhausted into nearby tents. Crowds at the side of the stage continue to watch the spectacle. This activity may take place over several days depending on the shaman's inner reading, whether he has received an answer to the problem at hand.

The descriptions of their rituals and their forest-related belief system show that the Orang Rimba internalise the forest as an integral home where everything is connected. At the spiritual level, they believe that all things in the forest have souls whose interconnectedness and existence must be preserved. The forest is also seen as a supernatural landscape that covers and protects them.

## THE LANDSCAPE ACCORDING TO THE ORANG RIMBA

When discussing the concept of landscape in relation to the Orang Rimba, it would appear that they have a perfect and detailed understanding of the different features in their area. They view the landscape as an exploration space that have many signs inside it. Their world is the *rimba* or forest that is their native habitat. A *rimba*, in their frame of thinking, is a space that extends from the headwaters down to the estuary, surrounded by borders in the form of hills that they refer to as *tali bukit*. The estuary to them is the boundary between their world and the world of the Orang Melayu, a place where all bad things happen or originate from.

To the Orang Rimba, a river is an important landscape position marker. The distribution of Orang Rimba settlement areas shows the characteristic of following the paths of rivers. River names are also used to refer to the different groups. For example, those who live along the Kejasung River call themselves 'Orang Rimba Kejasung', with a distinction between upstream and downstream. Each group then



divides itself into smaller groups of 10 to 50 people. Each smaller group manages its territory, with river features as borders, allowing them to organise their groups more independently.

The river also marks the boundary between their world and the world of the Orang Melayu. In viewing their landscape, the Orang Rimba of Bukit Duabelas National Park clearly demarcate the boundaries of the Orang Melayu or outsiders to be around estuaries or the mouths of large rivers, and they view these places as the origin of all diseases and afflictions, and therefore to be avoided whenever possible.

To the Orang Rimba of Bukit Duabelas National Park, their territory is acknowledged by the Orang Melayu in their *seloka adat* (traditional adage) that states ‘*Pangkal waris Tanah Garo, Ujung waris Tanah Serengam, Air Hitam Tanah Bejenang*’. This adage is the Orang Rimba self-admittance that the Malay are their caretaker in *Tanah Garo* and *Tanah Serengam* and the Malay’s positions as the authority in *Air Hitam*. *Pangkal waris* is the start of their territorial roaming and the *ujung waris* as their boundaries especially when they must do their *melangun* tradition (mourning voyage) when they travel to *Sungai Serengam* or *Air Hitam* where they must report to the local *jenang* to seek their warden. The Orang Rimba also believe that the whole area is the border of all their activities, roaming and their pilgrimage during *melangun*. *Tanah Garo* in the north and west of the Bukit Duabelas National Park, while the *Air Hitam* area in the south and *Serengam* in the east of the national park. This adage gives Malay the legitimacy on the ‘Waris-Jenang’ authoritative power to Orang Rimba.

They believe that the adage demarcates the boundaries of their wandering, exploration, and *melangun* (mourning voyage). Tana Garo Village stretches from the north to the west of Bukit Duabelas, Air Hitam is located in the south, and Serengam Village is located east of Bukit Duabelas. All these areas border Orang Melayu villages.

Waris’ themselves according to the Orang Rimba are Malays who are considered to be related to the Orang Rimba or their family, who are believed by the Orang Rimba as the appointee of the Malay Sultanate to take care of all the needs of the Orang Rimba. This inheritance position is then passed down from generation to generation. The existence of this inheritance was appointed and needed by the Jambi Malay Sultanate as the person in charge of the Orang Rimba. Therefore, their position in the Bukit 12 area is at the mouth of the *Makekal* River in Tabir and the banks of the *Serenggam* River and in *Tembesi*.

