

Indigenous Ecology: The Melangun Habit of Orang Rimba in Bukit Duabelas National Park of Jambi

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Abstract: *This research studies the ecology concept in Melangun habit of Orang Rimba in Jambi's National Park of Bukit Duabelas. Melangun is the tradition of migrating or moving far away from hometown (place of origin) performed by Orang Rimba if there is any of their family who pass away. The study towards Melangun habit in this research is performed through the perspective of indigenous ecology, namely the perspective rooted on cosmology and world perspective of local community. The research data are acquired through direct observation, focus group discussion, interview, documentation and literature study. The research results indicate that the Orang Rimba are unintentionally perform Melangun not only due to the death of family member, but due to their actions in reflection the situation, their social relation as well as economic adaptation towards tropical forest. In the perspective of Orang Rimba, social and economic relations are not only established between humans, but between human and the ancestors as well which interrelated and interconnected. Melangun habit is the concrete practice performed by Orang Rimba in maintaining the relations. According to that perspective, thus, the concept of indigenous ecology of Melangun habitis reciprocal and responsible relations between subjects in maintaining the cosmos.*

Keywords: Ecology Culture, Melangun, Orang Rimba, TNBD

1. Introduction

Although the wealth of natural resources of Indonesia have provided adequately large donation for national economy and development, however, until present, the management and utilization have emerged more deterioration of forest ecology, land degradation, social inequality, and living environment disaster that undermine the fundamental capital for the development itself. The economy of Indonesia is basically still depending on the results of extraction and exploitation activities of natural resources. The drained/exploited natural raw materials continue to degrade the unrenueable natural resources. If the exploitation process continues to run without control, then, the function and carrying capacity of nature as well as the environment will continue to degrade and emerge various natural and environmental disasters which eventually will bring degradation on economic growth.¹

One of the fundamental conditions that believed as the trigger of the issue is anthropocentric ecological paradigm that perceives humans as the center of the world and the other creatures are the objects for the needs of humans². This paradigm indicates that only humans who conceive intrinsic value. Meanwhile, everything exists in the universe is determined from the use of those objects for the human needs³. On the other words, the root of ecological problem is

on the paradigm of relations between humans and non-humans creature or inadequate nature. The environment scholars and enthusiasts/observer need to realize the need of new paradigm in perceiving ecology. Deep ecology scholars see the relation of humans towards nature with the entire creatures as a unity of ecosystem⁴. According to this perspective, humans do not have to see themselves as separated and prominent from the other creatures, on the contrary, they have to see themselves as a small part in cosmos.⁵

Indigenous ecological knowledge is one of the paradigms valued as potential to offer different perspective towards ecosystem. Indigenous ecological knowledge is not only offering idea regarding the preservation of water, soil, nature, forest, and the other resources aimed for humans⁶, instead, it is emphasizing on moral values which perceive that the entire objects exist in the nature have intrinsic value that similar to humans.⁷ The government of Indonesia has legalized the importance of local wisdom in the management

Hyman Ltd.,1968) : Chang, *Moral Lingkungan...*, (2007) : Robert P Borrong, *Etika Bumi Baru*, (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2009)

⁴Bron Tylor and Michael Zimmerman, "Deep Ecology, in 'The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, (London: Continuum, 2005), page.1

⁵ Tylor and Zimmerman, "Deep Ecology", 2005, page.2

⁶ Loren Wilkinson, "Kegundahan Hati Nurani Umat Manusia : Menemukan kembali ciptaan di dalam Gerakan "Lingkungan", in God and Culture, edited by D.A. Carson & J.D. Woodbridge, (Surabaya: Momentum publisher, 2002), page .365

⁷Workinche Kelbessa, "The Rehabilitation of Indigenous Environmental Ethics in Africa' in *Diagenesis* 207, (2005), page.19

¹Kartodihardjo.,H. 2017. *Dibalik Krisis Ekosistem*.LP3ES. Jakarta

² A.S. Keraf, *Etika Lingkungan*, (Jakarta : Kompas Book Publisher, 2002) page.33; William Chang, *Moral Lingkungan Hidup* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2007), page. 26

³ White, "The Historical Roots..."(1967): S.H. Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*, (Unwin

of living environment based on Law No.32/2009 regarding the Protection and Management of Living Environment which states that "Local wisdom is the noble values which applied in the life order of people, including to protect and manage living environment sustainably".

