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**Food security among the Orang Rimba in Jambi:  
transformation processes among contemporary Indonesian  
hunter-gatherers**

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Two kids in Terab posing for a picture near their compound, 2015

## IV The Terab Group: Outside the Forest

My heartbeat increased a bit the first time I met the Terab group. Once again, the member of the WARSI staff who has been a vital source of help during my fieldwork offered me a ride. We reached the Terab group on a sunny afternoon after a four-hour ride on a creaking motorbike from Bukit Suban to Air Hitam. Thankfully we reached our destination in one piece. The Terab group is located in the eastern part of Bukit Duabelas. The journey took about six to seven hours from Jambi city. From the city we headed directly east towards Pauh District, a Malay settlement that is home to growing numbers of incoming transmigrants from Java. From the Pauh road, a public highway, we headed towards the impressive gate to the industrial complex of PT. Era Mitra Agro Lestari (PT. EMAL), a giant palm oil company that once belonged to the Bakri Group, but today is under the control of the Sinar Mas Group, one of the major agro-industrial companies in the country. Numbers of small trucks loaded with palm pits were waiting outside to pass the gate.

Having passed PT. EMAL's complex, the only thing to see was oil palms, forming a never-ending display of greenery. The only people we met along the winding and dusty road were a few laborers tasked with maintaining the plantation. Once in a while, we passed other motorbikes belonging to the Orang Melayu heading to and from the plantation area. Later, I was informed that some of the Orang Melayu we met along the way were coming from their rubber fields, which had been planted in the secondary forest located along the border zone of the Bukit Duabelas National Park. Access to these fields is only possible by passing through the plantation. Leaving the oil palm plantations behind us, we reached the 6,800 hectares of land that belong to PT. Wana Perintis, a *Hutan Tanaman Industri* (HTI) or Industrial Timber Estate. The first time I passed the area, which was in mid-2012, it was an empty and desolate landscape bereft of any vegetation and with hardly any trees. There were only a few isolated forest patches, awaiting their fate to be razed to the ground by chainsaws and a fleet of bulldozers on standby in the area.

We stopped near a small compound in the bush, right in the middle of the cleared piece of land. We were greeted by a man poking his face through tree branches. The man had closely cropped hair, was holding a cigarette and wore a loincloth. He said only a few words of hello to my friend using *Beso Rimba* (Orang Rimba language). Slowly, behind his back, other men, women and children approached us, hesitantly.<sup>39</sup> Their fear subsided after my friend introduced me to the man, who later shook my hand while saying my

<sup>39</sup> It is not as difficult to meet the Orang Rimba nowadays as it was in the past. Previously, coming across the Orang Rimba was extremely difficult, let alone having a chance to talk to them as they were often suspicious and distrustful of others. Now, everything is completely different. Even though they remain suspicious of outsiders, due to the dynamics of the situation they find themselves in, interaction with strangers has become inevitable. This is especially true for the Terab group.

name, an act that perhaps convinced the other men dressed in loincloths to join the fray. I introduced myself to them and explained the purpose of my visit and the objectives of my PhD research. The man, who is the *tumenggung* of the Terab group, welcomed me warmly. To this day, his words still linger in my mind:

“You are very welcome here in our group. We are glad that there is someone who has a deep concern for our lives. Only a few people share similar concerns. As you can see, we live surrounded by an empty land. It (the empty land) used to be our forests, *tanah peranoon*,<sup>40</sup> our children’s playground, a place for us to hunt the wild animals. But now, all is gone. The company [HTI] took it away and turned our lands into a rubber plantation. I know that your intention here is to learn our way of life, our *adat* (customs). But in return, I expect you to send our message to the world about our conditions.” (translated by the author)

The words of the *tumenggung*<sup>41</sup> have in part shaped and inspired my research. The *tumenggung* is a quiet person. He rarely speaks to others, either to his own people or to outsiders. Nonetheless, he commands a lot of respect from his people. That is why once he says a word, others treat it with great respect. I learned that he is considered to be the wisest man in his community.

Right from the start, I wondered why the Terab group resides outside the forest, more so considering the reality that they still wear their traditional Orang Rimba outfits, consisting of a *kancut* or *cawot* (only a loincloth) for the men (children up to adults), a topless loincloth for married women and a *kemben* (a loincloth that covers the body from chest down to the knee) for unmarried women (see Chapter II). In fact, nowadays it is extremely rare to find the Orang Rimba men wearing only loincloths and the Orang Rimba women going topless outside the forest. Even though the Orang Rimba still consider that wearing loincloths is part of their identity as the Orang Rimba, in most cases such outfits are only used while they are inside the forest or just among themselves. Otherwise, the Orang Rimba who live close to other ethnic groups wear clothes that cover their bodies. In this sense, the Orang Rimba try to give respect to other cultures while they are not in their territory (forest). It is worth noting that the Orang Rimba are highly respectful of other cultures and expect that other ethnic groups understand and respect their culture as well. One manifestation of this is wearing a full body cover cloth when they are outside the forest in order to adjust and respect other people’s cultures. The wearing of such a cloth while outside of the forest is also a symbolic action, as the cloth signifies protection in the

<sup>40</sup> *Tanah Peranoon* literally means the land/the place for giving birth. It is one of the Orang Rimba’s sacred lands. It is usually located in a separate part of the compound but still near the fields where they work, which, in the current context, is *ladang/kebun* or garden/plantation. The place is chosen by the family of a woman who is about eight months pregnant. The place is designed as a temporary home for the mother until she gives birth. For the Orang Rimba, the birth process is very important as it combines great blessings from the gods and the danger of delivering a baby for a mother. The Orang Rimba see the birth of a baby as their opportunity to carry on their existence. On the other hand, delivering the newborn is a battle between life and death for the mother. The moment is very crucial because the Orang Rimba believe that the deities and bad spirits will clash in a fight for possession of the baby. This is why they make a special and sacred place, to avoid the bad spirits that can take away the newborn and to welcome the deities to protect the baby.

<sup>41</sup> The *tumenggung* of the Terab group passed away in 2015 due to ill health. He has been replaced by the new *tumenggung* that is in charge up to date. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, all stories, data, and information concerning the leadership or *ketumenggungan* are related to the late previous *tumenggung*.

outside world. Thus, it is likely that the way the Orang Rimba dress as I witnessed during my fieldwork in the Terab group is a deliberate attempt to underline their identity vis-à-vis the non-Orang Rimba society. Moreover, what is even more confusing is the fact that the Terab group stay outside the forest, which is not very far from the Terab River - their original location before they adopted a nomadic lifestyle outside the forest.<sup>42</sup>

This chapter aims to describe the current condition of the Terab group living outside the forest and the reasons behind this situation. The first part of this chapter, which serves as a background for the second part about their food situation, provides a short description of the Terab group, including their settlement and mobility, the composition of the group, the modes of livelihoods, the change of livelihood sources that are more depending on the cash crops plantations (rubber and oil palm), as well as their interaction with the outside world. The second part is focused on the core of the dissertation: food production and its consumption.

## 4.1 Ethnographic background to the Terab group

### Landscape, settlement, and mobility

The Terab group currently lives in a landscape that is dominated by oil palm and rubber plantations that belong PT. Sinar Mas and HTI Wana Perintis. Originally, the Terab group used to follow the course of the river Terab, inside the forest. Today, the group is more widespread and lives both inside, as well as outside of the park. One of the main reasons why the Terab group is very mobile is because of *melangun*. Their main roaming area is in the area of HTI Wana Perintis, and in some cases they also stay inside the oil palm plantation. The HTI company obtained permission to manage the land in 1997 and since then it has been involved in clearing the forest to plant rubber trees. During my fieldwork, some rubber trees were ready for harvesting, but the rest of the land area was completely cleared of all trees. The permission to do so came from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (previously the Ministry of Forestry, before they merged) and specifically stipulates that it applies to secondary forest.

