

Seeing the *utan*¹ from the *orang*:

**A decolonial Indigenous approach to orang utan
conservation in Sarawak.**



June Mary Rubis

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Environmental Change Institute, School of Geography and Environment
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¹ Orang utan means person of the forest in Malay; hence the modified saying, “Seeing the forest from the person”.

Abstract

This thesis takes an Indigenous decolonial turn for a rich, empirical analysis of the seemingly paradoxes of human-environment or human-animal relationships within the multi-scalar forces of conservation. Indigenous relations *is* more-than-human relations and further, necessitates fresh inquiry into specific politics and strategies of concealment that rural Indigenous communities may employ in response to conservation actions. This thesis seeks to understand the multiple Indigenous strategies to maintain relations with lands and orang utans through an interdisciplinary approach of decolonial and political ecology frameworks, including decolonizing ethnographic methods. In considering human-orang utan relations in ecological time and subtle Indigenous responses to conservation forces and action in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, I build on Indigenous decolonial and political ecology frameworks, including Vizenor's (2008, 1999) Indigenous survivance and Simpson's (2007, 2014) politics of refusal. I demonstrate the multiple ways human-orang utan relations are realized within the power relations of conservation work. These findings provide a theoretical and decolonial grounding of understanding the different ways of Indigenous Iban presencing, and provide a way forward in developing a decolonial political ecology of orang utan conservation.

Keywords: decolonial; orang utan; political ecology; conservation; Indigenous; Ibans; Sarawak; survivance

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviations and Acronyms	Full form
AAS	Association for Asian Studies
ASEAN	The Association for Southeast Asian Nations
CBD	Convention of Biological Diversity
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
FPIC	Free Prior Informed Consent
GPS	Global Positioning System
MSPO	Malaysian
NAL	Native Area Land
NCL	Native Customary Lands
NCR	Native Customary Rights
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
PFE	Permanent Forest Estate
RSPO	Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil
SAVE Rivers	Save Sarawak Rivers Network
SCORE	Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy
SFC	Sarawak Forestry Corporation
SLC	Sarawak Land Code
SUHAKAM	Suruhanjaya Hak Asasi Manusia Malaysia or Human Rights Commission of Malaysia
TCOs	Transnational Conservation Organisations
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
TPA	Totally Protected Areas
UNPFII	United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
USFW	United States Fish & Wildlife
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WGIP	Working Group on Indigenous Populations (1982)
WWF	World Wide Fund

Glossary of Bidayuh, Iban and Malay terms and phrases

Malay/Iban/Bidayuh terms and phrases	English translation
Adat (Malay/Iban/Bidayuh)	Cultural values, norms, customs, institutions, and customary laws commonly practised by many Indigenous and local communities in Southeast Asia
Ako lelah (Iban)	“I’m tired”
Anang guai (Iban)	“Slow down”
Baruk (Bidayuh)	Bidayuh ceremonial hut, rounded in structure
Bisik medak sarang maias (Iban)	Can you see a orang utan nest
Bumiputera (Malay)	Prince(ess) of the Lands/ Child of the Lands; a political construct in Malaysia to mostly assert Malay rights
Dayak	Colonial term to describe native peoples of Borneo; traditionally to only to refer to Ibans (‘Sea Dayaks’) and Bidayuhs (‘Land Dayaks’)
Gambier (colloquial)	Tropical Asian shrub (<i>Uncaria gambir</i>)
Jambu (colloquial)	Rose apple (<i>Syzygium samarangense</i> or <i>Eugenia javanica</i>); other common names include wax apple, java apple, samarang rose apple and jumrool.
Jangan ingat sendiri saja (Malay)	“Don’t just think about yourself”
Kampung (Malay/Iban)	Village/community, can be rural or urban
Kampung Besai (Iban)	Big village, referring to older primary forests
Kasam (Bidayuh/Iban)	Fermented dish, pork or fish, a favourite dish for Bidayuhs especially
Kasihannya kerana semua sudah habis di sana	“Pity those whose land and resources have depleted”
Kooperasi serbaguna Ulu Batang Ai (Iban/Malay)	Ulu Batang Ai village cooperative
Mungut (Iban)	Special rattan basket
Nabau (Iban)	Water serpent
Orang Asal (Malay)	Indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak (Malaysian Borneo)
Orang Asli (Malay)	Aborigines of Peninsular Malaysia
Orang solar (Iban)	Solar men
Orang utan (Malay)	Person of the forest
Padi (Iban/Malay/Bidayuh)	Rice
Pantang (Iban/Malay)	Taboo
Parang (Iban/Malay/Bidayuh)	Machete
Pasu (Iban)	Jar
Pemakai menoa	Traditional territorial domains of a community
Malay/Iban/Bidayuh terms and phrases	English translation
Pembangunan (Malay)	Development
Pulau (Iban)	Island/forest groves (in the Iban context, a conservation ‘island’ rather than the Malay