In contrast to *waris*, the *jenang* position is more the position obtained by a person upon appointment and recognition by the king so that it is more hierarchically structured. But even so, the position of this *jenang* is now understood by the Jambi Malay community as a position or status that is acquired from birth or passed down from generation to generation. It is not necessary for a *jenang* person to have a kinship with the Orang Rimba. The function of *jenang*’ is more to the person whose job is to collect *jajah* (tax) from the Orang Rimba to the Jambi

sultanate. In this case, *jenang* has a role as a link between the Orang Rimba and the outside world, namely the Jambi sultanate. He is considered as someone who represents the interests of the king or sultan. As shown in Table 2, the Orang Rimba mark their territories according to the functions of the different places and the distinct resources available there. They recognise each site according to what is available or the characteristic feature that can be seen there. For example, *tali bukit* are hills that, according to them, are too steep to work on and belong to the area where the gods live, making it unfit for cultivation. Then there are the *suban* or swamps, the dwelling place of *dewo suban*, or god of the swamps, who is fond of casting diseases.

To the Orang Rimba, this concept of marking the landscape of their native habitat has several objectives. One is to identify locations that are sacred because they may be the dwelling of gods (*tano bedewo*), the dwelling of *dewo* or *silumon suban* (the *suban*), or locations that hold ritualistic importance, such as *tano peranok'on*, where the Orang Rimba women give birth, and *tano pusaron*, where the Orang Rimba lay their dead. Moreover, some locations hold the essential values of having food resources or non-timber forest resources for medicinal purposes or trade. The various kinds of plants that grow in these places serve different purposes. A *benuaron* is where many fruit trees grow, planted by Orang Rimba in the past, although rattan and other kinds of plants that have trade value, and even some medicinal plants, can also be found here. This location holds a key role for Orang Rimba when they are on their *melangun*<sup>3)</sup> or *remayow*<sup>4)</sup> journeys because they will need to consume easily attainable foods that are rich in carbohydrate.

In addition, there are locations allocated for farming and gardening, such as the *huma* or dry fields, where crops are planted alongside rubber plants which can be tapped for their sap and sold as a commodity. There are also locations that the Orang Rimba have cleared for cultivating their crops and then abandoned for an extended period, called *sesap* or *belukar*.

Areas where animals converge, making them easy to hunt, are also significant as places to obtain food. Such sites include the *inuman*, namely pools or other smaller bodies of water where animals come to drink. Certain parts of a river also fall into this category since they are where the Orang Rimba can catch fish and other aquatic animals to eat. *Tengkuruk sungai* or the headwaters of a river, for example, is where the Orang Rimba can go to look for *labi-labi* (softshell turtles).

As shown in Table 2, the Orang Rimba utilise the ecosystems in their landscape for various objectives. All identifications of the landscape are based on their functions, and the knowledge of these identifications is passed down from generation to generation. The utilisation can be permanent, such as the rubber plantations or the fruit forests that can be beneficial in the long term, or semi-permanent such as the agricultural fields. The rest of the forest is then used as areas for hunting animals and catching fish, as well as for gathering fruits, honey, and tubers for their subsistence needs. Non-timber forest resources are used for



**Table 2** The Orang Rimba's landscape

No.	Function	Local Term	Descriptions
1	Cultural	<i>Tano Bedewo</i>	Dwelling of the gods; sacred; Orang Rimba are prohibited from entering.
		<i>Suban</i>	Swamps; sacred; Orang Rimba are prohibited from entering.
		<i>Tali bukit</i>	Hills; boundaries for Orang Rimba's various activities, including agriculture.
2	Ritual	<i>Tano peranok'on</i>	The area where the women give birth.
		<i>Tano pusaron</i>	Cemetery
		<i>Tano keramot</i>	Places Orang Rimba are prohibited from entering.
3	Food source	<i>Benuaron</i>	Food forest with fruit trees; foraging areas.
		<i>Bungaron</i>	Food forest with fruit trees; foraging areas that has specific vegetation or an area is altered though land clearing purpose to cultivate certain fruit the area.
4	Hunting	<i>Mato aik</i>	Springs; many animals come here to drink, making them an ideal hunting ground.
		<i>Payau</i>	Swamps
		<i>Sako talon</i>	Headwaters; many wild animals can be found here.
		<i>Inuman</i>	Pools and other smaller bodies of water; hunting grounds.
		<i>Kubang</i>	Pools where boars come to wallow to keep cool; places to hunt for boar.
		<i>Tengkuruk sungai</i>	Headwaters of a river for <i>labi-labi</i> (softshell turtles)
5	Livelihood	<i>Huma</i>	Dry fields
		<i>Sesap, belukar</i>	Abandoned parcels of land where Orang Rimba previously cultivated crops.

