

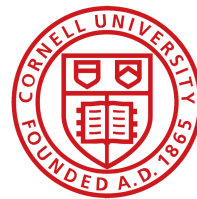
Human-Nature Interactions in East Kalimantan: A Literature Review

Kate Rodger

Supervised by Dr. Wendy Erb and Dr. Walker DePuy

Cornell University

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I. Abstract

The Indonesian government's capital city relocation project, in which the new city of Nusantara is being built in East Kalimantan, Borneo, comes as a response to a number of social and ecological problems plaguing its current capital of Jakarta. Pitched as a green "forest city," the national government has described high hopes for Nusantara's future (Saputra 2022). However, many concerns exist over the potential for environmental degradation and harm to the human and animal communities of East Kalimantan.

This report and review of literature seeks to provide an overview of the history of interactions between human communities and the natural environment in East Kalimantan, with a specific focus on the area where Nusantara will eventually be constructed. This area will be referred to as the "IKN" area, short for Ibu Kota Negara (National Capital City). This paper will examine existing literature on East Kalimantan's indigenous communities and their livelihoods, current and past land rights and laws, as well as their relationships with bioculturally important species. Ultimately, this literature review hopes to offer a background on the connection between people and the environment in order to increase awareness of the unique socio-ecological history of this region as it undergoes a huge transformation.

II. Literature Review

A. Ethnic Groups of East Kalimantan

East Kalimantan is home to many ethnic groups, accounts of which vary widely across different sources and time periods. The term “Dayak” is used broadly to refer to a number of ethnic and cultural groups indigenous to Borneo. While distinctions are further made within the Dayak label, Oesterheld (2016) cautions that the idea of stable and non-overlapping ethnic identities is in some ways a product of colonial rule in Borneo. In reality, many Dayak identities are “diverse and fluid” (Oesterheld 2016: 139). Historically, many groups across Borneo have led nomadic lifestyles and may not have been contained to one specific area. This means that the concepts of indigeneity and Dayak identity, while potentially useful in some contexts, should not be understood as firmly fixed categories and are often oversimplified when it comes to describing the people living in the IKN area.

Despite the difficulty of fully capturing these shifting identities, several authors have described the landscape of different Dayak groups in East Kalimantan. Wijaya and colleagues (2020) wrote that the earliest indigenous groups living in the IKN area today are the Paser, Kutai, and Dayak Basap people. In particular, the core IKN area overlaps heavily with areas where Paser communities live today and have traditionally lived. Sellato (2012), in a review of cultural artistic practices, writes that the Paser make up a large portion of the area near the city of Balikpapan. While most of the Paser today “have long been Muslim,” some may continue to “perform various traditional rituals” and blend folk religions with Islam (Sellato 2012: 313). Further research into the specific rituals which are still performed would provide valuable insight into the ways of life among Paser communities.

Sellato identifies the “Paser Balik” as a subgroup of the Paser people. However, several accounts from the Balik people suggest that many do not consider themselves to be Paser. Saputra (2022) disputes the idea of “Paser Balik” and writes that the Paser and Balik people are two separate groups, but further literature on the distinction between these two groups is sparse and suggests that more research is needed on the historical and contemporary connection between the Paser and Balik groups.

It is important to note that accounts of indigenous people living in the IKN area are complicated not only by the nomadic history and changing labels of many Dayak groups in the region, but also biased references. In particular, many of the earliest available primary sources on the indigenous groups of East Kalimantan rely on outdated race pseudoscience. One analysis from a European scholar in the early 20th century used “skull-index” to determine which Dayak groups could be categorized as “primitive” (Skeat 1906: 73; 54). Another naturalist described the “inherent savagery of the Dyak” in a journal entry (Powell 1922: 121). In addition, the authors frequently equivocate many distinct cultures by naming them all as simply “Dayak” rather than identifying whether they are Paser, Balik, or another ethnic group.

Many terms like Paser, Balik, and even Dayak can be difficult to find in the literature and may refer to different ideas than they do today. The paucity of published information about these groups also makes it more difficult to get a clear sense of which groups have lived where and for how long. Interviews and oral histories might be able to fill in some of these gaps where research has not sufficiently characterized the history of each group in the area.