Even though currently the Terab group prefer to live outside the park most of the time, NGOs, other ethnic groups, government officials and other parties describe them as representatives of the 'genuine' Orang Rimba who still preserve their traditional ways of life (Aritonang, 1999). This is reflected for instance by the extent to which they pay attention to details of customs and traditions in a way these were practiced by their ancestors in the past. In addition, the group is very mobile. During my fieldwork in Terab from 2012 to 2015, for example, they moved 15 times,<sup>43</sup> as part of the rituals of *melangun* and caused by a need to adapt their modes of production. For this reason, it is difficult to count the total number of the Terab group because the number is always changing. The

<sup>42</sup> The watershed of the Terab River is partly located inside the national park and has abundant forest resources, ranging from big trees, *sialang* trees to harvest honey, wild animals, fish in the river, and edible plants.

<sup>43</sup> I was able to follow their movements during *melangun* on six of these 15 occasions.



Figure 41. Landscape of the Terab group dominated by the plantation areas

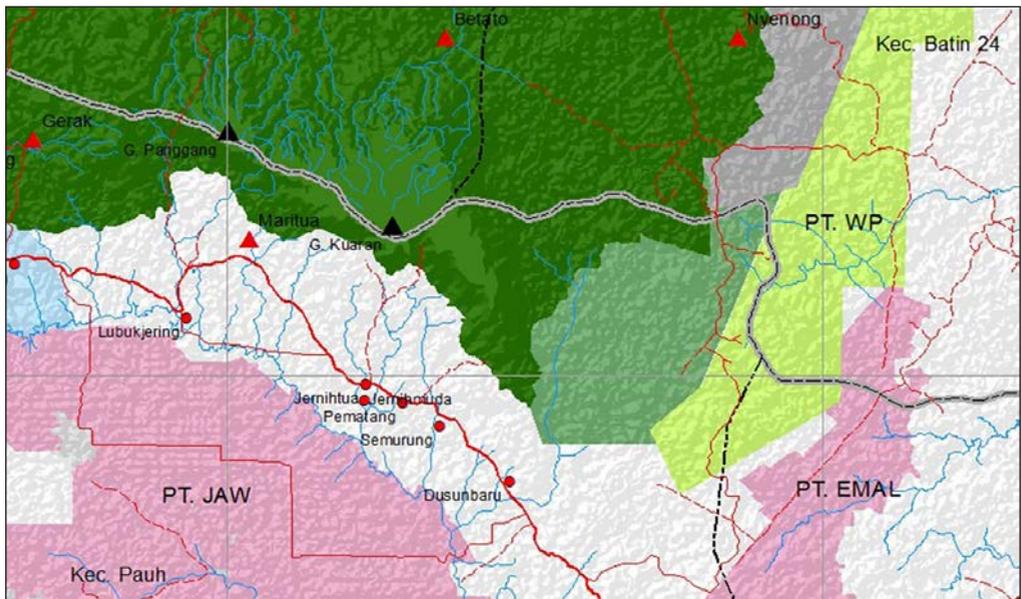


Figure 42. The location of the Terab group in the eastern part of TNBD

Source: WARSJ's map adapted by author, 2012-2014

Notes: the red dots are the resettlement areas for the other ethnic groups and the red triangles are the resettlement areas of the Orang Rimba. The Terab group is located in the red triangle dot under Maritua.



Figure 43. One typical house, a *sesudungon*, of the Terab group

size of their population ranged from 150 to 339 people during the entire time span of my fieldwork.

To be accurate, the map below shows the locations of the Terab group. Since the group is actively mobile, the movement of the group follows the locations of the other ethnic groups located, particularly in the red dots as provided in the map below. This especially happened during the *melangun* activities in 2015.

The dark green area shows the Bukit Duabelas National Park, which, based on calculations by the Indonesian Ministry of Forestry, stretches for some 60,500 hectares in total. The area covered in light green indicates the buffer zone of the park, which is designated for management by the community around the forest. This area is usually called secondary forest. Meanwhile, the lime green color shows the area that belongs to HTI PT. Wana Perintis and is used for a rubber plantation. The pink areas are the lands covered by plantation companies (PT. EMAL and PT. JAW) and Orang Melayu settlements. The light grey color indicates the community forestry area or *hutan desa*. As we can see from the result of the satellite map, many villages that have been formed as a result of transmigration already occupy *hutan desa* in this area. The settlements along the Air Hitam river belong to the Orang Melayu, namely Dusunbaru, Semurung, Pematang Kabau, Jernihmuda, and Jernihtua. All of them are old villages and were already mentioned by an explorer in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Van Waterschoot van der Gracht 1915). Based on this demographic composition, we can see that the Terab group is surrounded by secondary forest, *hutan desa*, commercial plantations (oil palm and rubber), and the settlements of other ethnic groups. The interaction of the Terab group with people of

other ethnic groups has become unavoidable. Further on in my analysis, I will discuss how this interaction to a large extent defines the cultural, social, political and economic conditions of the Terab group internally and externally.

Typical of the Orang Rimba in general, the Terab group in particular still preserves the way of life they inherited from their ancestors. The most vivid example is the way they build their 'lean-to's (*sesudungon*) (Figure 42 and Chapter II). Today, the roof is made of plastic materials rather than leaves. The underlying reason for such a practice is that the Terab group maintains a more nomadic lifestyle than other Orang Rimba groups. Using the plastic roof seems more practical when living in the plantation areas. The houses are very close together and form two rows facing each other. The houses also serve another function: separating parents with small children from young unmarried women and young bachelor males. Moreover, the pattern of houses is based on the kinship relationships. The unmarried youngsters stay close to their parents and the nuclear family, while the extended families stay not so far away from the nuclear families. The 'lean-to's or small huts that the people build fit the mobile lifestyle. Usually, they do not stay long in one place. They move in search of food or because of social reasons.

Moreover, a high mortality rate is another reason that the Terab group is so mobile. The death of a group member triggers *melangun* and a movement to a new location. For instance, members of the Orang Rimba that I worked with during my first fieldwork in 2012 had to move to another location in 2013 due to the death of a group member, who passed away due to an acute liver disease.<sup>44</sup> Following his death, the four groups divided according to the *melangun* tradition. The Terab group moved to Block C4 of the oil palm plantation, the Serenggam Group moved to the HTI area, Kejasung Kecil 1 and 2 returned to the Kejasung River areas, and some of the group members moved to the surrounding area of Bukit Tiga Puluh National Park on the border between Riau and Jambi Provinces.

### **The composition of the group**

Taking into account the fluidity of members, my analysis in this chapter focuses on the Terab group under the leadership of its major *tumenggung* during my fieldwork of 2013-2015. Other factors that affect the dynamics of the group will be complementary to this focus.

During my first visit to the group in mid-2012, I saw a large group of people, but I learned later that the large population was because three other groups with a different *tumenggung* had joined the Terab group under the leadership of the Terab *tumenggung*. Even though the *tumenggung* was in charge of the large group, it did not mean that he was the overall leader of the four groups; instead, each *tumenggung*, according to the Orang Rimba custom, is 'responsible' for his own group. Table 16 provides detailed information about the spread of Orang Rimba in Terab in 2012.

<sup>44</sup> This person was one of the members of the group that decided to move out to the Malay residency, he married a Malay woman and converted to Islam. Even though he was not living in the group anymore, he was still considered one of them; and they still conducted the *melangun* tradition for him. This diagnose was based on a medical examination at Sarolangun Hospital.

**Table 17. Location of the groups and total number of households & population in Terab, 2012**

No	Location	Group	Number of households	Number of people
1	PT. EMAL area	Serengam	10	36
2	Terab river	Serengam	5	18
3	PT. EMAL area	Kejasung Kecil 2	8	42
5	PT. EMAL area	Terab	17	79
6	Sako Kasai river	Terab	12	43
7	Terab river	Terab	1	3
8	SDM palm oil plantation	Terab	1	7
9	Kejasung river	Kejasung Kecil 1	21	111
<b>Total</b>			<b>75</b>	<b>339</b>

Source: census by WARSJ and author recapitulation, 2010 and 2012

The outcome of my first visit was later confirmed by the latest census on the demographics of the Orang Rimba in 2010, which was conducted by Statistics Indonesia (BPS) in cooperation with WARSJ. The total number of people in Terab was 339 divided over 75 households. The large number of people in the Terab group as mentioned previously was a consequence of the coming together of the Terab group with the Serengam group, the Kejasung Kecil 1 Group, and the Kejasung Kecil 2 Group.

