

Conference Paper

The Collapsing Dayaknese Totem: Palm Oil Plantation and the Waning of Religiosity in West Kalimantan

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Abstract

For the Dayak Desa people of Kampong Nek Gambang, *tapang madu* (*Koompassia excelsa*) is believed as their totem rather than just a bee tree. Being a totem, *tapang madu* underwent three cultural modifications: social, religious, and psychological. In religious function, *tapang madu* is considered as the main media for Desa's initiation ritual, as well as having vital position in their myth of origin. In its social function, *tapang madu* is also a statement of clanship, serving as a family tree which records up to nine late generations of ancestors. Relating to its social function, the *tapang madu* produces honey which is invaluable to the Dayak Desa. In its psychological function, *tapang madu* is protected by a collapsing-taboo. Nevertheless, research shows that even though it is considered sacred, *tapang madu* totem has been massively demolished by external groups and even the people of Nek Gambang themselves. This ethnographic research is aimed to understand the reason for the fall of *tapang madu* totem both physically as well as symbolically.

Keywords: Collapsing, Dayak Desa, Honey, Palm Oil Tree, *Tapang Madu*, Totem

1. Introduction

Kalimantan's exotic ecology, which is filled with dipterocarps tree species, has long been presumed integral with the exoticism of its human inhabitant (Dipterocarps tree species have the best and most luxurious timber quality compared to other trees species group in Kalimantan. Dipterocarps are the oldest and have an average height between 45 m to 60 m. These type of trees has been presumed to dominate the entire Kalimantan forest, nevertheless due to illegal logging, forest fires and conversions to monoculture farming, their number have drastically decreased) [1]. This romantic colonialist construction of imagination misguided both Indonesian and global society's way of perceiving the reality in which Dayaks of Kalimantan are and is currently facing.

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As a result, the Dayaks are perceived as if they are a group of purely-kept culture, far from the reaches of “outside” world [2], loving their forests and trees and in nowhere near an act of damaging the ecosystem, in whatever scale it may be.

In reality, even though the Dayaks build their settlements deep within the forest [3], its people’s life is by no means static, hidden or even unchanging. The Dayaks and their culture today are products of a long history of interaction with the outside world. That long-term interaction is an ongoing and ever-changing process which includes experiences of mobility, intergroup contacts, intercourse with outside traders, as well as changes in group affiliation and group boundaries both physically and non-physically [4].

The long history of the Dayaks has clearly shown that they are “old players” in forest product global market contestation, whether it is Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) or timber products (as seen in [5–8]). Aside from the Dayaks; Chinese traders, British imperialists and Dutch colonialists are also involved in this play, regardless of their main reason to land in Kalimantan. Therefore, Kalimantan has turned into a frontier area [9], whereas a land is perceived as an empty space without any indigenous inhabitants that is always open for ruling contestation.

The gradual influx of foreign traders into Kalimantan without permission is known as a process of ramification which brings two types of clashes to the Dayaks: physical ramification (materially) and symbolic ramification (immaterially). As proven by Poffenberger and Colfer, a promise of economic surpluses through NTFP and timber wood trading has made the Dayaks, especially the subgroups or interior groups who lives further in the forest depth, more exploitative to their forest products which brings forth a massive sociocultural transformation process [10, 11].

The same exploitation narrative can be found in my research area in Kampong Nek Gambang. As I began to explore more into the depths of Nek Gambang forest area, a certain tree that is about 1 m to 1.5 m in diameter with around 10 m to 30 m taller than the other trees, piqued my interest. At the end of each branch, honey bees (*Apis dorsata*) swarm and build their hives. Kek Lengkap, the Kampong’s shaman, stated that the tree is locally known as *tualang*, or *tapang madu* (*Koompasia excelsa*). According to Pak Victor, a former Kampong leader, the tree is considered vital for the whole Nek Gambang community as it serves as “*sejarah adat bah! Untuk pengadat*” (it’s a part of our traditional history! For traditional rituals), hence it should not be cut down. Interestingly, while Kek Lengkap stated that *tapang madu* is also mandatory for several Desa sacred healing ritual such as *Be’ancak* and *Badewa*, others are seldom reluctant

in going near to the *tapang's* bark as expressed by their statement “*soram bah!*” (it is scary!) every time the idea popped up.

However, coming into second month of research, locals are starting to tell me stories about the *tapang madu* tree being cut down. Surprisingly, some of them even stated that the amount of *tapang madu* today is actually far lesser than the amount it was between 10 yr until 20 yr ago. For reasons unknown at the time, it seems that youths and young adults of Nek Gambang are agreeing to cut down one of three remaining *tapang madu* in the *Kampong* area. The lumber is needed to construct bridges for a palm oil plantation industry-owned labor camp nearby. This cutting down phenomenon is somewhat contradictive to what Pak Victor and Kek Lengkap previously stated regarding the sacredness of the tree.