In addition to Borneo's native communities, the IKN area is also home to many migrant communities from neighboring islands. A large portion of these communities were part of a national program in the 1960s and 70s known as "transmigration," defined by Saputra (2022: 2) as "the transfer of population in Indonesia from the central islands of Java, Madura, Bali, and Lombok to the outer islands under government sponsorship." Transmigration was encouraged with the hope that it would relieve some of Java's high-population pressures and allow Indonesia to take more advantage of East Kalimantan's rich resources (Saputra 2022).

While many transmigrants and other in-migrants have lived in the IKN area for decades, several sources of tension exist between the transmigrant communities and Paser people. The groups have their own distinct languages, cultures, and histories, and Oosterheld (2016) notes that people frequently align with their ethnic groups or "suku" to make political decisions. It is difficult for both the Paser and migrant communities to part with their historical division, stemming in part from the national government's attempts to "Javanize" indigenous civilians and convert them to Islam (Appell 1985).

B. Land Rights

An analysis of Indonesian land governance conducted by Srinivas and colleagues (2015) described the history of land law as troubled by the lasting legacy of Dutch colonial rule. Because of all the competing laws dating back decades, most sources agree that access to land and legal rights to land are often contradictory and difficult to navigate for citizens. Part of the problem, according to Kusumanto (2007), is that about 70-80% of Indonesia's land is considered state forest and can be claimed by the government for logging. This

leaves many families and individuals in an unstable position as their claim to the land they have lived on for generations goes legally unrecognized.

In the IKN area, this landscape is particularly fraught for indigenous residents, who feel that they have a legitimate claim to the land through inheritance and as the first group to arrive in the area (Saputra 2022; Bakker 2010). Throughout most of East Kalimantan's history, local communities have determined land access using *adat* (customary) law, rather than state written law. Bakker (2010) notes that even during the Dutch colonial era, *adat* land law was respected and coexisted with a western land tenure system. Today, much of the land in the IKN area is either legally classified as state forest or titled to transmigrants.

While some laws in East Kalimantan indicate that *adat* claims to the land are legitimate, these claims are only recognized in the absence of other legal claims such as those by transmigrants or the federal government (Bakker 2010). In practice, very few indigenous residents feel that their *adat* claims to land are honored due to the overlapping legal claims from other groups (Bakker 2010). This is especially problematic for their sense of land tenure security, defined as "the certainty that a person's rights to land are recognized and protected in the face of specific challenges" (Srinivas et al. 2015: 3). Land tenure security is identified as highly important for managing poverty and food insecurity among indigenous and poor families living in the IKN area, many of whom rely on making a living from the land.

C. Traditional Livelihoods

Traditionally, many of the indigenous communities living in East Kalimantan have practiced land-based livelihoods. Subsistence farming and fishing are both identified by

various sources as important traditional livelihoods, although there is much more literature to describe farming practices. Nonetheless, one early account describes fishing techniques in which whole villages of “Dyak” gather at a stream to asphyxiate fish using a poison found in the tuba root (Powell 1922: 113). The villagers would mash up the plant, spreading it into a stream, until the fish were stupefied and the villagers could easily spear them to bring back and eat.

Alongside fishing, farming was a primary source of food for many indigenous communities. Historically, a big part of farming practices in the region has been the practice of swidden: a restorative practice of shifting agriculture. Over the course of a year, farmers first fell trees, then burn forests, and then replant crops to be harvested (MacKinnon 1997). The practice of swidden agriculture has a long history across many communities indigenous to Borneo. Gönner (2017) points out that swiddens have been not only a source of livelihood, but also central to ritual and social life.

However, in the last few decades a shift away from swidden agriculture has taken place. Misunderstandings of swidden farming have led to laws criminalizing the practice by claiming it will contribute to deforestation and environmental degradation (Appell-Warren 1985). Furthermore, Kusumanto (2007) writes that the large-scale logging in East Kalimantan’s forests during the late 20th century contributed to a loss of land for traditional swidden farming. Today, logging and timber companies hold great influence in East Kalimantan, contributing hugely to deforestation. This creates further barriers for local community members trying to earn a traditional living, who report that monkeys and other wild animals now raid their gardens for food because “the forest is gone” (Focus Group 1). Kusumanto (2007) and Gönner (2017) both note additionally that members of

local communities, especially younger ones, may be pulled away from swidden agriculture and drawn in by the shiny modern life – including economic opportunities and migration to bigger cities – that logging companies promise.