Melangun is one of the forms of system (order) of the social culture of *Orang Rimba*. The term of *Melangun* has been known only for *Orang Rimba* and unknown for the other communities in Jambi Province. *Melangun* is the habit of "Orang Rimba" to migrate from one place to another in a relatively far distance and performed due to death or threat in the life of *Orang Rimba*. *Orang Rimba* who migrate due to *Melangun* are not only conducted it to erase the sadness due to the death of their families, but also aimed to manage the management of forest resources. Due to that matter, *Melangun* builds boundaries for human actions towards the fellow human beings and the forest as well.

This writing is a specific study about traditional indigenous wisdom of *Melangun* of *Orang Rimba* in TNBD of Jambi. Until present, the practice of *Melangun* is only performed by *Orang Rimba*, although the forest lands inhabited by them are getting thinner due to forest concession rights (HPH), industrial forest (HTI), and illegal logging⁸. *Melangun* conceives meaning which indicates the ancestor relations between *Orang Rimba* with their fellow people and the other creatures besides humans which maintained for generation.

In correlation to that condition, interesting question regarding *Melangun* habit emerges, what is the correlation between this culture and environment? Why does it important for *Orang Rimba* to maintain the *Melangun* habit? Does the cultural practice of *Melangun* is merely performed to solace ones due to death? The author argues that *Melangun* habit which performed and maintained by *Orang Rimba* until the present time is not only a legitimation for solacing themselves but also a practice based on the cosmology and perspective of *Orang Rimba* regarding the harmony of their relations with the other creatures (nature) and ancestors, due to that matter, the author mentions *Melangun* habit as an indigenous ecological practice.

2. Theoretical Study

1) *Orang Rimba* of Jambi

Who are the *Orang Rimba*? How do they live? Do they have certain belief or religion? These questions are frequently occur for them who barely knew the *Orang Rimba*. *Orang Rimba* are the group of moving/migrating people without regional boundaries, having their own social order, administratively unregistered and avoid themselves from external influence.⁹

⁸Prasetijo, Adi, S. 2011. *Serah Jajah dan Perlawanan Yang Tersisa; Etnografi Orang Rimba di Jambi*. Wedatama Widya Sastra.

⁹ BPS Jambi, 2010. Jambi in Statistic. Central Statistical Bureau of Jambi Province.

Orang Rimba have physical characteristics of mongoloid race, curly hair, sturdy figure, high, slender, thin and muscular looks, therefore, they hard to be distinguished from the other races if they use the casual clothes like the common people. However, for those who getting used of interacting with the *Orang Rimba*, it's very easy to recognize them through various distinctive characteristics, including astinging body odor because they avoid bathing with soap. Jungle men use underwear and shirtless, while the women cover their breast with twill fabric. This way of dressing is commonly used by them in the forest. During their time outside the forest or in the village, they use usual clothes, such as pants, shirts, and wearing shoes or sandal. There are no written rules that suggest them to wear the clothes like *Orang Terang* (Villagers) if they are planning to visit the village.¹⁰ The *Orang Rimba* call the outsiders who not belong to their community as *Orang Terang*, *Orang Luar* (outsiders), *Orang kampung* (Villagers) or *Orang Dusun* (Hamlet people).¹¹

Orang Rimba believe in the existence of God, as the creator of universe and living creatures, not an animism or dynamism, however, the illustration and embodiment of God are still very abstract. The God who creates universe is called *Raja Nyawa*; the highest entity. *Orang Rimba* believe in the existence of gods and the function of gods as intermediary. There are more than a hundred of Gods believed by *Orang Rimba*, however, they are at least 8 Gods in which their existences are believed by *Orang Rimba*, namely *Dewa Harimau* (Tiger God), *Dewa Gajah* (Elephant God), *Dewa Kucing* (Cat God), *Dewa Haluaye*, *Dewa Madu* (Honey God), *Dewa Padi* (Paddy God), *Dewa Penyakit* (God of Disease), and *Dewa Trenggiling* (Pangolin God). Each God has its own responsibility and function.¹² The belief system of *Orang Rimba* has no specific name. *Orang Rimba* believe in norms that inherited from the original belief of their ancestor, they belief that whoever conduct good deeds will survive and whoever conduct evils will be condemned.¹³

Various origins of *Orang Rimba* can be discovered from the oral narratives that can be searched through the tales of *Buah Gelumpang*, the tale of *Tambo Anak Dalam* (Minangkabau), the tale of *Orang Kayo Hitam*, Serial Tales of Central Sumatra, the tale of *Bagindo Ali's War*, the tale of the war of Jambi with Dutch, the tale of *Tambo Sriwijaya*, and the tale of *Turunan Ulu Besar* and *Bayat*. Based on those tales,

¹⁰Tarib, 2012. *Hutan adalah Rumah dan Sumber Penghidupan Kami. Kesaksian Tumenggung Tarib Orang Rimbo*. Wednesday, June 27th 2012. Constitutional Court of Republic of Indonesia.