According to Sellato [12], as it would be further elaborated and explored in this paper, the tendency to exploit their own (Dayaks) forest, specifically through cutting down *tapang madu* trees, is considered as a form of economic pragmatism. Throughout my research, it has become apparent that this tendency has long existed as one dominant characteristic of the *Desas* (the sound of [e] articulated as [e], as in the word ‘red’), a Dayak sub group that dominates the population structure of *Kampong Nek Gambang*.

2. Getting to Know the People of Nek Gambang

Tebedak Hill (S 0°19′36.08″ E 110°20′20.33″) stands tall shadowing Poros Road, which stretches from the port of PT. BH, until approximately 20 km to the South (into the forest depth). At the opposing side of the Hill, Aek Kecik River runs swiftly even though it is not much in water volume. Nevertheless, it will eventually end up in the main flow of Kapuas River. *Kampong Nek Gambang* (S 00°19′07.9″ E 110°19′42.3″) is located in between Aek Kecik River and Road Poros which stretches quite parallel to each other. It is of much lower elevation than the Poros Road, or ‘*Road Kuning*’ as the people of Nek Gambang calls it. Nek Gambang is one of five *Kampongs* under the administration of a village named Kunyil, in Meliau, Sanggau District, West Kalimantan Province.

In the radius of 1 km² of the outmost reach of Nek Gambang borders, forest stretches far and wide, from the peaks of Tebedak Hill to the opposing sides of Aek Kecik River. Surrounding forest, claimed as belonged to Nek Gambang residents, is filled with tropical rain forest trees with their canopies standing high, about 45 m tall. In between those trees, local owned colonies of rubber trees (*Hevea brasiliensis*), durian trees (*Durio zebithinus*) and bamboo trees (*Bambusa vulgaris*) spread randomly. There are only two things that patches Nek Gambang’s forest area: small scale palm oil plantation owned

by locals on each sides of Poros Road's and newly opened areas, through swidden technique, for paddy rice which generally spread in between the local-owned palm oil plantations which extends to the interior forest area by Tebedak foothill. Forest on the West side of Aek Kecik River is filled with fruit trees of all variant, a place where Kampong kids used to go to pick up *langsat* (*Lansium parasiticum*), *Keledang* (*Artocarpus lanceifolius Roxb*) and also Rambutans (*Nephelium lappaceum*). On the other side of this fruitful forest, lie several new areas that are being prepared to be swiddened and also not to forget the scattered colonies of local owned palm oil plantation.

In between the blend of tropical rain forests, palm oil plantation and swiddened areas for paddy rice, the people of Nek Gambang live in a unique condition. The Kampong, which consists of 137 families, is majorly populated by the Dayak Desas, whom since their birth have lived in Nek Gambang. According to [13], generally the Desas live in Meliau and Toba Districts. Geographically, the Desas are differentiated into two groups: Dayak Desa Blungai which mainly live in Toba District's Mount Blungai area and Dayak Desa Ulu which mainly live in Meliau District area. The total spread of Dayak Desas in both districts are 50 *kampongs*, with the total estimation of 11 723 people. Within Nek Gambang's population structure of 137 families there are no more than 10 families coming from non Desa ethnic backgrounds.

Kampong Nek Gambang is actually a joint of two hamlets that are separated by a 3 m long and 1.5 m wide wooden bridge. Around the year 2000, some residents who were agitated by the small amount of fund allocated by the government to the Kampong, felt that Nek Gambang as a Kampong is too big for the fund to be distributed equally. Thus, the residents proposed a development of a new hamlet which will be named "Tanjung Perak" to gain more funds. However, in reality, Tanjung Perak residents still identify themselves as people of the same Kampong Nek Gambang.

Interestingly enough, even though both hamlets are populated by the Dayak Desas, there are several major contrasts between the people of Nek Gambang and Tanjung Perak. Nek Gambang hamlet consists of 77 families, 10 of which are not Desas and were originated from other districts such as Kapuas Hulu and Sekadau District. Nek Gambang hamlet has one Protestant church, a congregation constituted of 20 families; a denomination of GKSI (Gereja Kristen Setia Indonesia) which was built in 2004. In term of economic welfare, Nek Gambang hamlet residents are wealthier than the people of Tanjung Perak, as some rubber *taukeh* as well as owners of larger scale palm oil plantation (more than 15 ha, when normally locals have only about 2 ha per person) lives there. In this somewhat modern circumstances, the Protestant church

like to think that they have successfully turned its congregation against traditional elements, as stated by a local protestant leader:

“those Catholics, 80 % of them still believe in their forefather, while the other 20 % are actually protestants who no longer believe in the ancestors (referring to a 100 % population of Nek Gambang and Tanjung Perak). The Protestants must advance; our ancestors did not know Jesus before, thus they worshiped man-made idols in the past. Nowadays, we should all praise only the Lord, our ancestors were misguided”

(Sengki, local protestant congregation leader)

In contrast to those at Nek Gambang, Tanjung Perak hamlet is home for 60 Catholic families with only two protestant neighbors, all having Dayak Desa ethnic background. This is due to the strong influence of the local Catholic Church present in the hamlet. The Tanjung Perak people lives under poverty; most of the men work as industrial palm oil plantation laborer (mostly > 100 ha), while others work as illegal miners at small scale traditional gold mines. Unable to have proper jobs as men did, most of Tanjung Perak women turned to their kin’s small-scale palm oil plantation (\pm 2 ha to 3 ha) to work as underpaid daily labors. It is also observed in Perak, as how the people calls it, the practice of witchcraft and traditional rituals such as *Badewa* and *Be’ancak*, as well as mystification of the natural objects are openly practiced and continuously being discoursed in their daily life.

Economically speaking, the Desas are more than willing to tear down most of their heterogeneous forest area and convert it to a homogeneous small scale locally owned palm oil plantation, or even sell it to major palm oil plantation industries. Aside from the constant declining rubber sap price (from IDR 18 000/kg in 2010 to just between IDR 5 000/kg to IDR 6 000/kg in 2016), more and more people felt that there is no need to preserve a heterogeneous forest if it doesn’t provide higher income compared to the amount of money they might gain from growing palm oil trees. This is why it is fairly easy for the palm oil industries to persuade locals in to selling their land to the company.

3. Desa’s Tapang Madu Totem and Totemism

Following Aek Kecik River from Nek Gambang deep into the forest, one will arrive at a much higher-elevated ground, where *tapang madu* (*Koompasia excelsa*) would normally be found standing at the highest points. It is of 60 m tall in average, although

a height of 90 m has also been reported (As reported in a transcript of communication between Jess Riddle and Roman Dial on their research about native trees of Borneo (can also be seen in [14])) [14]. Six *tapang madu* trees of the same spreading patterns are found within the radius of 5 km² from the outer border of Nek Gambang, namely: Tapang Nek Mansur (S 0°19'11.70" E 110°19'45.80"), Tapang Nek Gambang (S 0°19'2.00" E 110°19'40.50"), Tapang Nek Rampo (S 0°19'1.91" E 110°19'5.25"), Tapang Nek Reten (S 0°19'36.72" E 110°20'11.59"), Tapang Nek Cancot (S 0°18'52.07" E 110°20'49.69") and Tapang Nek Lambeng (S 0°18'47.96" E 110°19'48.02").



Figure 1: Map of *tapang madu* spread around Kampong Nek Gambang area (©Atmaezer Hariara Simanjuntak).

For the Dayaks, especially Dayak Desas, trees in the forests are of higher cultural value than land itself, thus they are given respect in mystification form. A forest is not only considered valuable as much as their physical appearance and pragmatic uses, but also as an arena for the construction of socio-religious relationship between the Dayaks and materials in it, synthesized from their historical experiences [2]. Supernatural relationship between the humans and forest trees is reflected in the Desas traditional religious system, which is a part of a bigger cultural or customary system.

Totemism is a manifestation of the above mentioned supernatural relationship. By definition, totem is a class of material object/s (mainly natural object) which a group of kindred people regards with superstitious respect, believing that there exists between them and every member of the class an intimate and altogether special relation [15–18].

A totem started as a person's private owning, then ritualized together with the respective community and then transforms into a representative symbol of its community or group of kindred people [19]. According to [20], totem is dualistic in nature; it has to fulfil the social needs (being a group symbol and organize smaller groupings of cliques into clan) and also religious or ritual needs (being an object of sacred attitude and provides sense of security in return) of the respective group. In further development, [21] psychological aspect is also added (in this case a totem is believed as an ancestor of its respective group) as one of the required three main aspects to be met in a totem.

Dichotomy indications of a material object to serve as a totem can be observed fully in the *tapang madu* case. However, one should be warned that it is practically very difficult to firmly distinguish each indication of a totem. As Durkheimians perceive religion as a reflection of its respective community, the complexity of *tapang madu* as a totem reflects the layered characteristic of the people of Nek Gambang in their daily life.