Later on, as my fieldwork continued, the total population of the Terab group in the last stage of my fieldwork was 150 people divided over 26 households, 19 out of which in the HTI area and oil palm plantations. Some households moved to the Bukit Tiga Puluh area. It is well known among the Orang Rimba that the Bukit Tiga Puluh area is a place for the Orang Rimba immigrants from Bukit Duabelas (especially from the Terab group) and Pamenang. Some of them are displaced from their original locations as a form of punishment for mistakes they have committed in their previous locations, while some live in the area in search of better conditions, looking for a new place to earn an income or for hunting or other sources of livelihood.

### Modes of livelihood

Since the Terab group regularly moves in and out of the forest, they have adopted several sources of livelihood. Even though during my field work they spent most time outside the forest, non-timber forest products (NTFPs) were still the major source of livelihood both for their subsistence requirements and to earn money to fulfill their needs. This section discusses the modes of livelihood of the Terab group in the present situation that includes the collection of honey, rattan, dragon blood, and *damar*.

Time and again, my informants stressed the importance of honey<sup>45</sup>. Honey is more than just a commodity for the Orang Rimba; it has cultural and social importance as well. Moreover, the tree that hosts the bees is also of great value to the Orang Rimba.

<sup>45</sup> For further reading and comparison of honey for the Orang Rimba, see Sandbukt (1988), 'Resource Constraints and Relations of Appropriation among Tropical Forest Foragers: The Case of the Sumatran Kubu', *Research in Economic Anthropology*, Vol. 10: 117-158.

Honey and the honey tree are seen as inseparable. The most important honey tree is the *sialang* tree, a species of *Kompassia excels*. The *sialang* tree is also known as *kedundong/kedundong*, *kruing*, *pulai*, *kayu kawon*, and *par* in local parlance. It is one of the highest tree species inside the Bukit Duabelas Forest, as well as one of the most preserved resources for the Orang Rimba.

The *sialang* tree has such importance and significance among the Orang Rimba that it is considered to be equivalent to the life of a person, or worth 500 loincloths in the Orang Rimba trade and exchange system. An individual *sialang* tree belongs to and is managed by the first person to find it. Upon finding the tree, the founder marks it by using a specific initial cut by a knife in the tree to indicate to other members that he is the owner. Once the tree has the small initial cut, no other person would dare to approach it. However, according to Orang Rimba customs, the *sialang* tree actually belongs to a woman of the household, even though it is usually a male who finds it first. If somebody apart from the owner destroys or harvests the honey without permission, a fine of 500 loincloths or relinquishing an unmarried daughter to the original owner of the tree is imposed.<sup>46</sup> Thus, harvesting honey from a *sialang* tree that does not belong to you means incurring a debt to the owner.

The Orang Rimba refer to honey as *mani rapa*, meaning miracle and sacred (*bedewo*). According to them, honey is derived from blooming flowers and is brought to the trees by the bees on their heads, wings, and legs. Based on the Orang Rimba stories I heard, *rapa* (the big bee) has its origins in Kerinci Mountain, which has a special guard. The guard is believed to be a very tall white man with red eyes and a very tough and hardened face.<sup>47</sup> During a journey taken by the *rapa* and the guard, they stopped to rest (*perhentian*) under a *sialang* tree inside the forest. Since that time, the bees have always returned to the *sialang* trees and produced honey every year, especially during the rainy season from October to December.

Harvesting honey is an important ritual in the lives of Orang Rimba men and requires a lot of skill and a lifetime of practice. The activity is also a measure of the respect a man commands from his elders and the women. The skill that is required is not only limited to climbing the tree, but also how the men treat the trees, the bees and the honey in spiritual terms. It is an exclusively male job that is replete with sanctity. The honey-bearing tree is treated as a young virgin female, which is why the climber is required to say some mantras (*pantun*) in effect asking for the permission of the girl (*sialang* tree) to climb it to get the honey and come back to the ground safely. All the rituals are done in a conscious manner to respect the tree, the bees and the honey. Harvesting honey is always done during nighttime.

In one harvest expedition, the Orang Rimba can collect as much as 20 kilograms of honey in a single comb if the weather is good. However, if the weather is not good, the Orang Rimba can only harvest about seven to ten kilograms in one comb. The *sialang* tree often

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Many experts on the Orang Rimba believe the man is similar to the Dutch who came to Sumatra in the seventeenth century (based on interview with WARSI staff).

hosts many bees' nests, providing an abundance of honey during the honey season. The honey is very nutritious, providing a lot of energy and having a delicious, natural taste. No wonder the Orang Rimba have vast experience in determining whether or not it is good honey, and have developed ways of preserving it that enables them to sell it to other ethnic groups outside the forest. I learned, however, that not many outsiders want to buy the honey from the Orang Rimba because they are unsure about the hygiene of the honey that the Orang Rimba harvest. In that case, the Orang Rimba prefer to store the honey for use during periods when honey can no longer be harvested. The Orang Rimba store the honey by putting it into used bottles.

Unfortunately, I did not witness the practice of harvesting honey during my fieldwork. However, I heard many stories from my key informants and learned that many of them are highly skilled at climbing *sialang* trees. In 2006, the Terab group was forced to forego honey harvesting temporarily due to the death of one of their members. He was one of the best honey harvesters among the Terab group. The death was regarded as a bad omen (*kesialon*) for the group, which is why, since that fatal incident that occurred while on a honey-harvesting expedition, the Terab group has distanced itself from *sialang* trees inside the Terab forest. In the last ten years or so, the group prefers to stay outside of the forest, either in the buffer zone of the national park or in the plantation areas, where it is more difficult for them to practice honey-harvesting.

Some of my key informants informed me that the quality and quantity of the honey collected are also declining. This may be attributable to land conversion. Moreover, the Terab group fears that an absence of *sialang* trees will result in the bees vanishing and along with them, the honey. The Terab group realizes that they cannot always depend on the honey to fulfill their need for sugar and sweets. To that end, people have resorted to exploiting other modern sources of sugar to meet their daily energy needs. The sugar consumed by the Orang Rimba nowadays is the refined sugar that is available in the market and the nearby transmigrant stores.

Another tradable NTFP that the Terab group collects is a particular species of rattan called *manau* (well known as *manau*). *Manau* is a very important raw material for furniture-making and it is of higher quality than other species of rattan<sup>48</sup>.

*Manau* can only thrive in dense forests and in Jambi *manau* is in abundance in the Bukit Duabelas National Park and its secondary forest area. *Bermanau* or collecting *manau* is a social activity that requires onerous efforts. One piece of *manau* is between two to three meters long and can be sold for IDR 7,000 – 9,000 or \$US 0.53 – 0.68 per piece, depending on the size and quality. The Terab group sells *manau* collectively. Indeed, if one Terab group joins up with other groups, around 500-800<sup>49</sup> pieces of *manau* can be collected,

<sup>48</sup> At the macro level, Indonesia is the largest supplier of rattan in the world, and contributes to meeting 80% of the world's demand for the commodity. More than 90% of the commodity comes from forests in Sumatra, Sulawesi and Kalimantan. In a typical year, Indonesia produces about 23,000 tons of rattan (Pusat Informasi Kehutanan Provinsi Jambi 2015).

<sup>49</sup> The average annual *manau* production in Jambi is around 58,000 pieces, based on calculations by Dinas Kehutanan Provinsi Jambi (2015). I believe that most of the supply comes from the TNBD forest.

depending on the number of people involved in the harvesting process. The middlemen involved in *manau* transactions are either Orang Melayu or transmigrants.