Agriculture is still a hugely important sector in East Kalimantan's economy today. Wijaya and colleagues (2020) as well as Saputra (2022) identify agriculture as the primary field of employment for individuals living in the IKN area. Kusumanto (2007) estimates that at least 65 million rural people rely on the forest as income across Indonesia. In particular, indigenous populations in Kalimantan are “still very dependent on the use of ... forest products,” and worry that as Nusantara is constructed, their ability to earn a living from the land will become much more difficult (Wijaya et al. 2020).

D. Biocultural Heritage

While the connection between people and the land is greatly important to understanding the history of East Kalimantan, another huge factor is humans' interactions with other life in the region. An examination of literature on ethnobiology in the IKN area reveals many passing references to the importance of omen animals to indigenous communities in Borneo. For instance, MacKinnon (1997) notes that several species hold ritual importance to the “Dayak” and are seen as good and bad omens for the future. However, the vagueness of the term Dayak as outlined earlier means that this can be difficult to reconcile with the specific beliefs of the Paser and Balik people.

Orangutans, gibbons, banded kingfishers, and barking deer are identified as important omens to the “Dayak” by both MacKinnon (1997) and Sercombe and Sellato (2007). In particular, Sercombe and Sellato note that yellow barking deer were seen as

“message bearers from spirits or ghosts,” and MacKinnon wrote that the bark of a deer was seen as a “significant omen... which may even lead to the separation of a newly married couple” (Sercombe & Sellato 2007: 183; MacKinnon 1997: 386). An early account from 1922 also noted that the killing of crocodiles in Kalimantan was perceived as taboo for “superstitious reasons,” potentially meaning they were an important omen animal (Powell 1922). MacKinnon also writes that silence from gibbons is perceived as a bad omen to several communities of Southwest Borneo.

There is little to no information available in the literature on the specific relevance of omen animals to the Paser and Balik people. Targeted searches of the literature across several databases yielded very limited information on these omen animals in Borneo at all. Boolean searches using key terms related to the Paser and Balik communities (see Appendix 1) often returned empty or irrelevant results. This is an area which would greatly benefit from further archival research and additional literature published.

III. Methods

A. Search Terms

The following relevant terms were used to conduct searches across multiple databases:

Indigenous groups

(Paser / Pasir / Passir); Balik; (Kutai /Koetei); (Basap / Bassap); Benuaq; Dayak

Key locations

Borneo; (Kalimantan / East Kalimantan / Kalimantan Timur); Samarinda - *city in East Kalimantan*; Balikpapan / Balik Papan - *city in East Kalimantan*; Mahakam / Mahakkam - *local river*; Pemaaluan / Pamaluan - *local village in IKN area*; Mentawir - *local village in IKN area*; Sepaku - *district encompassing IKN area*; Wein - *protected forest on IKN border*

Organizations

ITCI / International Timber Corp - *International Timber Corporation Indonesia*;

Weyerhaeuser - timber megacorporation

Inhutani - logging company *

B. Databases

Targeted searches for the above terms were made across multiple databases, journals, and online sources:

- Google Scholar and Scopus
- Borneo Research Bulletin
- Leiden University

- Cornell University Library, with a focus on the *Southeast Asia Visions* collection
- Bibliography of Asian Studies
- Biodiversity Heritage Library
- Focus group discussions conducted with villagers in Mentawir and Pemaluan by Dr. Walker DePuy and Dr. Wendy Erb

C. Omen & Augury Search Terms

Animal Key Terms	Indigenous Key Terms
Augury	Dayak / Dyak
Omen	Paser / Pasir / Pasir
Orangutan	Balik
Gibbon	
(Rhinoceros) hornbill	
Crocodile	
Barking deer / Sambar deer	
Macaque	
(Banded) kingfisher	

IV. Findings & Discussion

The historical and contemporary role of human communities within East Kalimantan's ecology and the area's environmental history as a whole is crucial for new visitors and residents of Nusantara to understand. Existing literature supports the idea that local communities view access to their land as deeply significant, and that the landscape and creatures of East Kalimantan are imbued with deep cultural and historical relevance to them. However, further formal research into the Paser and Balik communities' history as well as their connection to the land would be helpful to support these claims. As the new capital city is constructed, it will be more important than ever to honor the unique history of interactions between the people, animals, and land of this region.

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Focus Group Discussions. Pemaluan and Mentawir villagers.