

Research Article

The Conflicts of the Orang Rimba and the Jambi Malay Community: Reality and Resolutions

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Abstract.

Since the New Order, the lands and forests of the Orang Rimba have been used as locations for the transmigration program and HPH and HP-HTI projects, resulting in the livelihoods of the Orang Rimba being destroyed and triggering conflicts. This paper discusses the recurring and endless conflicts between the Orang Rimba and the Jambi Malay community. The enmity is the impact of deforestation and the transmigration program. The values of the Orang Rimba's customary law and their religious beliefs have been eroded, forcing them to claim lands and forests as well as their products being for all. From this problem, it is believed that to obtain in-depth data, the main sources of this article are from field observations, intensive interviews, published journals, previous research reports, and print and online media reports relating to the conflicts involving the Orang Rimba.

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1. Introduction

The *Kubu* tribe is an indigenous community inhabiting the rainforest of Jambi province, Indonesia. They are perceived as not only backward but also believe in a local religion. Besides being called as the *Anak Dalam Tribe* (SAD), they also have other nicknames such as *Kubu*, *Orang Rimba*, and *Sanak*. In the past, during the Soeharto era, this double minority group was suppressed and their customary lands and forests were used as locations for Javanese transmigrants and large-scale commercial logging companies. The policy was continued by post-*reformasi* local governments with the same terminology, namely HPH and HP-HTI, narrowing the lives of the *Orang Rimba* and fostering conflicts.

This paper discusses conflicts between the *Orang Rimba* and The Jambi Malay community. The *Orang Rimba* assume that lands and forests and their products are natural possession that belong to all, neglecting ownership rights of lands and forests

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held by the Jambi Malay community. On the contrary, the Malay people of Jambi consider that land and forest possession and their products are limited by rights and laws. As a consequence, the differences lead to conflicts. For example, in 2018 the *Orang Rimba* shot a local resident with homemade firearms because they rejected a regulation that prohibited them from taking crops such as durians.

Such conflicts have numbered 16 cases from 1999 to 2015 with 14 fatalities [1, p. 81]. Again, the conflicts are the impact of deforestation and transmigration [2, p. 248]. This paper will further prove that conflicts between the *Orang Rimba* and the Jambi Malay community occur owing to local governments' greed over the control of land and forest concessions, resulting in an elimination of food sources that force the *Orang Rimba* to act against laws and morality. All of these problems are a consequence of local governments' absence in forming a bastion of conflicts, namely inter-communal organizations [3].

2. Methods

To describe and analyze problems that arise, this study uses a qualitative-ethnographic approach [4]. The objects of this study are the *Anak Dalam* Tribe and the Jambi Malay community. In general, ethnic conflicts tend to be the same as elsewhere. However, for this case it is relatively different because it involves an ethnic minority that is not familiar with positive laws. They only trust the customary law as a guideline for the rule of law.

The research locus is located in Merangin and Sarolangun districts, Jambi Province, Indonesia. These two districts are ecological areas where the *Orang Rimba* are located. The majority of the population of the two regions practice Malay cultures that are strongly influenced by Islam. Referring to the view of anthropologist Judith A. Nagata, Malay is a tribe whose ethnic and religious identities exchange and duplicate: religious identity is also ethnic identity [5].

Here, when an ethnic conflict involves the *Orang Rimba* who adhere to animistic view and have cultural differences from the local population, it makes it difficult to find a resolution for the conflict. This is the primary reason why Merangin and Sarolangun were chosen as research locations. To obtain data, this research uses three methods: a direct field observation to monitor all the activities of the *Orang Rimba*, indepth interviews, and documentation. The data obtained were then tested for validity through extended observation and triangulation or checking through cross-interviews and crosschecks with literature and print and electronic sources. The data were then classified, analyzed, and the results were written based on the subproblems discussed.

3. Results and Discussion

Social conflicts in Indonesia are an integral part of crisis and Indonesia's transition to a democratic country [6]. However, sometimes the state does allow conflicts to occur, without preventive measures and seeking resolutions that put emphasis on negotiations, resolutions, and peace creation [7]. Some examples are conflicts occurred since and after independence such as the attempted uprising in the 1950s, the massacres of 1956 to 1966 which marked a transition from the Old Order regime to the New Order, and the riots of 1998 that are not completely solved until today.

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that racial and ethnic conflicts are always there. It is argued that conflicts are a major feature of contemporary social life with its heterogeneity and the increasing intensity of social interaction between races [8]. It is true for Jambi today. In the past, Jambi was a safe area that was free from conflicts. However, in the last three decades it has changed drastically since and after the transmigration program [9, p. 13], [10]. The *Orang Rimba* feel disturbed and finally they themselves who disturb. The transmigration program is also believed to be a project of genocide of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples à la the New Order [11] because it still adopts a post-colonial and colonial state tradition which disregards the rights of indigenous peoples [12].

The transmigration project had run in the periods of 1905-1922, moving around 22,000 Javanese residents to Sumatra. The program was continued by Seokarno and Seoharto [11], [13] until 1989 with an addition of 4,866,394 residents [11, p. 555] spreading across Sumatra, Kalimantan and Papua. In addition, the program to transform forests and lands to palm oil and eucalypt plantations through forest concession grants and industrial timber plantations is also a source of problem. From 1985 to 2008 the two projects have unimaginably reduced Sumatra's rainforest on average 542,000 ha per year [14]–[16].