Men are responsible for collecting *manau*, a process that usually takes about one to two weeks, starting from identifying the location, transporting, and selling it to the middlemen. Meanwhile, women are charged with managing or weaving raw *manau* to make household implements such as *ambung* (small storage places), *tikar* (mat), and *tongkat* (walking sticks) for the elders. Only a small percentage of the *manau* is used for domestic needs, while most is sold to supplement their income from other sources. In some other cases, the women also join the men to collect and transport the *manau* even though on a smaller scale and not on a regular basis. Harvesting *manau* is based on both external and internal factors, such as demand from the middlemen, the ability of the group to look for, harvest and transport *manau*, and the willingness of individuals to do a *bermanau* job. Another important NTFP for the Terab group is *jernang* or dragon's blood (*daemonorops hygrophilus*). This rare commodity is obtained from the seeds of a particular species of rattan and has a very high monetary value due to its benefits. In fact, *jernang* has the highest economic value of all NTFPs in the national park. The final product from *jernang* includes but is not limited to sedatives and various medicines for treating diarrhea, cancer, and rheumatism. In addition, *jernang* can serve as toothpaste and as dye for various industries (ceramic, stones, timber, paper, paint, and cosmetics). During my fieldwork, I once witnessed a Terab member selling *jernang* for around IDR 800,000 or \$US 6,01 per kilogram to middlemen. Harvesting *jernang* is very laborious work, which is perhaps why it is an exclusively male job. It is also a seasonal activity that takes place once a year, usually during April to June. The *jernang* rattan stem is a communal possession and belongs to all Orang Rimba. That said, destroying or cutting the stem constitutes a violation of *adat* and is punishable by a fine of 120 loincloths. During my fieldwork, I learned from one of my informants that the highest collective harvest in 2013 among the Orang Rimba groups occurred in Tanah Garo registering a value of 0.5 tons of *jernang*. Such value is equivalent to IDR 400 million or \$US 30,040. Meanwhile, for the Terab group, the normal average value per individual/household is 0.5 kg or about IDR 400,000 or \$US 30.00 per harvesting activity.

*Damar*<sup>50</sup> or the resin of particular *dipterocarp* trees plays an important role as a commodity for exchange among the Terab group. However, a recent decline in demand has led to a drop in the amount that the Terab group collects. Besides being a tradable commodity, *damar* serves as an important source of light or traditional light/torches. The introduction of modern flashlights (*senter*) has, however, gradually replaced the use of *damar*. *Bedemor'* or collecting *damar* is a unisex job among the Orang Rimba, meaning that everybody can do it, ranging from children, men, and women to elders. However, the low prices for *damar* have reduced the importance of this commodity as a source of income; indeed, today it is a commodity of last resort, and only harvested when there are no other options to earn an income.

<sup>50</sup> *Kelongkung*, to borrow the local term.



Figure 44. An Orang Rimba in Terab with his collected *damar*

The Orang Rimba collect *damar* during the rainy season. The activity is complementary to the efforts to look for other exchange commodities and collective work among the Orang Rimba. This is especially so for the Terab group, who collect *damar* that is black in color. It is different from the *damar* that other groups of the Orang Rimba collect in Makekal, which is white and known as *damar mata kucing* or cat-eye's *damar*. The black dammar or *damar hitam* have the lowest price at IDR 2,000/kg or \$US 0.15/kg compared to *damar mata kucing* (IDR 13,000-20,000/kg or \$US 0.98-1.50 /kg). In April 2013, the group collected four tons of *damar* earning a total of IDR 8 million or \$US 600.80 for the members of the Terab and the Serengam groups involved. The highest earn was around IDR 500,000 or \$US 37.55 because of its contribution in terms of manpower in one household. Meanwhile, the smallest share of the earnings in one household was IDR 50,000 or \$US 3.76 due to limited human resource to collect it.

The Orang Rimba's Malay neighbors often pick up/buy *damar* and serve as middlemen for the Terab group. The middlemen in the neighboring villages sell *damar* to larger traders based in Jambi city. I had the opportunity to ask middlemen in Pauh about the process, and I was informed that if they could sell *damar mata kucing* directly to Lampung,<sup>51</sup> this earned them prices that were as high as IDR 20,000/kg or \$US 1.50/kg compared to the low price of IDR 17,000/kg or \$US 1.28/kg they get from Jambi city traders.

The HTI area that the Terab group live in today used to be primary forest or *rimba bungaron*,<sup>52</sup> borrowing a local term that refers to many aspects of the Orang Rimba's land use, ranging from *tanah peranakon*, children's playgrounds, to dwellings and gardens. I heard from an NGO activist, who witnessed the process of land conversion, that HTI had cleared the land with some of the Orang Rimba's knowledge. The company certainly had all the legal documents to manage the land in a proper manner. Moreover, the clearing process was facilitated by the connivance of some Terab elites. These elites got compensation for serving as guides or assistants, showing the company's workers which trees could be cut. During my fieldwork, I also heard that the elites still get 'monthly compensation' from the companies occupying HTI and PT. EMAL. Every month, the elites visit the company to draw their monthly salary for 'doing nothing'.<sup>53</sup> The monthly salaries paid to the leaders of at least four groups have been detailed as follows: Each *tumenggung* (IDR 2 million/month or \$US 150.20/month), and all of their assistants (IDR 1.5 million/month or \$US 112.65 /month) each. The transaction is done only with the leaders, without consultation with the other members of the group.

Besides the above 'contribution', plantation companies also hire the services of other members on an irregular basis, depending on need. The services and fees are negotiated between the companies and employees on a daily or weekly basis. Work usually involves providing security guard services for company bulldozers. The fee is around IDR 25,000/

<sup>51</sup> Lampung is the neighboring province to the east of Jambi Province.

<sup>52</sup> The Orang Rimba have specific classifications of land use, such as garden and bare land (*ladang*), garden with five-year yields (*sesap*), mixed garden with ten-years yields (*belukar*) and multipurpose forests (*rimba bungaron*).

<sup>53</sup> I got this information from a Malay neighbor with a very close relationship to the Terab group. He has a rubber plantation in the buffer zone of the TNBD and is trusted by the Terab group.

day or \$US 1.88 /day for an eight-hour day. Sometimes, companies also hire the services of members of the Terab group on a monthly, part-time basis, costing them about IDR 500,000/month or \$US 37.55 /month per worker. Such relationships offer immense benefits for companies, since these payments ensure protection of their property in the forests. For example, suppose a conflict arises between companies and the communities<sup>54</sup> or between the companies and the government, the companies will “use” the Orang Rimba to protect their interests. Companies, especially HTI, usually employ the services of the Terab group whenever they are involved in clearing land. Having the Orang Rimba as their security guards definitely secures their intended purposes to clear the land. There is no specific timeline for the company to clear the land but they do it regularly throughout the year.

Meanwhile, the Terab group “uses” their customs to derive other benefits in the form of fines imposed on other ethnic groups and/or on companies. Any contravention of the Orang Rimba’s customs may lead to various fines. Such incidents are frequent; during my fieldwork, I witnessed many. One example was about a misunderstanding involving researchers from Jambi University, who conducted research on the socio-economic changes affecting the Orang Rimba. Apparently, one of the researchers was not sufficiently aware of the Orang Rimba’s customs. While doing an interview, the researcher accidentally sat in the house of the *tumenggung*’s daughter. Those who know Orang Rimba customs are aware that to do such a thing will lead to unfortunate outcomes. Based on the knowledge I have gathered, in the event of such an act, women often scream very loudly, which is quite common in the Terab group. They demanded that the researchers pay *denda adat* or a ‘custom fine’ because of the violation that the researcher had committed against MM’s daughter. In the end, the researcher had to pay a fine of 25 loincloths to MM. I also witnessed incidences when the Terab group tore cameras from journalists and researchers for accidentally taking pictures of Terab women, which is a violation of their customs.

Based on the discussion on the modes of livelihood above, it can be said that the livelihood patterns of the Terab group are as depicted in the table below, which shows the dynamics and developments in the livelihoods of the Terab group during my fieldwork.