Socially, *tapang madu* is a statement of clanship. It serves as a family tree which may record up to nine late generations of ancestors. The name of ancestor who planted the tree is taken up as its name onwards [22]. This way, their offsprings will be able to identify his/her family members through the knowledge of his/her family totem. As an example, a *tapang madu* named "*Tapang Nek Reten*" points out the fact that it was planted by Reten, who has the title of *Nek* (grandfather or grandmother in Desa language). All of Nek Reten's offspring automatically becomes the owner of the access rights to their totem, including its timber wood and honey (NTFP) which can be harvested from the highest branches of the *tapang madu* tree.

Honey harvested from *tapang madu* is invaluable in Desas daily live as it is normally used as a component in local and traditional pharmaceutical practices. Traditionally, honey harvested from *tapang madu* trees is worth of 10 Real (a traditional exchange value used by the Desas, today 1 Real is considered the same as IDR 10 000). Comparing to traditional prices of other forest products, such as *Tengkawang* (*Shorea macrophylla*) 5 Real, *Tabodak* 2 Real and *Langsat* (*Lansium parasiticum*) 5 Real, *tapang madu* is very expensive. When converted into Rupiah, the Desas will sell 1 Litre of honey for IDR 100 000 in daily basis.

In religious and ritual aspects, *tapang madu* holds a very vital position. It must be kept in mind that a totem is not considered as God. Totems function as an object of ritual and sacred affection. It resembles a group's effort to simplify the abstract and imaginary form of a Deity. In Desas myth of origin, *tapang madu* is used by Nek Baok (a myth of the Desas first man) to travel down back to earth after marrying the moon,

to reconcile with his human wife. Phenomenologically [23] this myth can simply be considered coming from an experience and inspiration of the Desas when confronted in the forest by a material object of more than 60 m to 80 m tall. That admiration and awe is the foundation of mystification. In this case, *tapang madu* pose as an object of sacred attitude [24], a sacralized and ritualized material object.

The ritualized form of *tapang madu* can be seen in the use of its heights as a media of Desas rite of passage. According to Pak Victor, prior to climbing the *tapang madu* tree to harvest honey, young men gather below the tree to hum together. Then, one of them climb the tree using traditional equipment and carry a 20 L jerry-can for honey harvesting. The process of climbing *tapang madu* is a matter of life and death. According to several Nek Gambang locals, generally every person who has tried to climb the *tapang* will fall, but if he succeeded and acquires a gallon full of honey, there's a sense of prestige to it. Even in one way or another, the Desas seems to imbue a status called "*pemanjat tapang*" for the individuals that have succeeded, and it is made known to further generation through story telling. The climb of the totem and heading back is considered as an initiation ritual, with a prestige position in the community awarded if he is able to bring down several litres of honey safely.

Psychologically, *tapang madu* totem is closely regarded to its respective group's taboo. A taboo concept held by the totem is a mode of classification of things into two realms, either it is sacred or profane [16, 24, 25]. For the Desas, forgetting his or hers *tapang madu* might lead to a severe sanction from the family and also community. This can be seen through Pak Toni's (a *kampong* elder) anger towards his son, Lidom, when he failed to correctly pin point his *tapang madu*. The Desas consider Lidom's act as a sin from forgetting his ancestors.

Even more, because of its vital position in Desas socio-religious function, according to Nek Koci, an elder in Nek Gambang, *tapang madu* should not be cut down by anybody except the planter's offspring. If an individual cut down another person's *tapang madu* without permission, he/she will be sanctioned to pay 30 Real to the owner. Although it won't be forgotten easily, Pak Victor said that the community will consider the individual's sin gone.

However, putting aside all elements and reason behind the mystification process of a tree into a community's totem, in reality nowadays there are only five *tapang madu* left in a close range of Kampong Nek Gambang. This number alone is an irony, considering Nek Koci's statement on the existence of hundreds of *tapang madu* in the Kampong's outskirts before 1990s. Mak Yami, a *kampong* elder, also stated that the *kampong* was

once filled with *tapang madu* trees before a massive demolition at around the same time.

To date, *tapang madu* is considered no better than an average timber wood or as locals call it *Kayu madu* (honey wood), where honey bees make their hives. Therefore the Desas treat it no more than an ordinary wood, hence it is either cut down or transacted between individuals or families. No restrictions or sanctions from “*adat*” are then applied to a transacted *tapang madu* because it is fully under consensus and ownership of the buyer. In a way, it can be said that nowadays *tapang madu* is a commodity without any embedded value except economic significance.

The transformation of material base triggers a transformation of ideology/idea that the Desas of Nek Gambang has. In this case, the massively collapsing totem will absolutely transform Desas idea of religion. Transition from a traditional notion of religion, as expressed by totemism into Christianity that is claimed to be a “modern” religion, by time will also change how they perceive their environment whether it is the forest or Kampong.