(Data processed by Prasertjo (2014) and updated by Prabu/KKI Warsi)

various purposes. Flowers, for example, are used in rituals. Rattan and saps, including resin, are extracted as commodities, while several types of trees are used for both rituals and commercial purposes, such as *tenggeris* and *sentubung*. The *tenggeris* tree plays an important role in birth ceremonies. It is believed that this particular tree can give strength to a newborn, and the way to manifest this is by rubbing the bark on the baby's crown. A part of the *sentubung* tree is used to accompany the placenta when it is buried. Therefore, these two trees mark the beginning of Orang Rimba children's life.

## SUBSISTENCE AND ORANG RIMBA'S FORAGING ACTIVITIES

The Orang Rimba are a hunter-gatherer society that also forage for forest resources to trade with outsiders (Sandbukt 1988: 118), which makes them economically a hunter-gatherer society. However, they are also semi-subsistent swidden cultivators. Their main subsistence activities can be differentiated into two categories: gathering or foraging for forest resources (*remayow*) as well as cultivating

(*behuma*), and hunting wild animals and catching fish.

A detailed description of Orang Rimba's subsistence is described in table 3, which is explained they are familiar with dry-land cultivation (*behuma*) and other activities related to agriculture and plantations, especially rubber-tree planting. Even though farming or *behuma* is not a subsistence activity that they engage in consistently every year, it is throughout this period that they consolidate and create networks with other fellows Orang Rimba.

Their choice of location to practise *behuma* is based not only on the existence of a water source but also on how to avoid areas that are believed to bring bad luck if they cleared them for opening fields and settlements. The latter includes swamps, which they believe to be the dwelling place of the malignant *dewo suban*. This means they might catch a disease or be cursed if they insisted on staying in such an area. Another kind of land feature that they avoid is any steep, hilly region, such as the slopes of Bukit Duabelas. In their belief, some of the gods that live upon the hills can also be malignant.

If they find it difficult to open a new location to practise *behuma*, then they will clear up land that they once cultivated or that has been abandoned for a long time (*sesap* land). Nowadays, however, ease of access is another factor that they need to consider before clearing a plot of agricultural land. This factor will be necessary once the rubber trees that they planted have reached a proper age for tapping. Such access can be in the form of a river or alternative routes that connect them to the outside world, making it easier for them to transport their rubber latex.

To meet the constant need for carbohydrates, the dry fields are usually planted with staple crops that grow and produce yields quickly. These include cassava, banana, sugarcane, chilli, and taro, as well as pineapple and jackfruit. Plots of land that they have left behind would usually be overgrown with *tayas* and a variant of banana called *pisang kerayak* that appear to grow wildlly. In addition to those plants, rubber trees can also be found as one of their main crops.

The fulfilment of the Orang Rimba's carbohydrate needs may at times require some journeying, called *remayow*, in which they venture into the forest to forage for food when they are on their *melangun* journey or when they suffer (*sosot*) due to famine. The foods they look for during *remayow* usually include different kinds of tubers such as *benor* and *gadung*. Whenever they can find these tubers, they will obtain them by means of digging. The different types of tubers include *benor* (*benor godong*, *benor licin*, *benor berbulu*, and *benor siluang*). The *benor* tubers are extracted from the soil by digging 0.5m deep, while *humbud beyoi* and *sago* are extracted from the centre of the stems of certain trees. *Sago* is also an alternative plant from which Orang Rimba can obtain carbohydrate. However, it has become a rarity due to the gradual disappearance of swamps, reclaimed by oil palm plantations.