**Table 18. Livelihood sources of the Terab group**

Activities	Month	Type
Hunting	Anytime throughout the year	Depend on the personal ability
Betalang	Anytime throughout the year	Depend on the personal ability
Collecting honey (Bermadu)	October to December	Seasonal
Collecting manau (Bermanau)	Anytime throughout the year	Depend on the demand of middlemen
Collecting jernang (Berjernang)	April to June	Once in a year (seasonal)
collecting demar (Berdemor)	April to May	Seasonal
Providing labor	Anytime throughout the year	Regular and part time basis
‘Selling customs’ (denda adat)	Anytime throughout the year	Regular and part time basis
Collecting fruits	The end of the year	Seasonal

<sup>54</sup> Orang Melayu and/or Orang Transmigran.

### **Palm oil as a new source of livelihood**

It was during my third visit to the Terab group in early October 2013 when I joined them in their new activities in the oil palm plantation. During my first visit, one of my key informants informed me that the Sinar Mas group (PT. Sinar Mas) had taken over PT. EMAL (the previous owner of the oil palm plantation), which had belonged to the Bakri Group since January 2013. PT. Sinar Mas is one of the leading companies managing oil palm plantations in Indonesia<sup>55</sup>.

As mentioned earlier, some elites of the Terab and other Orang Rimba groups received monthly salaries from the previous company (PT. EMAL). After the takeover, this practice continued under the new company (PT. Sinar Mas). To that end, in the short term, the takeover may be good for the group, at least economically.

The company is only allowed to exploit secondary forest. In February 2013, the Sinar Mas group discovered that Bakri Group had violated the law by using part of the land that did not fall under their concession in the order of 20,000 hectares that should belong to HTI Wana Perintis. As the largest and best-managed company, PT. Sinar Mas did not want to take any risk by managing land plagued by disputes. To that end, the company lodged a report with the Ministry of Environment and Forestry.<sup>56</sup> After deliberations and communication, HTI did not want the land either because it was already planted with oil palms, and they claimed that the land did not fall under their jurisdiction, either. The land then became *tanah tak bertuan* or 'lands that belong to no one'. Since the oil palm plantation was ready for harvesting at the time, this created problems with neighboring villages, especially some Malay communities. The location of the land is tricky because geographically it belongs to the Pauh District, but administratively it is part of the Mandiangin District. The dispute between the two Malay groups arose over which of the two had rights to the land. The dispute was intense and sometimes resulted in physical conflicts. By the time I finished my fieldwork in March 2015, the dispute remained unresolved, with some of the Orang Melayu Mandiangin still occupying the land in Block C5, while the Orang Melayu from Pauh were occupying the area in BC4.

A further interesting question then emerged: What was the position of the Orang Rimba in the disputes? Inevitably, the Orang Rimba were being exploited, but they also exploited the situation to their advantage. After tedious negotiations with the two Malay groups, the Orang Rimba were assured of the right of access to a number of hectares of the disputed land in the area between BC4 and BC5. After another long internal negotiation among

<sup>55</sup> PT. Sinar Mas Agri-Resources and Technology (SMART) is Indonesia's largest palm oil-based consumer product group that has vertically integrated operations. It is the largest oil palm plantation group in Indonesia and the second largest in the world, with a total of 460,000 hectares or about 5.5% of Indonesia's oil palm plantations. The company booked net sales of IDR 32,341 billion or \$US 2,429 million in 2014 with annual growth of 35.1% compared with the previous year (PT. SMART Tbk 2015). Their end products include cooking oil, margarine, shortening, specialty fats, frying fats, ice cream fats, butter oil substitute and cocoa butter substitute. Thus, it is not surprising that following many internal problems, the Bakri group decided to sell some of their assets to the largest palm oil group in Indonesia.

<sup>56</sup> Based on Agrarian Law of Republic Indonesia No. 5 year 1960, forest in Indonesia belongs to the government and the government has the rights to maintain use of secondary and primary (protected) forest. In this sense, the Ministry of Forestry is the implementing institution handling forestry issues.



Figure 45. The inevitable interaction between Orang Rimba with the non-forest dwellers. A tractor collecting oil palm fruits passes by a hut of Orang Rimba along the road, Terab, 2013

the Orang Rimba, the 50 hectares of mature oil palm fruits were divided between 200 households in four groups, namely the Terab, the Serengam, the Kejasung Kecil 1 and the Kejasung Kecil 2 groups. Every *tumenggung* received six hectares, while other *penghulu* (high-level political positions) received five hectares, and the rest got 0.5 hectares for each household.

Apparently, the no-man's land had brought new economic opportunities for the Terab group. Even though the interaction they have had with other ethnic groups and the use of money has opened up new possibilities for them in recent decades, the access they have to 'ready to harvest fruits' creates yet another new opportunity. Tools such as harvesting sticks, fruit baskets, fruit scales, and transportation trucks have become commonplace and standard equipment. The Terab group members are no longer hunter-gatherers who are highly dependent on forest products. On the contrary, the group members have, by and large, become farmers on no-man's land that used to be their roaming territory and home.

#### **Interaction with the outside world**

Since the Terab group mostly lives outside the forest, they are familiar with the use of money, and today they depend heavily on products that are sold in stores and markets, such as food, clothes, mobile phones, motorbikes, gold in the form of jewelry, and other necessities. This implies that they have to earn money to do so. Some of them rely on

the NTFPs as the main source of livelihood and to earn money, the rest serves as laborers for other ethnic groups or their fellow Orang Rimba, or they become laborers for the plantation companies. The work they do includes clearing land, collecting palm fruits and tapping rubber. Even small children participate in such activities. In return, labor is paid for with free meals for the day, usually consisting of rice, cassava, sardines and instant noodles. Some of them also get small cash payments.

The nearest market is in Pauh Village, and there are also small kiosks in the plantation areas. However, based on my experience, the Orang Rimba buy products at far higher prices, either in Pauh or at the small kiosks, than those paid by people from other ethnic groups. Whenever I bought any merchandise at the kiosks while in the company of the Orang Rimba, I paid steep prices, which was rather different from when I accompanied someone from an NGO, for example. There are many such asymmetric relationships between the Orang Rimba and other ethnic groups.

Money can be considered to be part of a relatively “new culture” for the Orang Rimba in the Terab group and they are still adjusting to this phenomenon. Once received, money is often immediately spent on things such as groceries, loincloths (*kain*), motorbikes and mobile phones. The local term for this is *belanjokon sen kanti*, which literally means ‘selling’ your money as soon as you get it.

Motorbikes and mobile phones are classified as practical tools for the group in the new environment as they facilitate their economic activities. Motorbikes are a crucial mode of transportation, while mobile phones are important for communication. For some people, these two new technologies make their lives and economic activities easier. For instance, some members offer their services as *ojek* drivers (motor bikes for rent) for people travelling to and from the community, such as NGO workers, activists, researchers, and people from other communities like the Malay and the transmigrants. Mobile phones are used for communicating with middlemen about the demand for and prices of NTFPs and oil palm fruits.

Moreover, the acquisition of modern things has become a status symbol and a sign of wealth. In some instances, the Terab group members do not have sufficient knowledge about how to manage, service or maintain such modern acquisitions as motorcycles and mobile phones. Thus, any technical fault that affects the item sometimes leads to its abandonment and a financial loss to the owner. It is not uncommon to find motorcycles abandoned in the middle of plantations simply because they are out of order and the Terab owners do not know how to repair them. The Terab group often calls on the assistance of their Malay neighbors in these circumstances.

Another indication that possessing modern things is taking a toll on the Terab group members relates to possessing and servicing mobile phones. Initially, the Orang Rimba were not aware of the fact that mobile phones needed charging for continual use. Having learned that this is the case, they often trek to Pauh just to charge their mobile phones, which is a very long distance. Ownership of modern things also instills confidence and pride in the youths who feel they give them some status in front of their own people as well as in their interaction with other ethnic groups. Such a perception was revealed when I posed the question about why they consider owning motorcycles and other modern items such as mobile phones as important. The response was always that, when they have

such items, they are treated with more respect and accepted as equal members of society, both among their own members as well as among those of other ethnic groups.