	context, which refers to an island in the ocean)
Pulau galau (Iban)	Communal forest reserve of primary forest
Pupu tahun (Iban/Malay)	Yearly taxes
Pusaka (Iban/Malay)	Heritage
RM	Ringgit Malaysia (Malaysian ringgit)
Ruai (Iban)	Communal corridor, part of the longhouse
Sungai (Iban/Malay)	River
Tempoyak (Bidayuh/Iban)	Preserved durian
Temuda (Iban)	Cultivated farm lands
Tertinggal (Malay)	Left behind
Tusun tunggu (Iban)	Codified Customary Laws
Tusut (Iban)	Compiled genealogies
Umai (Bidayuh)	Fresh local vegetables
Umai (Iban)	Fallows

Statement of authorship

I confirm that the thesis I am submitting is primarily my own work. For Chapter 6/published paper 2, I co-wrote the paper with my co-author, Dr. Noah Theriault. I conceived the idea of the paper and did the simple majority of the work. Dr. Theriault confirms this with a pdf letter provided in Appendix 3.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Rubis', is centered on a white rectangular background.

June Mary Rubis,

September 2019

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Mostly, I am grateful to my parents, Teresita Rubis and Dr. Patau Rubis, for without them, I wouldn't be here. This is for them.

Memoria In Aeterna

For my parents:

Teresita Rubis (1943-2018)
Dr Patau Rubis (1946-2016)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This section introduces the context, aims and objectives of this thesis, setting up the relevance and applicability to the research questions and case study selected.

This thesis articulates a decolonial understanding of political ecology in which Indigenous Iban² communities enact, articulate and mobilise strategies in different ways to navigate their day-to-day lives in native customary domains that are also orang utan conservation landscapes in Sarawak. In understanding these strategies, I reflect on the framing around the current discourse regarding orang utan conservation in Sarawak, how the framing works and how Indigenous peoples may resist the framing in diverse ways. The way these areas of debate are interpreted affects policy and conservation intervention relating to the management and conservation of orang utans and its habitat. In particular, I demonstrate the continuance of human-orang utan relations by Indigenous Iban communities through subtle resistance or refusal, contra-remembering and other methods, and suggest other pluralities that contribute to conservation, over prevailing dominant narratives that mostly assume a linear pathway to conserve forest and more-than-human species.

² Iban is a term used locally and regionally to describe the largest native group in Sarawak that along with Malays, the Orang Asli ('Aborigine' as referred to in Article 160(2) of the Malaysian Federal Constitution) of Peninsular Malaysia, and natives of Sabah and Sarawak, are unambiguously accorded special privileges and protection under Articles 153 and 161A of the Malaysian Federal Constitution. In Chapter 3, I elaborate more on the Iban customary territories and discuss the 'Indigeneity vs the Local' in the Sarawak context. During colonial times, the Ibans were called 'Sea Dayaks'. Today, the term 'Dayak' is also used to denote native groups in Sarawak, and in Indonesian Kalimantan. When I use the term, I am describing both Bidayuh and Iban peoples in Sarawak, and who have community and historical links to the region.