Hunting, or looking for *louk* (meat), is an activity that is usually undertaken by the males. The animals that the Orang Rimba commonly hunt are boars and deer, although they also catch other animals such as *tenuk* (tapirs), muntjacs, and mouse

deer. There are some animals that they abstain from killing and eating; for example, monkeys, *gading* birds, elephants, and tigers, among others. This is mostly related to their belief that those animals are pets of the gods or even manifestations of the gods themselves.

They usually hunt using a *kecepek*, a handmade rifle assembled from pipes. In addition to *kecepek*, they also use *kujur* (spears). Nowadays, however, they prefer to use *kecepek* and air rifles in their hunts, which usually take place at night. The Orang Rimba make use of flashlights to hunt their prey before shooting them or they called it as *nyuluh mato*.

The making of snare traps, an activity called *mosong jorot*, using twigs and strong ropes woven from tree roots or rattan is also considered a part of hunting. Snare traps are usually made to catch larger animals, such as deer, tapirs, mouse deer, and muntjacs.

Another activity in the hunting category is catching fish by hand (*ngakop ikan*) by extracting poison from certain tree roots (*menubo ikan*) and transforming it into a concoction that, when poured into the water, can semi-intoxicate the fish and make them easier to catch. *Ngakop ikan* is an activity that may involve the whole family. The women and children are particularly fond of participating in it, especially after floods when some fish cannot return to the river and remain in pools or swamps.

**Table 3** Orang Rimba's modes of subsistence

No.	Local term	Activity	Objects	Time
1	<i>Behuma</i>	Planting upland rice in dry fields.	Upland rice, cassava, sugarcane	To meet the constant need for carbohydrates.
2	<i>Remayow</i>	Foraging for food.	Forest tubers	When Orang Rimba are on a <i>melangun</i> journey, or during famine.
3	<i>Mencari louk</i>	Hunting for wild animals.	Boars, deer, mouse deer, tapirs	Orang Rimba hunt to meet the need for protein; it is done in specific periods.
4	<i>Ngakop ikan</i>	Catching fish by hand.	Freshwater fish	Done in certain seasons.
5	<i>Nyuluh mato</i>	Night-time hunting using flashlights (spotlighting) and <i>kecepek</i> . The hunters shine a light on their prey, stunning it before they shoot it.	Mouse deer	Nocturnal
6	<i>Masong jorot</i>	Setting up snare traps to catch animals. It can be done individually, but more often in groups.	Boars, deer, muntjacs, and tapirs	Done in the day or late afternoon; they return to check on the traps after a few days.
7	<i>Menubo ikan</i>	Intoxicating fish with natural <i>tuba</i> (poison) from a particular tree.	Freshwater fish	Done in certain seasons.
8	<i>Bekebun karet</i>	Planting rubber trees.	Rubber latex	Orang Rimba plant rubber trees for monetary purposes.

(Field data processed by Prasetijo 2014)

Table 3 also explained, the fields of the Orang Rimba are planted with staple crops that are fast-growing and producing fast. For example, sweet potatoes, bananas, sugar cane, chilies, taro, and jackfruit. Then they also planted rubber as a staple crop for their cultivation or *bekebun karet*.

For the first year, they will plant it with field rice, wherein between the fields they plant rubber trees after a few months. Cassava is planted spread over the land. Cassava is better able to survive both against pests and the weather. The Orang Rimba then planted a lot of rubber trees to support the family economy. They like to plant rubber because the rubber plantations are integrated into secondary forest originating from traditional farming, not much different from the traditional way of developing various traditional crops. This also implies a potential for a more sedentary lifestyle in strategic locations facing road infrastructure and could accelerate the integration of the Orang Rimba into the main economic routes.

The Orang Rimba process their catch by boiling or grilling. They are also familiar with a particular meat preservation method. This preservation method, especially for red meat, is important for a hunter-gatherer society like the Orang Rimba. The method is called *sale*, or dry smoking. This way, when their catch is quite large (*louk godong*), they can keep it for several days. Once their meat supply has run out, they return to the forest to hunt for more animals.