¹¹Lih, Prasetijo, Adi, S... 2011

¹²Zuhdi, M. Nurdin. 2013. *Tuhan dimana Kau Berada: Kajian Etnografi tentang Sistem Kepercayaan Orang Rimba di TNBD Jambi*. Research Report of Short Courses. Social-Religious Methodological Research of the Ministries of Indonesia.

¹³Handini, R. 2015. *Foraging Yang Memudar, Suku Anak Dalam di Tengah Perubahan*. Galang Press. Jogjakarta.

Muchlas¹⁴ draws conclusions that *Orang Rimba* are coming from three lineages, namely:

1. The descendant of South Sumatra, mostly live in Batanghari Regency.
2. The descendent of Minangkabau, mostly live in BungoTebo Regency, partly in Mersam (Batanghari).
3. The original descendant of Jambi, namely *Kubu Air Hitam* of Sarolangun and Merangin Regencies.

The first version of the origin of *Orang Rimba* is mythical which derived from personal writing of Sayuti Ali, former inheritance of *Tanah Garo* who explains that the origin of *Orang Rimba* in Makekalis named as *Bujang Perantau* (nomad) that come from Pagaruyung. He made a hut in the forest. One day, *Bujang Perantau* found a *Gelumpang* fruit. The fruit was took and brought home. At night, the *Gelumpang* fruit was cracked and transformed into a princess. The princess ask *Bujang Perantau* to marry her, however, *Bujang Perantau* resists it because they have no one to marry them. The princess said, “*letakkanlah batang kayu Bayur, lentangkan di atas sungai, kito berduo sama-samo berlari, apa bila kito beradu kepala, artinya syah kito kawin* (put the stem of *Bayur* wood on the river, if our heads are met while we running, it means that we are legitimately married).” This marriage culture has become the way of marriage of *Orang Rimba* until the present time.

From the marriage, four children were born, namely *Bujang Mapalangi*, *Dewo Tunggal*, *Putri Selaro Pinang Masak*, and *Putri Gading*. The brethren divides, first: *Bujang Mapalangi* and *Putri Selaro Pinang Masak* convert to Islam and establish a village. *Bujang Mapalangi* has settled in *Tanah Garo* which called as “*PangkalWaris*” and *Putri Selaro Pinang Masak* has settled in SerengamTembesi which called as “*Ujung Waris*”. Second: *Dewo Tunggal* and *Putri Gading* are both live in Makekal River, which later called as *Orang Rimba*.

The second version of the origin of *Orang Rimba* which included in profile series of *Orang Rimba* of TNBD¹⁵ is as follows: in ancient times, there were wars between Jambi Empire ruled by Putri Selaras Pinang Masak and Tanjung Jabung Empire which ruled by Rangkayo Hitam. The continuous war has eventually heard by King Pagaruyung as the father of Putri Selaras Pinang Masak. King Pagaruyung orders his armies to be able of conquering the Tanjung Jabung Empire, the armies are taking oath to never come back before they able to prevail in the fight, the distance between Pagaruyung Empire and Jambi Empire is very far at that time which travelled by foot throughout the dense forest. The travel that takes days decreases the physical condition, meanwhile, the food supplies have ran out, they are in confusion. Their destination is still far ahead, at the same time, it is a shame to go back to Pagaruyung Empire, due to that matter, they are having discussion and decided to stay alive in the forest. In order to avoid the embarrassment, they

¹⁴Muchlis Fuad, 2017. *Praktik Komunikasi dalam pemberdayaan Orang Rimba di Taman Nasional Bukit Duabelas Provinsi Jambi*. Dissertation. Post-Graduate School. IPB. Bogor.