Here, I take an Indigenous decolonial turn³ for a rich, empirical analysis of the seemingly paradoxes of human-environment or human-animal relationships within the multi-scalar (Tsing, 2011) forces of conservation. In considering human-orang utan relations in ecological time⁴ and subtle Indigenous responses to conservation forces and action, I build on Indigenous decolonial and political ecology frameworks, including Vizenor's (2008, 1999) Indigenous survivance and Simpson's (2007, 2014) politics of refusal. Indigenous survivance refers to an active sense of presence over historical absence, deracination and oblivion (Vizenor, 2008). Beyond the recurrent thematic motif of silencings, domination, absences and narrations of tragedy, survivance stories also speak of the continuance and thriving of Indigenous presence(s) over and against powerful forces of assimilation and dispossession. Survivance – or what Povinelli (2011) calls 'endurance' – depends not just on positive acts of presencing but also on negative ones. I draw inspiration from Simpson's work on acts of concealment and refusal as legitimate decolonial responses to colonial processes (Simpson, 2007). And I follow Cepek (2011, 2016) in recognizing that outward acts of consensus and cooperation can conceal the persistence of critical consciousness and internal debate. These frameworks are important to my work as I seek to understand the multiple ways human-orang utan relations are realized within the power relations of conservation work. They provide a theoretical and decolonial grounding of understanding the different ways of Indigenous Iban presencing.

³Coined phrase as inspired by Puerto Rican Fanonian philosopher, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, who first introduced the concept of "decolonial turn" (Maldonado-Torres, 2006).

⁴ I refer to ecological time as a time scale that we can directly observe, as opposed to many Indigenous concepts of time that include a non-linear time scale. I acknowledge the biological thinking around how changing environments (which includes changing organisms and their relationships to one another) directly influence evolution.

Through empirical research and grounded arguments, this thesis makes contributions to developing a decolonial political ecology of orang utan conservation. In the following sections, I describe the conceptual framework for this thesis, and set up the relevance and applicability to the research questions and case/kin study selected.

1.1 The Kin Study on human-orang utan relations.

The outset for this research began in late 2000, when I, armed with my Bachelors of Science degree in biological sciences from Simon Fraser University, Canada, began working for an international conservation NGO (non-governmental organisation) in Sarawak as a conservation fieldworker. Based in the Sarawak state forestry department, I was immediately launched into intense fieldwork around Malaysia, from camera-trapping wild tigers and leopard cats in Krau, West Malaysia, while leading a team of Orang Asli (Indigenous to the peninsular Malaysia) men who knew the jungles more intimately than I, to conducting a year's fieldwork of diurnal primate surveys in Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary, Sarawak. My childhood dream however was to follow wild orang utans. Only several years later, I was given the opportunity to realize this dream in the Batang Ai-Lanjak Entimau protected area complex in Sarawak despite the many challenges as the first long-term Bidayuh-Dayak female fieldworker. In addition to my day job as a conservation biologist, I was also volunteering full-time in the local nature society, Malaysian Nature Society Kuching branch. This experience meant I had an opportunity to work closely with state forestry actors and other NGOs and thus gained a richer understanding of socio-environmental issues beyond my fieldwork.

It was through these interactions, particularly with Indigenous land rights activists around Borneo, and my own subsequent work as an activist in a major

anti-mega dam campaign in Sarawak, that I began to question my own assumptions of local and Indigenous communities, how we, as conservation NGOs, were working with them, and my own responsibility to my rural Bidayuh kin, as an urban Bidayuh-Filipino woman with 'global connections'. I never imagined that over a decade later, I would return to school and pursue a PhD study that would begin to answer all the nagging questions I had, working as a conservationist in Sarawak.