It is now can be seen that the idea of *tapang madu* serving as a totem and totemism itself is not static. To understand it completely, the totem has to be perceived as a partial and historically derived system, and not an expression of a completely general, unitary or systematic principal of social or conceptual order [26]. In other words, a study of historical dynamics of *tapang madu* as a totem is needed to understand the collapsing process that has and is currently undergo.

4. Tapang Madu Totem Dynamic in Kalimantan's Trade History

Totemism as a system of religion is a contested arena between, on one side; elites; ruling literates, the people of great tradition; and on the other; rural cultivators; peasants; the ruled illiterates; the people of small tradition [27] By analyzing the dialectic relations between each element, it can be said that the study of *tapang madu* as a totem throughout Kalimantan's trade history is to view it as both NTFPs (honey and bees wax) and timber wood which are commodities to be sold at the market. In other words, we can now specify each period of *tapang madu's* dynamic by the transformation of mode of productions prior to accumulation of both commodities. This analysis refers to [28] definition of mode of production, which is a sum total of sources of production (includes human labour power and means of production) and social relation of production (includes the property, power and control relations governing

society's productive assets, cooperative work relations and forms of association, relations between people and the objects of their work, and the relations between social classes)

Through Kalimantan's historical ecology studies, it is known that the Dayaks involvement in trading with the non-Dayak traders can be traced in at least three periods which brings massive transformations in Dayaks landscape and culture: (i) Trading with the Chinese [29, 30], (ii) The transition of Chinese domination to British and Dutch colonization [12] and also, (iii) Trading with the colony and further beyond [12, 31, 32]

4.1. Pre-market era: trades with the Chinese

The records on pre-market Kalimantan derives from Chinese traders notes on their sporadic voyage and trading experience with the Dayaks during the revival of Taoism in China [33]. The pre-market Kalimantan dates back before the year 960 [29] when Dayaks were graciously living through their subsistent system. Subsistence is a product of Dayaks ethic of access to the forest. By living subsistence, the Dayaks are posed to exploit their forest sustainable enough to hinder it from total deforestation.

By the year 960, Chinese traders have begun intensely establishing their trading system with outer Dayak groups who lived by the sea and river shores. This systematic trading can only took place by the legitimation of a newly emerging power known as the Sriwijaya kingdom in South Sumatera who has been able to take control and monopolized Malaka strait around the exact same time. Chinese traders were lured in the depths of Kalimantan forest to search for beeswax from bee hives on bee trees such as *tapang madu*. It has been known that Taoism revival also carries with it a revival of Chinese traditional medicine studies [34]. Beeswax served as an important material in Chinese traditional pharmaceutical, since it can be processed into moisturizers, cosmetics and even edibles [12]. Until early 17th century, historical reports [35] announced that despite the ever increasing demand on beeswax, NTFPs are still plentiful.

In this period, the notion of *tapang madu* being Desas totem is still substantial, whereas it completely served three elements of totems posed earlier. However, the economic value of beeswax has been made known to the Desas through their sporadic trading experiences. The Desas had only begun to understand the invaluable price of beeswax for trade, rather than honey for subsistence (a study in 1946 shows that an estimated 10.9 kg to 13.6 kg of honey is produced per 0.45 kg of wax)

4.2. Capitalistic market era: Chinese domination to British and Dutch colonization

This era is marked by the rise of British and Dutch colonization over Kalimantan as a whole, which span in between 1840 until 1900s. The emergence of this new power gave a significant impact to the Chinese traders in Kalimantan, which in later time will also affect how beeswax and honey harvested from *tapang madu* distribution to the global market. Supposedly an over exploitation of NTFPs might be the main and continuous effect of this era.

In 1850, as British and Dutch colonists begun to set foot on Kalimantan lands, Chinese traders are forced to move outside of European authority borders. Traders who are still interested in the forest products moved further inside the forest via river branches. Chinese traders who lives in lowland river ports and coastal areas sent representatives upriver in large, complex network of trade [2] Chinese *taukeh* (large merchants) funded these journeys, supplying credits and supplies so that forest products could be brought down from up river to the towns [36] The founding of De Vries [31] suggests that regional trade resources (between interior and exterior groups) includes items used by coastal peoples. Both items that are also used among the interior peoples (for examples honey and rattan) and other that are not, for example beeswax. Later on, in 1902, export statistics of the Dutch dominions include thousands upon thousands of dollar worth of NTFPs, including beeswax (a sum total of USD 18 048 worth), most of them funneled downstream by Chinese traders and sold to Dutch colonies in the shores (exterior groups)

Para-rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) was introduced by colonists to the Dayaks in 1900. Only 5 yr later, the demand for it elevates drastically, which at one point in between 1905 and 1906 achieved major trading booms. 1908 until 1910 were also great years for para-rubber plantation, since it is undergoing a second boom. In the same notion, the Dayaks might've also taken the same interest in planting small scale para-rubber tree plantations.