To Sandbukt (1988), the Orang Rimba comprise the lowest link in the chain of trade in the Sultanate of Jambi, all the way to the Malacca Strait's free trade. According to Sandbukt, the Orang Rimba are the leading suppliers of several primary trade commodities for the Sultanate of Jambi.

They collect several kinds of natural resources that they then offer for sale, such as *jernang* (*Daemonorops* sp.), *damar*, *getah balam* (the sap of *Palaquium hexandrum* Engler), *getah jelutung*, *manau*, and various types of rattan. The types of rattan they collect range from ones that grow on hills, such as *manau* (*Calamus manan*), *tetebu*, *semambu* (*Calamus scipionum*), and *balam*, to those that thrive in swampy areas, such as *rotan sego* (*Calamus caesius*) and *rotan cacing*.

These different forest resources were the primary trade commodities in the Jambi Sultanate era. *Jernang* fruit was used as a fabric dye, resin gum was used to hold ships' planks together, and *jelutung* gum and *balam* were used in rubber making. Over time, the sale value of these commodities declined due to the mass production of synthetic materials with lower prices. Moreover, the severe level of forest destruction has made these forest resources quite challenging to find in Bukit Duabelas National Park. According to the Orang Rimba themselves, *jernang* (*Daemonorops draco*) has become a rarity. The same applies to rattan. There is very little rattan left in the forests of Bukit Duabelas. Should there be some left, the Orang Rimba have to go deep into the jungle to find them. An imbalance has caused this scarcity between collecting the rattan and replanting it or simply giving nature enough time to reproduce it.

To comprehend the economic relationship between the Orang Rimba and their neighbours the Orang Melayu, we need to be able to understand the socio-political

organisation system of the Melayu Jambi Sultanate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which influenced the Orang Rimba's socio-political organisation system. It can be said that the Orang Rimba adopted the model of the sultanate's government system, which referred to the sayings *serah naik jajah turun* and *jajah naik penuntung turun*. *Serah naik jajah turun* means the tribute given by the Orang Rimba to the Malays in the form of commodities obtained in the forest, where in return, protection from the king or *jajah* descends on the Orang Rimba. The better and the routine the tribute or *jajah* is given, the better the legitimacy or blessing of the sultan for the economy of the Orang Rimba. The two adages formed a principle adopted by the Sultanate of Jambi to clarify the flows of commodities and taxes both from the upstream areas (inland) to the downstream areas (coastal) and vice versa.

According to Tideman (1938), in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the people of Jambi were subject to several levies imposed by the sultanate in the form of money and goods. The taxes were in the form of payments from any sale and purchase of land as well as any land rent (*hasil umo*), forest products related to timber (*bungo kayu*), and non-timber forest products (*jajah*). There were also several types of items that ordinary citizens were prohibited from owning and had to surrender to the king because they were considered to hold strong supernatural powers. These items included *jata jati* (gold nuggets), ivory, *cunding* (the back parts of female elephants), *sungu* (rhino horn), *culo tupay* (male squirrels' genitals), *guligo* (hard objects in animals' bodies), *semambu ulung* (black rattan), and *mastiko* (gemstones previously residing inside snakes or elephants).

On the other hand, the sultanate (the king) would reward those who surrendered such items by giving a piece of white cloth, a machete, and some salt. These two flows were the ones referred to as *serah naik jajah turun* and *jajah naik penuntung turun*. To collect *jajah* (tax) and conduct governmental duties, the king appointed several *jenang*. The *jenang* performed political duties and provided justice on behalf of the sultan. The powers delegated to the *jenang* by the king included determining *pampas* (fines) and the payments of *bangun* (*finer for a high value, worth a substitute for human life*), the processing of civil cases as well as determining the amounts of debts and receivables before handing the decisions over to the sultan (up level by level), receiving *bungo kayu* and *bungo pasir* (sand tax) payments, handing down *serah* (rewards from the king), and collecting *jajah* (tax). This was the focus of Tideman's work (1938: 8), which illustrates how the economic relationships bind the Orang Rimba and outsiders, especially the Orang Melayu.