¹⁵Algopeng, Z. 2014. *Orang Rimba di Taman Nasional Bukit Duabelas Jambi*. Publisher: BTNBD Jambi.

seek for rarely inhabited places in the depth of forest. As the time passed, the condition of their lives has become more concealed; thus, their descendants named themselves as “*Orang Rimba*”. The arguments above are supported by Tarib (former Tumenggung of *Orang Rimba*) who states that *Orang Rimba* in Duabelas Highland are coming from Pagaruyung Empire who migrate to Jambi.¹⁶

The third version tells about the origin of *Orang Rimba* who has been known since the period of Sriwijaya Empire, however, their existence have never been interfered by civilization, either in religious, economy, or legal manner. Another argument states that the ancestors of *Orang Rimba* did not live in the forest at the beginning. They forced to live in the forest by a certain circumstance, the jungle later becomes the personal identity of this community due to their self-defense mechanism, based on this condition, the term of *Orang Rimba* or Kubu Tribe emerges.¹⁷

Reviewed from the relationship perspective, the matrilineal relationship system owned *Orang Rimba* is similar to the relationship system of Minangkabau culture. Matrilineal is a custom of the community which regulates the lineage from the mother side. In addition, according to the experience of the author during the communication with *Orang Rimba*, there is one thing that able to provide a clue about the origin of *Orang Rimba*, namely in the time they spell chants for cultural ceremony which always began with “*bismillah*” and “*masyaallah*” as the expression of amazement and others. According to the description above, it is assumed that there is a connection regarding the origin of *Orang Rimba* in the TNBD area to Pagaruyung Empire of West Sumatra which also the ancestors of Jambi-Malay Tribe.

2) Indigenous Ecology

Henk Manschot in one of his writings, “Bruno Latour: Ecology and Pluralism, explains the ecological principle initiated by Bruno Latour especially what related to earth, human as well as the relation and interaction between the entire creatures on earth. One of the important ideas proposed by Latour which considered as “new path” in perceiving the present ecology is diversification and pluralism of knowledge. Knowledge is not restricted to modern science. The solution for the present ecology requires perspective which sees that the entire creatures on earth are having respective values and roles in an ecological unity. That kind of perspective is more dominant on indigenous ecology knowledge rather than on modern ecology knowledge¹⁸.

Indigenous ecology is one of the studies in ecology and environmental sciences. Scholars are indicating the significance of indigenous ecology study regarding its

¹⁶Lih., Tarib, 2012. *Hutan adalah Rumah dan Sumber Penghidupan Kami. Kesaksian Tumenggung Tarib Orang Rimbo*. Wednesday, June 27th 2012. Constitutional Court of Republic of Indonesia.

¹⁷Lih., Algopeng, Z. 2014. *Orang Rimba di Taman Nasional Bukit Duabelas Jambi*. Publisher: BTNBD Jambi

¹⁸Lih. Maarif, “Ammatoan Indigenous Religion..” (2015); Pierotti and Wildcat, “Traditional Ecological..” (2000)

relation to the emerging issue of environmental crisis. Grim expresses that environmental study performed through the perspective of local belief opens the possibility of mutually beneficial dialog between local belief and contemporary science.¹⁹ Some writings in the book of "Indigenous Tradition and Ecology" edited by Grim indicate the significance of local ecological knowledge (indigenous knowledge) which expressed through various methods or forms, including ritual, rules, practices, and others.

This argument also supported by Kalu (2001) who expresses that the perspective of the community in West Africa towards the world (Indigenous worldwide) which rooted on the local belief is in principle having close relation to environment.²⁰ They express the ecological knowledge through myths that restrict their actions towards nature, however, that perspective or knowledge is less sustainable in the adjustment of modernity pressure, but this condition is not an obstacle but instead works as an opportunity to describe the problem which called as "the open predicament". Kalu is reassuring that the local community along with their belief system are dynamic and transforming.

Pierotti and Wildcat²¹ also express that local ecology or what they labelled as traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) is different with the western perspective of ecology which assumes that humans are more prominent, superior, and separated from nature. Maarif²² provides one of the example of the implementation of indigenous ecology in Indonesia, namely on Ammatoa Tribe in Sulawesi. The indigenous ecology of Ammatoa Tribe is the perspective and understanding of indigenous people of Ammatoa regarding nature which based on traditional cosmology in which the community of Ammatoa along with the non-human creatures are not merely living together but having reciprocal sharing as well.