The growing importance of possessing modern items among the Terab group members has increased their dependency on money. Whenever they are short of money, they have become accustomed to borrowing it from middlemen, a practice that increases their dependency. One of the consequences of this increasing dependency on money is that the Terab group often foregoes buying foodstuffs in order to buy modern items, which adversely impacts on their food security. This points to another asymmetrical relationship between the Orang Rimba and the middlemen. The middlemen use these situations to secure the dependency of the Orang Rimba in term of commodity exchange. The middlemen usually make a down payment in the form of money, cigarettes, rice, instant noodles and other consumptive goods. By doing so they lock the Orang Rimba into this unequal exchange process while the Orang Rimba have generally little bargaining power in this process compared with that of middlemen and other parties.

Smoking cigarettes is another new norm that has been introduced to the Orang Rimba through their interaction with the outsiders. Currently, smoking relatively cheap cigarettes has become an important pastime hence a requisite product that, whoever wants to interact with the Orang Rimba, must be provided. Almost all Orang Rimba men, including the young ones, in every location smoke cigarettes.<sup>57</sup> In the case of the Terab group, not only men, but also married women smoke cigarettes, although to a lesser extent than the men. Women who smoke are very uncharacteristic of other groups of Orang Rimba in other locations.

The Terab group men smoke roughly one pack of 12 cigarettes per day, both when they are healthy and when they are unwell. They justify their chain-smoking habit by saying that if they abstain from smoking their lips become sore and they easily get hungry. When money is short, they prefer buying cigarettes over food. According to them, smoking reduces their hunger pangs.

Sugar is also consumed in large quantities, mostly when drinking tea or coffee,<sup>58</sup> when roughly a third of a glass contains sugar. When money is available to buy sugar, tea or coffee is consumed in the morning, afternoon or evening. My observation is that the Terab group's love for sugar in tea is because it neutralizes any bad odor and the color of impurity-laden water. The only option they have is either to drink very sweet tea or not to drink at all.

During my fieldwork, I often heard that water is *jehot* or very bad so they could not drink it safely, as used to be the case when they lived inside the forest where there were abundant supplies of clean water from springs or small brooks. While living in the forest, they did not have to boil the water because it was pure. Unfortunately, this practice persists despite living in an environment that is rather different from what they left behind inside

<sup>57</sup> One of my fellow NGO workers cracked a joke on the connection between cigarettes and the Orang Rimba. According to him, outsiders who want to have the opportunity to talk to the Orang Rimba must give them cigarettes as *bakon* (trade or souvenir) prior to doing so, or else one can forget about hearing a single word from them. While the analogy my friend made seems hyperbolic, knowing the facts on the ground, I have to admit that it has a grain of truth.

<sup>58</sup> Unlike other groups in other locations, the Terab group prefer tea to coffee.

the forests. This means they do not boil the water they get from rivers or small streams in the middle of plantations and they drink it directly, regardless of possible contamination from chemicals and other impurities. It should be noted, however, that, to date, there has been no scientific research on the impurities in the water that flows in the rivers and streams that cross the plantations in Central Jambi. That said, according to medical doctors at local hospitals and WARSI's health officers and other activists, there is no doubt that water in the plantation areas is contaminated with chemicals (fertilizers and pesticides) used in the plantations.

### Sickness

In term of health-related issues, the Orang Rimba have their own cosmology. They believe that there are many causes for their illness, the most common being devils, interaction with the Orang Terang (the non-forest dwellers), and the fruit season (*petangungan godong*), the time, once every two to three years, when the fruits are abundant. As mentioned in Chapter II, during the fruit season, the Orang Rimba enjoy eating fruits and honey with limited combination with any staple foodstuffs. Consumption of sweet and sour fruits for a protracted time adversely impacts their health, their stamina plummets and they often become prone to coughs, fever and other illnesses.

Diseases that are common among the Orang Rimba include chickenpox (*cacar aek*), coughs (*betuk*), flu (*betuk slemo*), and cholera (*gelira*). The Orang Rimba believe that the diseases that afflict them are brought to them by the Orang Terang who live in downstream settlements (*hilir*). The Orang Rimba are very afraid of the aforementioned diseases due to the bitter experiences they have had whenever an outbreak occurs. The diseases often culminate in many deaths. To that end, the Orang Rimba are extremely wary of making any contact with the outsiders, especially to those with whom they have not interacted within the framework of economic and social relations.

The Orang Rimba treat sick persons in a very specific way. The sick, whether individually or in a group, are isolated from other members of the group. A specific place is established where the sick stay and they do not have contacts with healthy members of the group, a practice that is aimed at preventing the spread of illness. The practice is known as *cenenggo* or *bercenenggo*<sup>59</sup>.

With regards to the Terab group, members of the group often suffered from illnesses during the period I stayed with them in the course of my fieldwork. The groups constructed a temporary shelter that was at least a kilometer away from the main compound. While in their temporary shelters, the sick persons search for and prepare the food they eat. In the event the sick are unable to search for and prepare their food, the responsibility is given to one or two members of their nuclear families. However, there are also occasions when the disease is so contagious and virulent that almost all members of the group are sick. Being a close-knit society means that diseases spread rapidly in the group. Once a member of the group falls ill, he or she is isolated from other members, until the person is well again. This is another reason why the number of members in any group fluctuates from time to time. Being confined in a relatively small environment, if

<sup>59</sup> Being isolated or self-quarantined.

compared with the vast stretch of territory the Orang Rimba used to live in in the past, might provide another explanation for the high incidence of illnesses among the Orang Rimba.

Based on my observations, the causes of illness among the Terab group vary, and range from child malnutrition, poor hygiene and lack of clean water to inadequate food in the households. My conclusion is corroborated by information from a medical doctor whom I met during my fieldwork in October 2013. She was an employee of Pauh Medical Center, which is under the jurisdiction of the district health office, and worked in cooperation with WARSI. The doctor, along with WARSI staff, paid regular visits to the Orang Rimba, especially the Terab group, to check on the state of their health. The NGO is committed to collaborating with government institutions that are charged with delivering basic services to the general public as well as the Orang Rimba groups.

With respect to health, the Terab group is one of the most fragile groups among the Orang Rimba. Based on information from an NGO employee in the health division, the Terab group has both a high mortality and a high birth rate. The most vulnerable are children under the age of five. There is often a very small age gap, sometimes of only eleven to twelve months, between children. This means that the young children are often not breastfed by their mother for very long. As a result, young children are forced to eat the same food as the adults, which makes them vulnerable to all kinds of diseases that are attributable to insufficient nutrition.

### **The 2015 hunger crisis**

During January and April 2015 there was massive and extensive news coverage regarding the Orang Rimba and especially the Terab group. Reports said that hunger and starvation had resulted in the death of 14 people (mostly children). The case went beyond being a regional issue and reached the central government in Jakarta. It was a serious problem for the newly elected Jokowi government, especially given the fact that during the election campaign Jokowi pledged a strong commitment to promoting, achieving and sustaining food sovereignty for all Indonesians. Jokowi's government, and in particular the Ministries of Social Affairs, of Environment and Forestry, and of Health, were under significant pressure to resolve such issues. Among other national media (daily journals as well as weeklies) that published the incident are *the Jakarta Post*, *Kompas*, and *Tempo* in their newsfeed in early March 2015<sup>60</sup>. Instantly, the incident of the deaths of the Orang Rimba brought together the authorities. Doubtless, thanks to the massive media coverage in early March 2015, the government at all levels have sprung into action, belated though it turned out to be.

The deaths of 14 people evoked the interest and concern of many parties who were involved with the Orang Rimba. As a result of the unfortunate but avoidable incident, the Terab group moved to 14 different places between January and April 2015.

The incidents brought some new awareness within the Terab group about their lifestyle choices. However, they still persist in remaining outside the national park. It is clear that whenever they move during *melangun*, they always avoid going back to the forest. Recognizing such a tendency, I began to wonder why the Terab group is trying to avoid

<sup>60</sup> For example: Tempo 2 March 2015, Kompas 4 March 2015, The Jakarta Post 9 March 2015.

their original livelihood. However, on close observation, I have discovered political as well as ecological factors that have influenced the decision.