The effects felt by *tapang madu* as a totem is posed by the soil's limited ability in growing new *tapang madu* trees. Which means, foreign traders have to exploit existing *tapang madu* trees to the fullest extent in order to achieve a sustainable amount of honey and beeswax produced. At the same time, Dayaks have been introduced to para-rubber which offers a larger amount of money when its product being trade of. Supposedly during this time period, Dayaks main interest is being shifted into a more profitable cash crops, rather than *tapang madu*. By sending interior Dayak groups to

harvest NTFPs in regular basis, the *tapang madu* tree totem gradually loses its sacred and religious values. In other words, the Dayaks have begun perceiving *tapang madu* tree as only a matter of economic purposes rather than a mystic totem.

4.3. The rise of Christianity and industrial capitalism: trades with the colonies and further beyond

The rise of an industrial capitalization –which is based on neoliberal fundamentals– means that not only the timber wood and NTFPs are being perceived as commodities, but also the land itself. It started in the late 19th century when aggressive Dayak groups staged regular raiding expeditions to neighboring group territories to pillage their NTFPs resources [8]. By doing so, it explicitly points out the depletion of NTFPs, while market competition has only becoming more demanding of them.

Not surprisingly, Christianity in Nek Gambang emerged in 1950 just before the transition to palm oil industries begun. As locals described it, since then, a number of evangelical missionaries have been coming back and forth in a rather temporary time span. This is mainly due to an impediment of establishing a permanent church building before their effort paid off much later on in 2004.

Between the end of 1960s and early 1970s, is a time when the remotest interior groups started to join the mainstream forest product trades. The demand on high-quality timber wood is on its peak and prices went very high compared to the prices for NTFPs in the same period. Since the highest quality timber wood is located in the *dipterocarps* forest deep upriver, interior Dayak groups were in turn taken into the timber boom that had been going on for some time downstream by the exterior groups [37] Small amounts of NTFPs were collected during this time, but huge damage was done to upriver forests. This includes *tapang madu*, where it is being cutted down for its timber wood and its NTFPs being collected for trade in low prices. Specifically in the 1970s, a lot of infrastructures being made (roads, workshops, etc) to fulfill the needs of timber companies (PT-PT HPH). This can only lead to the influx of consumptive goods which creates artificial needs and a new knowledge on the importance of money. At the same time, the influence of church since 1950 has long been converting interior groups into Christianity and is constantly growing stronger and wider spread.

At 1990s seems to be a fresh new start for Kalimantan's economy whereas palm oil tree (*Elaeis guineensis*) is being introduced to the people. Its popularity booms in 1992 and it is parallel to the demand of more opening forest areas prior to an on growing expansion of palm oil plantation. Efficiency of time, quality and also quantity

of palm oil production has since then become the plantation industry's main concern. To accommodate these needs, one major industry stepped up to open up even more areas of the forest and construct a road which will then connect the most remote palm oil plantation to factories near to the river's coastlines.



Figure 2: Tapang Nek Cancot posing as an obstacle to a newly opened local owned palm oil plantation; planned to be cut down (©Atmaezer Hariara Simanjuntak).

Around the same time as palm oil plantation industries are opening more and more heterogeneous forest to convert, Christian evangelical missionaries has been spreading the promise of salvation. Missionaries sincerely believed that salvation can only be achieved through the extinction of elements viewed as traditional, and through the convergence into Christianity [38]. Radical sermons are then held repetitively, discriminating the existence of *Desas* traditional elements. Moreover, in order to free the *Desas* from their ancestral sins, they have been thought to modernize themselves by working in the palm oil plantations.

In relation to *tapang madu* trees, from this point on, only those located in the furthest and non-penetrable terrains are left. *Tapang madu* is no longer viewed as a totem; its NTFPs and timber wood have no significant economic price left. With the cooperation of invasive Christianity, traditional religious affection and rites has been degraded as much as the numbers of totems cut down. Today, as the condition in Nek Gambang shows, *tapang madu's* function is as a mere obstacle to the ever expanding palm oil

plantation. When it posed as a threat to the expansion process, it surely will be put down.