Importantly, whilst returning to my formal field-site, I wanted to *not return* to the same methodologies that entrenched dominant ideas of nature and ecology. Here, I present a thesis that attempts to decolonize the different ways we conduct research. For example, Métis/otipemisiw scholar, Zoe Todd (2017) calls for a new type of citation politics for studying on-going ecological devastation and the ubiquitous use of 'case study' to make dramatic points. Citing inspiration from various Indigenous and non-Indigenous decolonial scholars including from the work of the Bawaka collective (Country et al., 2016; Suchet-Pearson, Wright, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Country, 2013; Wright et al., 2012), Todd (2017) suggests that we consider a 'kin study' in place of the 'case study' to be cognizant of all the relations that lands/waters/atmospheres co-constitute with humans. Speaking with Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe cosmologies, Vanessa Watts (2013:23) argues that

“habitats and ecosystems are better understood as societies from an Indigenous point of view; meaning that they have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements, and further their ability to interpret, understand and implement. Non-human beings are active members of society. Not only are they active, they also directly influence how humans organize themselves into that society. The very existence of clan systems evidences these many historical agreements between humans and non-humans. Clan systems vary from community to community and are largely dependent on the surrounding landscape...”

Watts' (2013) *Indigenous-Place-Thought* asks us to consider what it means to sever land from thought when we mobilize specific landscapes, watersheds and atmospheres to make dramatic academic points (Todd, 2019). Todd (2019: 2) thus suggests the kin study as to engage more thoughtfully and reciprocally with the lands/waters/atmospheres and other co-constituents. It is with this provocation and also, following the work of Bawaka Country (2016) and decolonial and Indigenous scholars, that I also take inspiration to move away from the classical case study to consider the kin study, where using ethnographic methods, I think with the lands, the remembering, as well as with more-than-humans and human interlocutors.

In some ways, this research also presents an intimate engagement with my own struggles and political and social interests. With this in mind, I attempt to make my positionality as an Indigenous researcher and scholar as transparent as possible, through my methodology and further analysis. My positionality in my research is particularly expounded in Chapter 3 that also provides the theoretical grounding, and two empirical papers (Chapter 4 & 5).

1.2 Material Imaginary of Land and Conservation

This kin study, through its mostly ethnographic description approach, takes upon the importance of local contextual analysis, and the ironies and complexities of real aspirations and experiences into conservation policy debates. For example, in Batang Ai national park, where I've spent many years as a fieldworker since the mid-2000s, many communities accept access restrictions to protected areas that were once their native customary lands that they used to freely hunt and fish, in order to conserve these places and/or species (Figure 1). Others, while realizing the depleting natural resources in their area, continue to engage in seemingly

unsustainable harvesting practices. This study ultimately aims to contribute an original, detailed empirical case study of the understanding, governance and reciprocal relationships of contemporary Ibans with orang utans in changing landscapes. I also plan to contribute to the broader theories of political ecology and decolonial scholarship.



Figure 1: Fishing is a daily activity in Batang Ai, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo.

I start by laying out the material history of land and conservation management in and around Batang Ai as I had learned it through professional work, archives and literature review. I would not pose this as the ‘real history of events’, set in contrast with ‘stories and memories of individuals’. Rather, I see it as a *material imaginary*⁵ that has had real and powerful political outcomes for the lives of people in Sarawak. I established three main framings that are often emphasized in ecological and social science studies about Sarawak: 1) weak governance (loss of

⁵ I am inspired by Povinelli’s (2011) *Economies of Abandonment*, where she describes the late liberal power relies on a specific imaginary of the tense of the other, that is the social imaginary that divides human geography and time.

Indigenous land tenure; overlapping land claims, contradictory federal and state policies, conflicting land use pressures); 2) ecological degradation (edge fragmentation, hunting and fishing pressures on local wildlife species); and 3) clashing aspirations for land development and management (restrictive rural livelihood options; short-term vision of development; unquestioned social and political structures embedded in the notion of development).