From the political point of view, the movement of the Terab group is conducted within the framework of their customs, which requires them to always be close to their *waris* (guardians), which, in this case, is the Orang Melayu that live in the area of Ulak Kemang Village. By staying close to their *waris*, they secure their access to economic resources. The second consideration is that, by doing so, Terab group members can maintain their role as forest watchdogs, preventing encroachment of other parties into the area. The Terab group is aware of the plantation companies because of their dealings with official institutions such as the Ministry of Environment and Forestry. This reduces the chance of companies engaging in practices that break the law on land grabbing in the national park. Nonetheless, the Terab group has little control over the threat that the Orang Terang (smallholder farmers from other ethnic groups) pose to their livelihood. Their expansion into the forest areas is gradual, which begins with occupying secondary forest and, over time, starts to encroach and endanger the national park. Moreover, by staying outside the forest, the Terab group has access to fast and sufficient information on the movement of their farming neighbors. Another reason why the group stays outside the forest is because they still maintain the oil palm plantation in 'no-man's land'.

On 12 March 2015, the local government authorities in Jambi Province under the direct command of the Indonesian Army, in collaboration with local NGOs and media, paid impromptu visits to the village of Ulak Besar in the district of Batang Hari, a place for the Orang Rimba to practice *melangun*. The following day, the Minister of Social Affairs, Kofifah Indar Parawansa, paid another visit, which was aimed at conducting a dialogue with the Orang Rimba. While there, the Minister asked the Orang Rimba questions aimed at uncovering the reasons and causes that had led to deaths, and obviously the underlying factors that have contributed to the worsening of living conditions for the Orang Rimba. Later, the causes of the deaths were confirmed as diseases in the longer dry season, malnutrition, and polluted drinking water in the plantation areas. However, by the time the Minister bid the Orang Rimba farewell, she recognized that the fundamental cause of the problem lies in the confined living environment that the Orang Rimba currently have. She promised the Orang Rimba that they would be granted rights over land that is currently part of PT. Wahana Perintis rubber plantation, giving them about 114 hectares for use as a customary village.

The Orang Rimba have long demanded that the plantation company (in this case the rubber plantation/HTI that is located on the border of the national park) return ownership of the land to them, because it belonged to the groups prior to the designation of the area as part of the national park. From the perspective of the Orang Rimba, the plantation company's claims to the land are exaggerated and manipulated, since it belonged to their ancestors. Nonetheless, the company maintained its claim to being the rightful owner of the land arguing that it had informed the Orang Rimba of its intention to clear the land for rubber plantations beforehand. The fact is that the land managed by the plantation company lies outside the national park. Nonetheless, the establishment of the national park is a recent development compared with the awarding of land concessions by the

Indonesian government. Consequently, the area that the Terab group calls home, which lies mainly to the east of the national park, has been diminished over time. It is thus not far-fetched when some sources, including those that have a keen interest in the fate of the Orang Rimba, attribute the hunger to fundamental problems that have driven the Orang Rimba from being people with a place they use to call home, to virtual 'squatters' on land that belonged to their ancestors.

## 4.2 Food production and consumption

This section will provide a closer analysis of food consumption among the Terab group in the period that preceded the above-described crisis. The analysis is based on data collected between 1 September 2013 and 28 February 2014. One of the households was able to finish the complete data collection on dietary food intake. As explained in the methodology, the other one could not manage to finish the complete six months of data collection because, unfortunately, the head of the household passed away in the middle of the data collection. Consequently, my comparative analysis of data from the Terab group is varied, based on a six-months period for one household and a two-months period for another. Thus, the specific dates for data collection used on daily food intake for the two sample households ranged from: (a) 1 September 2013 to 28 February 2014; (b) 1 September 2013 to 31 October 2013.

The first sample was a *menti's* household. *Menti* is a position within the Orang Rimba political structure that is mainly about dealing with the outside world. He is one of the Orang Rimba with a relatively high level of literacy. In addition, he was one of my key informants, and he played the role of my field assistant in the Terab group. Before choosing him, I previously worked closely with the *wakil tumenggung* or Deputy of Chief, currently as a new *tumenggung* after the previous *tumenggung* passed away. However, in the middle of my research, the *wakil tumenggung* and some other households moved to other locations away from the main compound of the Terab group. Even though he was still a key informant, he was excluded from the sample households for the record of the daily food intake. With respect to the political situation, *menti* represents one of the elites of the group who has a 'more stable' income. Meanwhile, the other household in the Terab group was a representative of the households with a limited source of income. The late head of my second household was an elderly or *rerayo* (the respected Orang Rimba elderly), without a political position in the group. However, as he was one of the elderlies, he knew a lot about the culture of the Orang Rimba.

### Overall food intake and meal composition

The Terab group represents the most mobile community of the Orang Rimba in terms of strict adherence to the traditional *melangun* way of life. The results of the data collection, which are based on records obtained during the periods of the dietary food intake survey, show the meals that were actually consumed by both households in relation to the number of potential meals (Table 18).

Because the sample size varies for both households due to special circumstances, the

total number of *potential* meals consumed by each of them differs. Whereas the first household managed to finish the intake record of the whole period with 540 *potential* meals, the second household only managed to finish the intake record over a period with 180 *potential* meals.

Potential meals consumed	Actual meals consumed				
	Frequency			Percentage	
	HH 1	HH 2	Total	HH 1	HH 2
Breakfast (n = 180 for HH1 and n = 60 for HH2)	132	46	178	73.3	76.7
Lunch (n = 180 for HH1 and n = 60 for HH2)	149	47	196	82.8	78.3
Dinner (n = 180 for HH1 and n = 60 for HH2)	180	60	240	100	100
Total (n = 540 for HH1 and n = 180 for HH2)	461	153	614	85.4	85.0

Table 18 shows that the *actual* number of meals consumed during the survey by the two households was 614. On average the households consumed more or less 85% of *potential* meals. Dinner is the most important meal for the Terab group. It was never skipped during the survey, while breakfast is the least important meal for both households with a frequency of less than 80% of all *potential* meals. With regards to the importance of lunch, the differences were not very big.

Table 19 shows the presence of the different food groups in the *actual* meals consumed. Carbohydrate was the food group most often consumed. On average, it was present in nearly 90% of the meals. The second most important food group was animal protein, which was present in nearly 64% of the meals. Fruits and vegetables were the two food groups that were least present in the meals consumed by the two households, with an average of less than 3%.

Type of food	Frequency			Percentage		
	HH 1 (n = 461)	HH 2 (n = 153)	Total	HH 1	HH 2	Average
Carbohydrate	407	138	545	88.3	90.2	89.3
Animal protein	312	91	403	67.7	59.5	63.6
Fruit	29	6	35	6.3	3.9	5.1
Vegetable	6	6	12	1.3	3.9	2.6

A detailed breakdown of the composition of breakfast, lunch and dinner show that the above trends are consistent throughout the day, with no major differences in the presence of specific food groups between meals (see Tables 40-42 in Appendix 2). Moreover, similar to the group discussed in the previous chapter, the two households in Terab show no

particular differences in terms of the composition of breakfast, lunch and dinner. However, there was one remarkable difference in the presence of vegetables during lunch. The first household had lunch without vegetables, while the second household consumed vegetables during about 10% of their lunch meals.

#### Composition and origin of carbohydrates

Based on the intake data, it is evident that the types of staple food for the Terab group include rice, cassava, taro, and wild tuber (and other starchy food). Rice is the most consumed carbohydrate by the two households. It is consumed in over 50% of all meals containing carbohydrate (n=545). Cassava is the second most important source of carbohydrate, with a percentage of more than 41%, followed by taro (7%). As the Terab group was mainly living outside the forested areas, the consumption of the wild tubers and other starchy food has become less important. This type of food contributes very little to the consumption of carbohydrate by the households.