Over time, right up to the modern era, the Orang Rimba still see their commodities as having a high market value. In reality, the current market no longer considers these commodities as valuable. The hunter-gatherer mentality of the Orang Rimba has been built based on economic relationships in which they continue to see themselves as part of the leading link in the capitalistic market chain. They do not realise that the market commodities they gather, or produce are

no longer needed and have been replaced by other commodities, the demand for which they cannot fulfil.

World commodities have evolved. Those that once relied heavily on natural resources have steered towards the productive management of plantations. The Orang Rimba have seen the signs of this phenomenon, their native habitat has turned into plantations and settlements, and it is too late for them to retrieve it.

## **DISPLACEMENT AS FACED BY THE ORANG RIMBA**

On 19 March 2015, Jambi was rattled by a local news report that 11 Orang Rimba had died of starvation<sup>9</sup>. It was a case of successive deaths that had happened to three Orang Rimba groups in the eastern part of Bukit Duabelas National Park, Sarolangun, Batanghari Regency. Among these 150 people in the three groups, the most frequent deaths occurred in January through February 2014 with six fatalities, namely four children and two adults. The total number of fatalities until March 2015 totalled 11.

In January and February 2014, they began their *melangun* journey, moving to at least seven new locations, mostly on the peripheries of villages and within community plantations. Under normal conditions, the Orang Rimba would visit sites that they consider to be good sources of food and rich in various natural resources. The locations that they visited, however, had been transformed into private rubber or *sengon* tree plantations.

Spatially, the wandering area of these groups overlapped with the operational areas of PT EMAL, PT Sawit Desa Makmur (oil palm plantation), and the industrial forest of PT WANA Perintis. The forest area that had been converted by these companies covered 30,000 hectares. The land function conversion narrowed the Orang Rimba native habitats and made it more difficult for them to continue implementing their ancestral way of living, namely hunting and gathering forest resources.

The Orang Rimba's *melangun* journey usually forms a circular pattern, which allows them to return to their starting point a few years later. In the case of the three Orang Rimba groups, their journey path made it impossible for them to find sufficient food supply. As a result, their health was compromised, and many of them became sick or prone to illnesses. This situation led to successive deaths in different locations.

The condition experienced by the three Orang Rimba groups in the eastern part of Bukit Duabelas National Park is one of displacement or environmental discrepancy. The groups were using their knowledge of the landscape that they had acquired for generations to understand and solve the problems they were facing as a community. Yet, this knowledge was no longer following the real conditions. The locations that they had considered sources of food no longer served this particular purpose due to land function conversion. The areas were now under the control of private companies.





**Photo 1** Orang Rimba on an oil palm plantation.  
(Photo taken by Prasetijo, 2014)

Regardless of their surroundings, the Orang Rimba's mindset or frame of thinking leads them to keep acting as they always do in the forest. The same applies to their view of the oil palm trees growing in their territories—the same areas that now belong to oil palm plantation companies. They view oil palm trees the way they see any other trees growing in the jungle, which means that they can gather the fruits readily. In their mind, they are still living in a forest, even though that jungle is now a monoculture of oil palm trees. This is why there have been a growing number of conflicts between the Orang Rimba and oil palm plantation companies as well as villagers. The latter two see the Orang Rimba as stealing oil palm fruits from their plantations, while the Orang Rimba see it as an act of gathering from the forest.

According to Sandbukt (1984: 86), the Orang Rimba classify their world into two distinct categories, namely the world of the Orang Melayu and the world of the Orang Rimba. The world of the Orang Melayu is characterised as populated by people who live in villages and subscribe to Islam. They call them Orang Terang (People of Light), or people who live in a world that is always bright from sunlight. It is safe to interpret this as a belief that the Orang Melayu are those who live outside of the jungle.

In the 1980s, rapid developments occurred in Jambi. The expansion of oil palm plantations, the establishment of settlements for participants in the transmigration programme, road construction, and logging activities were among the reasons that brought the 'People of Light' into the Orang Rimba territories. The Orang Rimba cosmos and the cosmos of the outsiders collided. This caused significant confusion among the Orang Rimba because their world was no longer the same, and they were utterly unprepared for the new world.