Several studies based in Borneo particularly point out how native customary rights are continually contested and rural communities are depicted as threats to biodiversity (Cleary, 2008; Colchester, 1993; Cooke, 2006b; Eghenter & Labo, Martin, 2003; Eghenter, Sellato, Devung, & Center for International Forestry Research, 2003; Peluso, 1992). These studies, based on the framework that secure tenure and the ability to exclude other beneficiaries, is fundamental in upholding sustainable management of resources (Ostrom, 1999, pp. 1–10). Scott's (2000, 2009) work on resistance also influenced how we understand local and Indigenous peoples' actions towards state policies, including conservation policies (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2006).

From an environmental perspective, many rural studies in Sarawak focus mainly on ethnobotany, land-use patterns (e.g. shifting cultivation, small-scale oil palm plantations) and the relationship between contentious land tenure and agrarian transition (e.g. Cooke, 2006a; Cramb, 2007; Cramb & Wills, 1990) but not so much on the complexity of strategies in engaging with multi-stakeholders to conserve customary forest territories (however, see Egay (2007)). Human-orang utan relations and corresponding strategies against contemporary pressures for conservation, from a decolonial perspective, has not yet been closely studied.

The majority of Indigenous peoples of Sarawak currently live in rural and peri-urban areas. Many who have migrated to urban centres of Sarawak either for

economic opportunities or for other reasons (e.g. forced displacement due to building of dams, including where this study takes place on), may become disengaged from their rural kin, however many others have taken upon their perceived urban elite positioning and 'exposure' to other sets of ideas, to identify common interests with their rural relatives and create new social groups for mutual beneficial outcomes, particularly in relation to land tenure. For the urban elite, the reasons to get involved may range from securing their own usufruct rights over native territories, to a moral desire to assist their communities and uphold their native life ways, or varying combinations of either. For the rural communities, allying with urban elites (whether related or otherwise) may be one of the multi-fold tactics to strengthen their positions.

Much of the literature on Indigenous rural peoples of Sarawak tend to highlight their marginalized and impoverished positions due to post-colonial systemic policy and development actions (eg. Brosius, 1997, 1999b, 1999a, 2001; Colchester, 1993; Yong et. al., 2014). While this remains a fact that Indigenous rural communities in Malaysia overall are historically marginalised and have lost much of their ancestral lands to growing urbanization and large agricultural or industrial expansion in the post-colonial period, this study nevertheless seeks to understand the multiple strategies that Indigenous rural Iban communities employ to maintain relations with native lands and orang utans.

In understanding these multiple strategies within the combination of Indigenous decolonial and political ecology frameworks, this study demonstrates the continuance of human-orang utan relations through heterogeneous and plurivocal ways, and uncover new possible pathways that contribute to conservation, over prevailing dominant narratives by policy-makers and conservation NGOs that mostly assume a linear pathway to conserve forests and

species (e.g. 'fortress conservation' where communities are displaced and hold no dominant managerial role over the conservation area).

1.3 Study aim and research questions

The overarching aim of this thesis is to provide a nuanced decolonial understanding of how Indigenous Iban communities enact, articulate and mobilise strategies in different ways to navigate their day-to-day lives in native customary domains that are also orang utan conservation landscapes in Sarawak, and how these modes of thought and action may contribute to particular mainstream conservation narratives, politics and power relations, from a political ecology perspective.

Specifically, I reflect on the framing around the current discourse regarding orang utan conservation in Sarawak, how the framing works and how Indigenous peoples may resist the framing in diverse ways. The way these areas of debate are interpreted affects policy and conservation intervention relating to the management and conservation of orang utans and its habitat. In particular, I demonstrate the continuance of human-orang utan relations by Indigenous Iban communities through subtle resistance or refusal, contra-remembering and other methods, and suggest other pluralities that contribute to conservation, over prevailing dominant narratives that mostly assume a linear pathway to conserve forest and more-than-human species.