The study of indigenous ecology which related to the purposes of practice-based conservation or specific custom ritual is still debatable among the scholars on whether the indigenous people have truly practiced a habit or custom that specifically aimed for conservation or not. Dove²³ explains that in debate, some academics use the term of intention and conscience as the standard in the ideas of culture-based conservation. According to Dove, there is a group of scholars which disagree with the perspective that local ecological

knowledge is a conservation practice, however, there is also a view about intention-unintentional. The term and concept of conservation might be undiscovered and still applied by indigenous people, however, it does not mean that their knowledge and life practice can be determined as ecological practice.

3. Method

This field research is began with the search for relevant literatures and secondary data as well as the previous studies. *Orang Rimba* which studied in this article is the *Orang Rimba* who live in TNBD of Jambi. TNBD is one of the forests exists in Sumatra with tropical climate. Administratively, TNBD is included in five regencies, namely Sarolangun, Merangin, Tebo, Bungo, and Batanghari. *Orang Rimba* live in group and spreading. In Bukit Duabelas National Park, there are 13 immense groups which commonly called as *ketemenggungan*.

This research is focused on *Ketumenggungan* area of *Orang Rimba* of Makekal Ulu located in west part of TNBD. Administratively, Makekal Ulu is included in Tebo Regency, however, the accessibility is easier to be reached from Merangin Regency. This group is selected because *Orang Rimba* of Makekal Ulu live in the depth forest and firmly hold their culture/custom. The collected information includes the forest condition of Bukit Duabelas National Park of Jambi, the behavior of *Orang Rimba* and the *Melangun* habit of *Orang Rimba*. The informants are determined through purposive and snowball sampling.²⁴ The data are acquired through focus group discussion, interview, observation, documentation, and literature study.

4. Discussion

1) *Melangun* and Circle of Life *Orang Rimba*

The forest area of Bukit Duabelas National Park with all its resources is the original habitat of the daily life of *Orang Rimba*. They were born, raised, and even died in the forest of Bukit Duabelas. In short, forest is the hometown of *Orang Rimba*. They have developed a cultural feature in the forest, namely *Melangun* habit.²⁵

One of the traditions or life habits that mostly known by outsiders (*Orang Terang*) about *Orang Rimba* is *Melangun*. This tradition is intriguing because it has vast implication towards the life of *Orang Rimba*. This tradition is also unique because a similar tradition has never found on the other tribes exist in this earth. Common people are sometimes have wrong perceptions towards this tradition, therefore, more responsible information and explanation are required to correct the existing perception regarding this tradition.

¹⁹ John A. Grim. (ed.), *Indigenous Tradition and Ecology*, (USA: The President and Fellows Of Harvard College, 2001), page.Xli-xlii

²⁰ Ogbu U. Kallu, "The Sacred Egg: Worldwide, Ecology, and Development in West Africa, in John A. Grim (Ed.,) *Indigenous Tradition and Ecology*, (USA: The president and Fellows of Harvard College, 2001/, h. 225-248

²¹ Pierotti R., Wildcat.D., 2000. *Traditional Ecological Knowledge*, h 1333-1340

²² Maarif, "Ammatoan Indigenous Religion. (2015) h 145-146

²³ Michael R. Dove, "Indigenous People and Environmental Politics," in *Annual Review Of Anthropology*, Vol 35 (2006), page. 197

²⁴ Craswell J. W. 2007. *Qualitative inquiry and Research Design. Choosing Among Five Approaches*. California. Sage Publications, Inc.

²⁵ Saudagar, F. 2005. *Makna Melangun*. Accessed on September 10th 2018. From: <https://melangun.wordpress.com/2000/03/01/makna-melangun/>

The word *Melangun* is derived from Malay language²⁶, which has two meanings; in broad and limited terms. In a limited term, *Melangun* has two meanings, namely “being nomadic in the forest” and “a bad place”. In that order, the living humans have to stay away from that bad place as soon as possible. In a broad term, *Melangun* can be defined as follows: 1) *Melangun* is the embodiment of love towards the dead. More love on the dead will establish more compassion, more devotion and a further distance of *Melangun*; 2) *Melangun* is the effort of overcoming the pain and eradicating the sadness by *mekhotop* (mourning) the soul of the dead; 3) *Melangun* is the embodiment of respect towards the dead; 4) *Melangun* is the embodiment social solidarity; and 5) *Melangun* is the symbol of traveling process of the dead’s soul, due to that matter, *Melangun* has to be conducted. *Melangun* habit is the teaching of the ancestor which crucial and has to be obeyed, the curse will come if this habit is not performed, and the *Orang Rimba* of Makekal Ulu are terrified of curse