5. An Analysis of the Collapsing Totem

5.1. Tapang madu totem as a commodity fetishism phenomenon

Referring to *tapang madu's* dynamic within Dayaks and non-Dayaks trade history analysis, it can be seen that the mystical attributes of a totem were stripped down through transformations of mode of production. In this case, the transformation process happened rapidly from pre-market era to an industrial capitalism market era, whereas the people of Nek Gambang are currently in. As industrial capitalism market arise, the previously acclaimed totem transformed into nothing more than a commodity with no mystical attributes embed to it.

In contextualizing the Desas totem, *tapang madu* totemism should be considered as a form of commodity fetishism. In saying so, totemism is seen as a product of interrelations of persons which are no longer seen as such, but as things that stand over, control, and in some vital sense even may produce individuals [39]. As a product of interrelations, the mystical attributes embed in a totem does not originate from its own use value [28]. Whatever maybe its natural form, totemism is essentially an expenditure of human brains, nerves and muscles. In other word, the mystical value of a *tapang madu* totem is a product of our social construction that is expressed through its exchange value that is constantly changing throughout the course of trade history.

Sources of production transformations throughout the Desas NTFPs trade and introduction of new cash crops (such as rubber tree and palm oil tree) demanded the people's social relation of productions adaptation. One important product of the transforming social relation of production is a constantly-changing Desas core cultural value. Understanding Desas values, both in the past and present time, are important. It is mainly due to the fact that values governs what the people perceive as important and not important.

In the pre-market era, working and labor power is not of importance for the Desas. Paralleled to that, economic surplus as the main goal from labor power accumulation was also not one of the people's main interest. This is mainly because labor is only another name for a human activity that goes with life itself, and land which is a commodity today, is only another name for nature which is not produced by man [40].

According to historical analysis, the Desas main interest in the pre-market era was to exploit forest products stably which in this case is NTFPs (both honey, and beeswax). The availability of honey for the people to harvest is vital, because their existence correlates with subsistent consumption and also for trades with the Chinese. Hence, embedding mystical attributes to *tapang madu* tree is a system developed by the Desas to prevent NTFPs sources depletion. As [41] stated, a religious community provide social support which constructs a system where each individual within the community guarantee each other forest products availability. The construction of a totemic community as a form of religious system thus becomes important because Desas of Nek Gambang have always been vulnerable to outside threats of their traditional economic system.

The transformation of Desas traditional religion also shows a transformation of their social relation of production that serve as a functional integument which structures work relations [42, 43]. The emergence and development of Christianity in Kampong Nek Gambang during the entrance of colonialists gave the capitalist and neoliberal mode of production a religious cloak that are able to accommodate new cash crops introduction to Desas daily livelihood. Deconstruction of sacred affection towards *tapang madu* through the construction of a sin concept, gave the people a chance to reconstruct their value in the forms of Christian ideology. The main aim of this reconstruction process is clear, that is to ease all of Desas livelihood aspects integration to a global neoliberal-based market structure through an introduction of Christianity as a new global value. In an era of free competition, individualism has become one vital value to have in order to gain economic growth. In Christianity, spirit of individualism is accommodated through the promotion of a heavenly salvation dogma that each individual have to work for personally without concerning the whole community. Moreover, in agreement with [44] a promise of salvation will be more likely achievable if a Christian individual is economically success during his lifetime in this world. The believe that his/her economic pragmatism act on natural resources exploitation is being supported by his/her religion won't be provided if the Desas still believe in their *tapang madu* totem which promoted communality.

The introduction of rubber tree at the advent of Desas capitalistic market, and palm oil tree at the beginning of neoliberal market era, transformed their value of importance once again. In this era, trade connections grow even more complex, whereas the people of Kampong Nek Gambang doesn't even know to whom are their forest products being traded and distributed. They only knew that at the end of the day, they will be paid as an exchange of their products. As a result, the Desas started to realize a

new importance to sustain their livelihood that goes complimentary with Christianity, and that is building wealth through accumulating money.

Rubber trees does not do damage as massive as palm oil trees when it comes to demystifying the totem as one of the most vital processes to acquire money. This is mainly because the expansion of rubber tree plantation doesn't require a separation of labour force from the Desas daily lives. After traditional sources of production (trees within the forest) tore down massively in 1970s as a result of log demands, the emergence and development of palm oil plantation industries restructured Desas life through a separation of labor power which is then abstracted into a commodity known as working time [39]. In the end, the concept of labor power itself becomes a continuous threat to the totem's sacredness, because in order to make their working time effective, labors have to cut down honey woods to fasten palm oil plantation expansion. In other words, to acquire money, more *tapang madu* have to be cut down.