I completed 20 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo since June 2015, of which ten months were spent in three Iban communities in the southwestern tip of Batang Ai. During my time in Batang Ai, I conducted a total of 45 semi-structured interviews among other ethnographic methods. I further describe my Methodology in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

This thesis seeks to understand the multiple strategies that Indigenous communities employ to uphold their rights over conservation landscapes from an Indigenous decolonial perspective, as well to critically examine the power dynamics and tensions emerging within practice and discourses of orang utan conservation from a political ecology perspective. Specifically, it will ask the following questions that crystallized from my initial field explorations:

1. *Remembering*: How may a decolonial political ecology approach work in understanding local Indigenous epistemologies of landscapes and memory (remembering) and therefore, open up new understandings of human-environment relationships in the context of conservation? **(Chapter 3/Paper 1)**
2. *Concealing*: How might a more ethical approach and understanding of hidden Indigenous strategies, contribute to better forms of conservation and research? **(Chapter 4/Paper 2)**
3. *Naming*: What are the Iban ways of naming and knowing the orang utan? To what extent, through acknowledging contemporary Iban ways and relations with orang utan (and nature) that different understandings of conservation practices may arise? **(Chapter 5/Paper 3).**

1.4 Thesis structure

In **Chapter 2**, I describe the thesis' conceptual milieu (an Indigenous decolonial approach in political ecology) and discuss how we move towards a decolonial political ecology, by centering Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and ways of life when thinking through human-orang utan relations in Sarawak.

This thesis is then organized to follow the main themes drawn from the research questions: *Remembering; Concealing; Naming* of which the following concepts are elaborated in the three empirical papers: a) survivance amid dispossession; b) the political economy of conservation; c) conservation and "environmentality" and d) the politics of naming & classifying nature. This thesis is written in the form of three papers, each of which contains its own literature review. Each theme (with corresponding concepts) are developed and expanded with pertinent literature overview which situates this work within the broader discourses of conservation, political ecology and decolonial literature, as it engages with the theoretical aspects and empirical work.

While my study is empirical-based and guided by disciplinary concerns, I am neither a 'detached nor dispassionate' scholar. I have spent most of my adult life working in conservation and later on, advocating for Indigenous rights in Malaysian Borneo. I view conservation as a powerful set of institutions and practices that have enormous environmental and cultural protection potential but tend to marginalize Indigenous and local peoples' ontologies, epistemologies and concerns of which critical scholarship can help reveal.

The core argument running through the thesis is that human-orang utan relations provide plurality of ways to think of conservation engagement, where orang utans and people are simultaneously impacted by and workings of conservation as it seeks to control and manage Indigenous peoples and their

relations with customary lands and orang utans⁶. Ibans have interacted with conservation practices in complex ways, opening up new ways of engagement and pluralising conservation discourse.

Chapter 3 therefore expounds on my positionality as an Indigenous scholar while elaborating on the local context of the Indigeneity vs the Local and outlines the methodologies and pertinent literature that informs my research. Here, following decolonial Indigenous scholarship such as Tuck & Yang (2012) and Tuhiwai Smith (2013), I define decolonization at its core -- as a process of concrete actions and changes rather than theoretical posturing. I bring into conversation, the challenges of writing from a local or 'native geographer' perspective. After setting the stage of how Indigeneity is wielded in different ways, I conclude that these debates and instruments of native or Indigenous identification remain too limited when considering relations with community, place and more-than-humans and surrounding pressures.

In my Methods chapter (**Chapter 4**), I introduce the land (site) and the emerging relationships I have with the land, people and more-than-humans. I describe the emergence of the kin study and the role of place and relationships as I work towards a decolonising approach to my work. I also discuss how the orang utan is understood in the conservation literature and how this thesis furthers a decolonizing approach on orang utan research.