Melangun is the taboo of death which makes *Orang Rimba* have to leave their home and looking for a new one when one of their relatives of community members has passed away. According to the interview results with Tumenggung Celitai (Makekal Ulu), the *Melangun* ceremony is indicated when one of the family members in the group has been considered of showing death signs due to severe disease. The member who become seriously ill will be moved to another place in a hut accompanied by the close family (father, mother, siblings). The other family members in the group are immediately preparing for *Melangun* ceremony. The corpse of *Orang Rimba* is bathed, then covered with fabric from the head to toe. Necklace jewelry which made from beads, bracelets, and rings is worn to the female corpse, white kerchief and head scarf are worn to male corpse. The corpse then warped with fabric. The number of fabric layer is adjusted to the wealth of the corpse’s family. More wealth means more layers. The corpse is buried in *pesaron* ground, a hut with the same size of the corpse is made, embedded with roof with 3-8 meter of heights that usually called as *sesudungon*. The heights of *sesudungon* is adjusted to the wish of the corpse’s family. The location is very far from the forest, however, the family will leave a sign by planting a certain type of tree, therefore, if the family wants to come back to the burial area, they will find the sign. Moreover, to mark the area in which the members have performed *melangun*, a piece of wood is stuck in reverse on the ground towards the way to their previous *genah* (home).

The place where people are death is considered as cursed and inhabited by many ghosts, therefore, the place has to be abandoned, even though, sometimes during the season in which the land yields some fruits.²⁷The plants such as cassava, sweet potato, sugarcane, and caladium can still be taken, however, the place will no longer able to be made as home, even temporary. Generally, the destination during the act of *Melangun* is the abandoned area which has been worked by them in the past, or the other places that considered as having quite abundant food resources. There is no certain measurement which calculate the distance of

melangun and the migration towards a new *genah* (home). Further distance and the longer that distance is travelled would be better, because this process will able to forget the dead person.²⁸

During *Melangun*, any property of *Orang Rimba* is brought along by them. The goods or *haba-haba* include the cooking equipment, such as pot, frying pan, and carpet. In addition, weapons like machete, *kujur*, and pickaxe which usually used by *Orang Rimbat* farm and hunt animals are always accompany this *melangun* trip. The cooking equipment is usually taken by putting them in *Ambung*. *Ambung* is a unique basket of *Orang Rimba* which made from rattan and smeared with *jernang* (a type of resin) as the dye of the *ambung*.²⁹*Ambung* has various diameters, however, the *ambung* with 50 cm diameter is used to carry goods, thus, it quite large to contain the luggage during *Melangun*.³⁰*Melangun* also involves the relatives group, especially from the mother side, because it correlated with the post-marriage custom in which the men will move to women family, while the group of women relatives from the father side will be responsible to deliver the corpse and take care of the place abandoned by the core family as well as the group from mother side.

The author has visited *sesudungon* (*Orang Rimba*) of Makekal Ulu which was in the middle of *Melangun*. The author asked:

“*Mikay ngapo tinggal di siko?* (why do you live here?)

“*Kamiy ndok melangun* “(we are currently in the middle of *Melangun* act)

“*Sudah berapa lamo mikay melangun di siko?* (how long have you been performing *Melangun* in here?)

“*Sudah 4 bulan kamiy melangun* (we have lived here for four months)

“*Biasonyo sampai berapa lamo mikay melangun?* (how long does it usually take for you to perform *Melangun*??
Kamiyendoktau, kalau tanahnya subur, kamiy lamo melangun disiko (we don’t know, if the soil is fertile, we would stay longer)

This condition indicates that the length of *Melangun* performed by *Orang Rimba* is not only depending on the mood/feeling of the heir, but also determined by the condition of the area which inhabited by them during *Melangun*. If the soil is fertile, close to the water source, they would stay longer in the area. In the past, *Orang Rimba* will conduct *Melangun* in a quite long time, usually for 10-12 years, however, because the forest area has getting narrowed today, thus, they *melangun* period has become shorter which only for few months.

The destination of *Melangun* is usually determined by the *penguluoron* the leader of the group. This *pengulu* is a *tumenggung*, *tengganai*, *mangku*, *menti*, or *depati*. If there is no *pengulu* in the group, thus, a *rerayo* (elder person) can be

²⁶Lih. Saudagar, F...2005.

²⁷Lih, Saudagar F, 2005.