5.2. The commodity and ethic of access shift

Through analyzing NTFPs trade history and also agrarian transformations that it cause, it can be seen that economic pragmatism and opportunism has been the Desas traditional set of ethic of access towards their forest products/natural resources to begin with. The ethic of access is constructed by the community as a reference point, or even guidelines, which will govern their way of accessing natural resources around them (in this case, *tapang madu*). By being pragmatic and opportunistic, the Desas are welcomed to exploit *tapang madu* in a stable and sufficient scale; just enough to provide for their daily needs while in the same time preventing the *tapang madu* from total extinction. This traditional ethic of access, is then ritualized to construct an imagination of sanctity or sacredness which consequently embedded to a *tapang madu* tree. This mystical imagination and also functions of relational regulation that it presented, transforms a piece of wood into a totem

Exploitation of *tapang madu* products (be it NTFPs or timber wood) are govern by power, wealth, and also values constructed by the community to prevent it from depletion or even total destruction. In the context of pre-market Desas of Nek Gambang, only ancestors have those three elements of govern, thus the right to monopolize the community's access towards *tapang madu* with all of its products. The right to own, to inherit, to use, and to dispose the tree are the largest bundles of rights a person can have [45]. Later, all of the ancestor's offspring of the same lineage are also given those rights. As a consequence of the ever-expanding family-lineage which then posed as

the core of a larger community, they took role as an institution which regulate and oversee the ethic of access in daily practice.

However, as policies and governments change, as market opportunities or even social structures change, and also as the individuals or groups who monopolize power change, so does the Desa's traditional ethic of access towards *tapang madu* tree. The community lost their control of governing their access ethics over to the new power holder periodically (as can be seen from their trade history with non-Dayak traders). Today, that right of power is owned by the palm oil industry. A change of ethics invites a change in physical characteristics and social constructed values of a resource. In *tapang madu* context, the physical change is seen through their massive demolition process, as for the transformation of a totem back into commodity is a form of social constructed symbolic change.

By not having the right to define their-own ethic of access, exploiting the *tapang madu* for sufficient consumption is considered wrong. As also seen from their trade history, capital accumulation is put forward when it comes to exploiting *tapang madu*. Putting in mind that financial power is of importance, the community has no other option than collapsing and selling the *tapang madu* to palm oil industries. By doing so, they gain money from payment while also providing new open spaces for industry's palm oil plantation expansion where ultimately also providing them with new job opportunities.

6. Conclusion

For the Desas of Kampong Nek Gambang, *tapang madu* tree is a totem. This can be seen through three cultural modifications: social, religious, and psychological that the Desas have imbued to the tree. Socially, *tapang madu* totem functions as a community symbol, clan categorization media, and also a traditional economic medium of exchange. In religious function, it posed as an object of sacred affection. This affection can be traced to the vital position of *tapang madu* in both Desas myth of origin, and rite of passage. *Tapang madu* is also protected by a taboo, which is one of a totem's many psychological modifications.

But then history took stage. Specifically, Kampong Nek Gambang turned into a frontier area where struggles for power domination happened between the Desas and outsiders or even between the Desas themselves. These struggles happened repetitively in eras of NTFPs trade, loggings, introduction of rubber trees, and also palm oil plantation expansion that is currently undergoing. These processes are known

as ramification, which took forms in both physically and symbolically through the introduction of Christianity in Nek Gambang. Reflecting back to the conceptual understanding of frontier area which has been provided in the first part of the paper, it can be said that Nek Gambang has been facing frontier area symptoms up until now.

The development of Christianity in Nek Gambang to converge diverse traditional people into one global imported religion might be seen as a destructive activity. However, the people's choice to convert themselves into Christianity is considered rational. This can be seen from Christian's theological dogma and institution that is paralleled with capitalistic and neoliberal economic system presented by palm oil industries.

This long and winding historical process gave birth to a unique Nek Gambang condition as it is today; an unstable area. It is in this condition that *tapang madu* has been massively demolished. The collapsing *tapang madu* phenomenon became an ironic fact, considering the totem status given. From this contradiction, a question rose: why does *tapang madu* totem, both physically and symbolically, collapsed?

The totem collapsed due to the fact that Desas of Nek Gambang have been stripped off of their power to construct and govern their own ethic of access towards *tapang madu* tree. This gave effect to a shift in their physical and symbolic conception of *tapang madu*; from totem to a mere commodity. Nowadays, as power holder, palm oil industries have the right to define the Desas way of perceiving their natural world; that is to put capital accumulation first in order to gain more financial power. This conceptual regulation correlates positively with Desas needs to monetize *tapang madu* by selling it to the palm oil industry for new palm oil tree plantation spaces. Working in palm oil plantation is also preferable because it provides the Desas with instant money.

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