The Orang Rimba perceive oil palm plantations just as they saw the landscape

of their old forests. They still hunt for wild boar amid the oil palm trees, and they build shelters in the middle of the plantations, treating the palm trees as they did the trees in the old forests. Previously, they could take any fruit in the forest to sell as part of their customary foraging tradition. What is different now is that the commodity has changed from natural forest resources to oil palm fruits.

Even though the Orang Rimba are familiar with *behum* or dry-field farming, growing industrial crops was part of the Orang Melayu's knowledge, introduced to them in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Dutch colonial period. In those days, the Netherlands needed a steady supply of rubber latex from Sumatra. The Orang Rimba's foraging tradition then arose as an indirect result of the colonial capitalist economic system at the time. Before that, they had no knowledge of farming the way the Orang Melayu and other outsiders already did. Similarly, this now applies to oil palm trees. The Orang Rimba have not been accustomed to planting and tending oil palm trees. They simply view oil palm fruits as a commodity that they can take to sell.

The environmental displacement has also forced the Orang Rimba to adapt to modern life. My research (Prasetyo 2014) also shows that they have to earn money regularly to support their day-to-day lives, and yet they no longer have any dependable natural resources around them. Modernity is described to them in the form of oil palm plantations, settlements, constructions, and similar developments. To enter modernity, they will need to add other skills to support their endeavours; however, they do not have the ability to do even this. Hence, modernity to them is an endless series of interconnected problems in one big complex web. It is therefore not surprising that some of them are experiencing social, political, and psychological displacement.

## CONCLUSION

The Orang Rimba do not transgress the boundaries of each group's wandering area, marked by Jambi's different rivers. Therefore, they hunt, clear agricultural land, and gather forest resources in the areas that constitute their territories. The same principle applies to their ritualistic or religious activities. Their understanding of the landscape around them is part of the knowledge system that they have internalised from generation to generation, and it has become their reference in moving about. They set out on their *melangun* or hunts in this same manner, in which they only visit previously marked areas.

This condition of displacement has forced the Orang Rimba to adapt to the new situation. Even though they realise that their territories are no longer cosmologically in harmony with their knowledge system, they strive to continue living in those areas despite all the limitations. The deaths of 11 Orang Rimba in the eastern part of Bukit Duabelas National Park stands as a case in point. They set out on their *melangun* journey to areas they thought still to be *benuaron*, or forests replete with food. It then became apparent to them that the areas had become part

of an industrial plantation, covered by a monoculture of *segon* trees (*Paraserianthes falcataria*) grown for timber, leaving them with no means of feeding themselves.

The condition of displacement in terms of landscape, in turn, affects the Orang Rimba's frame of thinking. In the Orang Rimba cosmology, they distinguish their world from the world of outsiders, the world of the People of Light. In practice, the Orang Rimba still refer to the legacy of ancestral knowledge, a knowledge handed down to them by their progenitors, to deal with the situation. What ensue are rising conflicts between the Orang Rimba and outside communities. The outsiders, including the oil palm plantation companies, see the Orang Rimba as a threat on land they call their own.

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### NOTES

- 1) Sandbukt (1984: 89) says that this term also refers to the personification of the Orang Rimba's gods in the form of wholesome human beings, and therefore it is quite common that these gods are depicted as normal human beings that are Melayu (Malay) in appearance.
- 2) *Kamimpi'on* can be interpreted as dreaming of specific occurrences or seeing revelations signalled by the gods, which provide answers to the shaman's questions. In the dreams, what the realm of the gods looks like is supposedly revealed.
- 3) *Melangun* is a mourning voyage taken immediately after a family member dies.
- 4) *Remayow* is a journey taken to forage for foods in the forest when a group of Orang Rimba is running out of food in its settlement.
- 5) Source: <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/646497/kelaparan-11-orang-rimba-meninggal-di-jambi>, accessed on 15/05/2020.

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