²⁸Soetomo., M. 1995. *Orang Rimbo Kajian Struktural-Fungsional Masyarakat Terasing di Provinsi Jambi*. Disertasi. Bandung. Universitas Padjajaran

²⁹Lih. Handini.,R. 2005.

³⁰Lih. Soetomo...1995.

selected. There is no particular ritual to determine the new location. The most important things of the place that will be inhabited by them are the food source and hunted animal as well as sufficient water which will be used for living. When the forest in TNBD area is still relatively intact, the mobility of *Melangun* is performed from west to east or from north to south or on the contrary in accordance to where the death occurs. If the death occurs in the west, then the group will travel to east or south or vice versa. The migration pattern is associated with traditional political system at that time in which those three directions are domiciled. *Pangkal Waris* in the north, *Ujung Waris* in the East, and *Jenang* in the South. *Pangkal Waris* is defined by *Orang Rimba* as the exploration area of *Orang Rimba*, *Ujung Waris* as the migration area of *Orang Rimba*, especially as the boundaries during their *Melangun* process.³¹ The locations which made as the destination of *Melangun* in the past have no longer ideal at present. According to the information acquired from *rerayo*, in the past, the destination of *Melangun* has to be an intact and vast forest. Because in that area, a new life cycle will roll.³²

If that dreamland has not been discovered during the process of *Melangun*, they will return to the original land after leaving it for three months. The reason of their return to the previous land is because that land categorized as *pengantilan* land³³ (the land that always occurs in their minds). They might remember their old places because the rubber plants which planted by them before have become shady, green, and bigger. However, if they find a better place or location, thus, only parts of the group which return to the previous land. This condition occurs because they have found a location or place which considered as good and have began to re-manage their lives. If this kind of land is found, the first thing done by *Orang Rimba* is preparing the field to be planted with tubers, because they are in the shortage during the *Melangun* period.³⁴

As a comparison, there is an interesting case when Tumenggung Tarib (*Orang Rimba Air Hitam* that already settled) conducted *Melangun* due to the death of their sister, they performed the *Melangun* which only less than 10 kilometers from the previous *genah* (home), moving to the old rubber farm that will be tapped. When he was asked why the *Melangun* is not performed in the location which far from the previous *genah* (home)? The reason expressed by Tumenggung Tarib is because their strategic home location which not located in the depth of the forest and not too far from the village. In addition, the farm which cultivated with young rubber plant has made them to become reluctant of leaving it because they afraid the plant will be ruined and eaten by wild boar. Tumenggung Tarib performed *Melangun* for about 3 months only. This kind of event in which the *Melangun* is conducted in a short time and with a destination that close to *genah* has been performed as well by the *Orang*

Rimba who live in the western part of Jambi in which the forest has gone and replaced with palm and rubber farms.³⁵

2) *Melangun*; the Economic Adaptation of *Orang Rimba* towards Tropical Forest

A sleek teasing from Peter L Beger “*Every human being knows their own world better than any outsiders*”. The knowledge of *Orang Rimba* regarding their values and understanding towards culture and forest is only known by the *Orang Rimba* themselves. For the forest people, the *Melangun* habit is a knowledge which refers to the effort of observing, inspecting, measuring, and supervising the surrounding natural symptoms. *Melangun* is not only aimed for the tears of despair as the consolation of grief, or the habit of *Orang Rimba* to move from one place to another, but also to seek for a better life.

A better life for *Orang Rimba* is highly depending on the integrity of forest. *Melangun* as cultural system is a set of ideas which form behavior of *Orang Rimba* towards an ecosystem. Through *Melangun*, *Orang Rimba* perform an adaptation towards the environment (forest). *Melangun* (the migration) of *Orang Rimba* from one place to another generates a meaning of “rotation on forest resources management”. It means that, they provide the opportunity for the old farm to rest and re-establish as Jungle (wilderness). The phases of forest resources management of *Orang Rimba* are as follows: “*Ladang- Sesap -Belukor and Benuaron*” (*sesap* is the remains of farming land which still leaving the yields of crop, *belukor* is a new thicket plants, *benuaron* is a new potential forest for *Orang Rimba*. The last returns into a Jungle. The existence of these phases of forest resources management becomes the adaptation process which produces a perfect balance. Through *Melangun* habit, a new ecosystem has established to maintain their lives and the unity of forest.³⁶