In the Air Hitam [the Bukit Duabelas Naitonal Park] area, for example, there are millions of hectares of land and forest converted into transmigration villages (such as the villages of Bukit Suban, Mentawak Baru, Mentawak Ulu, Pematang Kabau in the upstream section), palm oil companies (such as PT. SAL, JAW, EMAL, Sawit Desa Makmur), and Industrial Plantation Forest (such as PT Wahana Perintis, PT. Inhutani V, PT. Putra Sumber Utara Timber [PSUT]) [1], [17].

Since then there has been an imbalance in forest and land ownership [20, p. 8]. For the *Orang Rimba*, the problem has been quite torturous. The forest, which is a home and source of livelihoods, has now been transformed into palm oil plantations and acacia forests. In addition, the New Order's progressive program of the unification of national

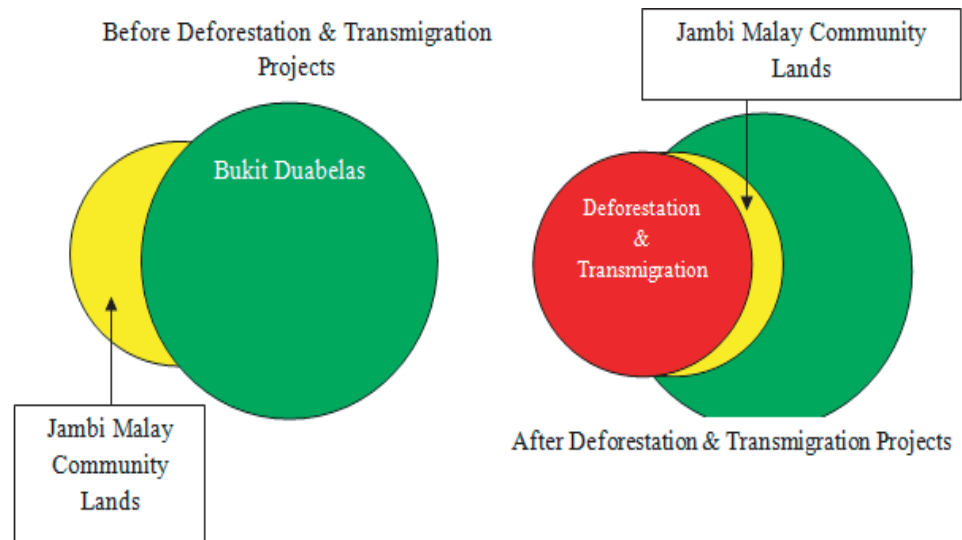


Figure 1: Changes in Ecological Forest and Land in Air Hitam.

identity has further worsened their lives that it complicates their customary and religious legal arrangements [15], [21]. Finally, after the *reformasi*, various social problems have emerged, mainly in the form of economic inequality, forcing the *Orang Rimba* to violate the ethics of social life of the Malay community.

Kami ikoh terpaksa macam ikoh, hutan uda habih, nak mera'mu dak do gi, Nak nimbak babi dak do ego, te'pa'so kami ngambi' berondol sawit koh lah, kami jual. (We don't have much option; the forest has been destroyed and forest products and wild animals (for hunting) are no longer available. So we regretfully have to take people's palm fruits illegally for sale.), (Interview, Depati Busu, 12 June 2019).

The *Orang Rimba* have no option but doing anything that the most important thing for them is to meet the needs of their families. They also have to assimilate with Malay communities and some of them even have to convert their beliefs even though it violates the customary and belief law. In the ecological area of Batin VIII for example, the *Temenggung Jurai* group had to convert into Christianity so that they obtained financial aids for land purchase from the Church to meet housing needs. Likewise in Air Hitam, The *Orang Rimba* are highly hopeful that the government can provide alternative livelihoods for them that are equal to that of the Jambi Malay community.

Kami iko tepa'so bepo', kalu ida macam iko, kami ida mekon, anak cucu kami nak mekon apo, hutan uda habi, na mera'mu ida ado lagi, utan, manau, jerenang la habi galo, apo nan ketemu itu nan diambe. (We don't have much option, Sir. If we were not like this [taking residents' crops illegally] what would we eat? The forest is gone, and if

we want to get forest products like rattan, manau rattan, and dragon blood, they are no longer available. So we take whatever we find), (Interview, Jurai, 13 June 2019).

4. Conclusions

The conclusion from this study is that the local government need to provide new livelihoods for the Orang Rimba. Their great hope is to obtain equal ownership rights to plantation lands in order to replace their hunting and gathering lifestyle. At the very least, the best resolution that needs to be adopted by the government could be through giving away some parts of The Right of Exploitation (HGU) held by palm oil plantation corporations in the Air Hitam region to the Orang Rimba for plantations with an ownership status or a plasma partnership. The land transfer could be considered a compensation for the conversion of their customary forests to oil palm concessions that eliminate their food sources. The resolution will reduce the Orang Rimba's socio-economic gap and a beginning for the creation of ethno-communal institutions.

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