**Table 21. Types of carbohydrate of all meals consumed by the two households, Terab (n = 545)**

Types of carbohydrate	Frequency	Percentage
Rice	276	50.6
Cassava	225	41.3
Taro	38	7.0
Wild tubers and other starchy food	6	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Based on my interviews, and while digging deeper into food preferences and choices by the various age groups of the members in households, it became clear that there is a difference between food that the younger generation consumes and that for adults and/or the elderly. Adults and the elderly showed a preference for traditional types of food as a means of fulfilling their carbohydrate needs, that is, tubers instead of rice. For them, the satisfaction after eating rice lasts for a shorter period of time before they feel hungry again. In contrast, after eating tubers, the satisfaction they get lasts from morning until the evening. That saves them the trouble of having to eat three times a day. The younger generation, on the other hand, shows a preference for rice over cassava and other types of carbohydrate. More specifically, since the younger generation can avail of a cash income more often than the older generation, they can also afford to buy rice instead of having to search for tubers themselves.

With regards to carbohydrate sources, the results of the survey show that buying is the most important way to obtain carbohydrate, followed by harvesting from the garden (see Table 21 below). Nearly 55% of the carbohydrate consumed comes from the market, and more than 41% of carbohydrate is the result of their garden. Only about 2% of the total carbohydrate consumed is sourced from the forest, while only just over 1% is obtained from others. This demonstrates the Terab group's dependency on the market in general and on rice in particular.

Figure 46.  
Kids in Terab catching a  
frog for dinner



Table 22. Origin of carbohydrate of meals consumed by the two households, Terab (n = 545)

Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Buying	299	54.9
Collecting from the forest	13	2.4
Harvesting from the garden	225	41.3
Given	7	1.3
Unknown	1	0.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>545</b>	<b>100.0</b>

#### Composition and origin of animal protein

The variation in the sources of animal protein among the Terab group is quite large, and ranges from fish to primates (Table 22). Lizard was the most consumed animal during the period of data collection, followed by wild pig, fish, squirrel, snake, hedgehog and a

number of other wild animals. The options of the Terab group that were available given their location, relatively far from the forest and closer to the plantations (oil palm and rubber), were limited. A special case here is the wild pig, as this wild animal survives remarkably well in the plantation areas by eating the fallen palm fruits as their main intake. This is the main reason that the Terab group still has an abundant supply of wild pig.

Similar to other groups and as it is commonly practiced by the Orang Rimba in general, the Terab group hunts wild pigs using the locally made shotgun called *kecepek*. The *kecepek* happens to be the most common tool to hunt the wild pig because it is the easiest and fastest to kill the animals. Moreover, specifically for the Terab group, the *kecepek* is the most important hunting tool since their mobility is around the plantation area with limited exploration in the forested areas. In addition, sometimes the children hunt birds using a *ketapel* or slingshot, and rats using a simple trap that they buy in the market. While for frogs, the children catch them using their bare hands.

The Terab group also sell off wild game, such as deer, which has a high commercial value, and they keep other game animals that do not have such a high value for their own consumption. This means that in terms of self-sufficiency, people prefer to eat whatever they find in their vicinity, while animals with a high commercial value can be sold in order to obtain cash. For example, the price for a small deer (without head, legs, and innards) was around IDR 500,000. They usually sell the wild game to the employees of the plantation company or the nearest neighbor in the transmigration village. In some cases, they also got a pre-order from the plantation staff to find some specific wild game, mostly deer or mousedeer for consumption.

**Table 23. Types of animal protein of all meals consumed by the two households, Terab (n = 403)**

Types of animal protein	Frequency	Percentage
Fish	46	11.4
Wild pig	56	13.9
Freshwater turtle	18	4.5
Hedgehog	33	8.2
Snake	44	10.9
Combination of above	1	0.2
Deer	0	0.0
Bird	16	4.0
Frog	26	6.5
Lizard	67	16.6
Squirrel	45	11.2
Rat	21	5.2
Primate	24	6.0
Unknown	6	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The Terab group considers some animals as sacred or *bedewo*, to borrow the local term. *Bedewo* is not about forbidding people from eating specific animals per se, but rather relates to the time when consumption of particular sacred animals is allowed<sup>61</sup>. For example, adult men and the elderly can eat certain kinds of animals that are restricted for children, unmarried girls, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers. The Terab group believes that eating taboo animals leads to serious health consequences, including:

- Children suffer from stunted growth or stay small and thin;
- Unmarried girls can fall sick all the time and can even die from illnesses;
- Pregnant women can give birth to babies with disabilities or the babies can die soon after they are born; and
- Children of breastfeeding mothers can suffer from continuous sickness, suffer from stunted growth, and may even die at a very young age.

The Terab group fulfills its needs for animal protein mainly by eating wild animals that they get by hunting and through sharing or exchange, and to a smaller extent by fishing and buying. Hunting and sharing are still important social values for the group. Typically, the Terab group hunts on an individual basis as well as in small groups. The proceeds from communal hunting trips are shared collectively. However, catches by single households are also shared with others, including members of other groups, depending on the quantity.

Origin	Frequency	Percentage
Hunting	231	57.3
Fishing	28	6.9
Given	129	32.0
Buying	12	3.0
Others	1	0.2
Unknown	2	0.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### 4.3 Conclusion

The daily diet of the Terab group, just like that of other groups of Orang Rimba, contains much more carbohydrate and animal protein than vegetables and fruits. Less than 10% of the consumed meals contain vegetables and fruits. Rice and cassava are the two most important sources of carbohydrate, followed by taro and other wild and starchy food. The sources of animal protein vary, with the majority coming from lizard, wild pig, squirrel, fish, and snake. Having said that, the combination of hunting and buying is the common source of food intake for the group.

I have argued elsewhere (Wardani 2007, 2011) that the Orang Rimba have experienced adverse effects from the growing influence of the interaction with other ethnic groups

<sup>61</sup> See Sandbukt (1984) for further reading on the Orang Rimba's conception of reality.

on their food habits, one of which is reflected in the increasing importance of foodstuffs obtained from shops or the market. Nonetheless, the household records show that the amount of food obtained through buying is limited to the carbohydrates, which they cannot produce themselves. Even those among the Terab group who live in relatively remote areas and practice traditional ways of living such as hunting and gathering for their food supply, cannot separate themselves from the money system and purchase food products they believe are important for their household. However, they also still rely on products obtained from the environment by hunting, fishing and collecting, which continues to be the main source of animal protein. In times of (income) crisis, the Terab group relies on relatives, on neighbors or on fellow Orang Rimba of other groups.

Based on my observations, during *remayo* (and *melangun*) periods, the Terab group members eat more carbohydrates than protein, which undermines their health. In this season, households face scanty supplies of all foodstuffs, ranging from the products they gather from forests, the animals they hunt, and the rice they buy from shops or the village markets. Heavy reliance on nature for sustenance, by hunting wild life, gathering forest produces, and undertaking modern labor in the plantations, means the Terab group are at the mercy of nature's forces in general, and seasonal variations in particular. This underlies the group's high vulnerability to food insecurity, which became painfully evident when 14 members of the Terab group lost their lives in 2015.

Vulnerability to food insecurity (food shortage) is attributable, among other factors, to the fact that the Terab group lives outside the national park and, because of that, it faces problems in their efforts to fulfill their needs for food and drinking water, which is often polluted by the use of chemicals in plantations. These factors contribute to the impact for the Terab group and their exposure to malnutrition, hunger, and various diseases. In addition, such conditions resulted from their move into sedentary livelihood as practiced by the mainstream population, without ample knowledge on good cultivation methods or sufficient information on engaging in trade on fair terms with other communities. In any case, they are still not entirely accepted as equal members of the communities in which they live, which has oftentimes generated tensions between them and mainstream society. Additionally, income-generating activities such as growing cash crops, picking oil palm fruits in companies' territory, and selling labor, are not enough to offset the loss they suffer by being confined in designated zones rather than leading a life of gathering forest products from vast expanses of forests, which are no longer available to them. In any case, efforts to reduce vulnerability made by external forces seem to be aimed at uprooting the Terab group from their cherished traditions they have long held, and a livelihood they have known and practiced for ages.