3) *Melangun*; Social Reflection of *Orang Rimba*

Orang Rimba have unique characteristic of living in group, however, the existence of this group is not restricted by specific habitat. They are free to live together with another group. Each member of the group is able to get themselves closer or further from the bound of a certain group with various reasons, for example a conflict or violation of cultural order. These two problems are frequently occurring on the group of *Orang Rimba*. However, it is not easy for *Orang Rimba* to change group. *Orang Rimba* are able to conduct mobilization between groups only through two ways, namely *Melangun* (death) and *nyemendo* (marriage). Those kinds of prohibition are regulated by indigenous law.³⁷ If marriage occurs, thus, the men side will follow the group from the side of the wife. The settling culture of *Orang*

³¹Lih., Prasetijo, A...2011

³²Lih., Soetomo, M... 1995

³³Lih., Soetomo, M...1995

³⁴Aritonang R., 2010. *Orang Rimba Menantang Zaman*. Publisher: Conservation Community of Indonesia/WARSI Jambi.

³⁵Lih. Prasetijo, A., 2011

³⁶Sidik, H. 2016. *Impresi Orang Rimba: Melangun” Sebuah komposisi music dalam interpretasi perjalanan Orang Rimba. Jurnal Puitika*. Vol 12 No. 2, September 2016

³⁷Lih. H... 2016

Rimba after the marriage is settling near the relatives of wife parents (*uxorilocal*).³⁸

The change of household composition between groups is a common thing. If the composition of the member of a group is to stable in a relatively long period, thus, it would be vulnerable towards various types of conflict. The conflict that frequently occurs in the forest people is the decreasing availability of natural resources. Sometimes conflicts also occur due to very simple things. Therefore, the best time to disengage from the group is by approaching another group. This can be happened due to death or due to the *Melangun* reason. *Melangun* creates new balance to renew social order between groups of *Orang Rimba*.

4) *Melangun*; A Traditional Wisdom in Indigenous Ecology Perspective

According to the two previous explanations regarding the conception of *melangun*, thus, the implementation of indigenous ecology perspective is a concrete action to be conducted by *Orang Rimba* in maintaining the balance and order of their world. Cultural practice of *Melangun* indicates the presence of interconnection between the surrounding objects. *Melangun* habit involves the relationship between humans, nature, and their ancestors in which those three are the main creatures that inhabit the cosmos of *Orang Rimba*.

The life of *Orang Rimba* is very depending on the function of ecosystem. They see themselves as an integral part of ecosystem. In the context of community of *Rimba*, *Melangun* habit is understood as the embodiment of respect towards the dead and the ancestors. By performing *Melangun*, *Orang Rimba* has maintained the continuity of good relation which has been established by the ancestors with gods. Obeying gods will provide safety. *Melangun* habit is seemed to be related with religious system alone, however, the actual condition shows that *Melangun* habit is also associated with the social relation of *Orang Rimba* towards their fellow human beings and the relation of *Orang Rimba* towards nature.

Unconsciously, by performing *Melangun*, *Orang Rimba* has performed rotation of forest resources management and preventing the excessive exploitation towards forest resources. By performing *Melangun*, *Orang Rimba* also able to maintain their social relation and preventing conflicts between them. This argument is supported by Reichel-Dalmatoff which mentions that the ritual on pra-modern community that involves materials and energy from environment does not only related to mythical things but also beneficial to strengthen emotional bound with material and energy, therefore, the imbalance which generates disaster can be prevented.

Melangun is the bound that contains commitment of relationship between humans, spirits, ancestors, fellows *Orang Rimba*, forest, and gods. This condition indicates that *Orang Rimba* and the other creatures exist in the nature are the actively interconnected subjects. *Melangun* is ritually

regulated ecosystem; as system in which the ritual works to preserve the structure of the system itself. *Orang Rimba* have crucial role in maintaining order and balance of ecosystem. More harmonic relation between those three will create a better life in the cosmos.

5. Conclusion

Orang Rimba is a community which consistently holding the culture and highly depending on nature. *Melangun* is the culture of *Orang Rimba* that until present is still performed. *Melangun* describes the social relation occurs between humans, nature, ancestors, and gods. Although, the manifestation of spirit and god are invisible, however, its interconnected and interrelated. *Melangun* is a concrete practice performed by *Orang Rimba* in the effort of preserving the relation with another subject. *Melangun* is a ritually regulated ecosystem in a system in which the ritual works to maintain the structure of the system.

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