Chapter 5 looks at ways of remembering of contested landscapes of orang utan conservation. I bring in ideas of remembering and contra-remembering by different peoples, as one of the ways that speak of continuance and thriving of Indigenous presence(s) in response to conservation forces and actions. My findings

⁶ Here, I acknowledge that I am also greatly inspired and similarly have been thinking along the same lines with Dr. Todd's (2016) seminal work on human-fish relations in Paulatuuq, Canada.

include an articulation of a type of decolonial remembering, 'contra-remembering' that speaks of Indigenous presencing on lands. **Chapter 6** examines how protocols of evasion and concealment are important parts of defending more-than-human worlds from dispossessory intrusions, including those of conservation. I build on the ideas of contra-remembering and more collaborative forms of conservation by articulating how protocols of evasion and concealment are important parts of defending more-than-human worlds from dispossessory intrusions, including those of conservation. I describe a particular ethical approach and understanding of hidden Indigenous strategies within human-orang utan relations in the context of conservation activities. I particularly draw on Anishinaabe scholar Vizenor's (1999; 2008) work on Indigenous survivance that refers to the active thriving of Indigenous presence, rather than a mere reaction or a survivable name, over the changing colonial forces. While I do not wish to appropriate the time- and place-based meanings of this theorizing, I hold this formulation of theorizing, in plurality⁷, as I think through the possibilities enacted through my own thinking around Indigenous Iban-led responses towards conservation actions. **Chapter 7** turns to the topic of politics of naming the orang utan. I state it is necessary to consider how we approach Indigenous naming, knowledges and stories in conservation work and also in our citational practices. It is these ideas of knowing the maia beyond "to protect" but rather *to connect, in place* that maintains orang utan-human relations as more than an abstract(-ed) species with conservation value. In other words, we must know the maia beyond its mostly charismatic and conservation value, and carefully think through its embodied co-relations with place and Ibans or other Indigenous peoples living in the same lands. The final chapter, **Chapter 8**

⁷ Thinking through the plurality of multiple Indigenous worlds (Blaser, 2010).

summarizes my overall findings and offers concluding thoughts on what a decolonial political ecology would look like in practice.

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CHAPTER 2

Moving towards a Decolonial Political Ecology

This section introduces the conceptual framework and overarching literatures in conversation, identifying the gaps that this thesis fulfills and setting the scene for the following chapters.

2.1 Conceptual milieu: An Indigenous decolonial approach in political ecology.

Research is never apolitical. The political, philosophical and social assumptions embedded in a research framework, however seemingly invisible, encode particular behaviours and actions in praxis. More dominant frameworks through citation practices also structure a collective body of work, that particular knowledge and ideas matter more than others, and that these ideas should remain at the center of disciplines (Ahmed, 2012). I am reminded by Crenshaw's intersectionality framework (1990) to maintain a critical look at frameworks on whose knowledge counts, to center all intersecting voices, particularly of those who are more vulnerable to different forms of oppression by virtue of their identity, and to investigate the power dynamic at play within and beyond the 'field'.

Leading Maori intellectual, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, describes decolonisation as a 'long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power' (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013, p. 33). Colonial power remains 'alive' or animated in the forms of knowledge such as development, science, conservation, economy and so on, and are deeply rooted in post-Enlightenment euro-western claims that universalise and theorise the world (Chakrabarty, 2000; Mignolo, 2011; Slater, 2008). Whilst postcolonial scholarship

has been important in examining ongoing socio-spatial transformations in relation to enduring euro-western influences, decolonial scholars build on the work by seeking theoretical-conceptual frameworks and political inspiration from anti-colonial writers (eg. Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Gloria Anzaldúa, WEB du Bois) and social movements (Radcliffe, 2017). The decolonial option 'switches away from a postcolonial provincialising of Western claims' (Radcliffe, 2017, p. 331) to re-think the world *from* Indigenous places, *from* marginalised academia in the global South, *from* Africa and so on (Grosfoguel, 2007; Johnson et. al., 2007).

To this end, I aim to ground Indigenous peoples' knowledge, ways of knowing and relationships with land and non-human species by adopting an Indigenous decolonial framework that legitimatizes Indigenous and other marginalized scholars and my fellow interlocutors, as producers of knowledge. As my aim is to develop a decolonial political ecology, I begin with a provocation of decoloniality approach before moving into a deeper discussion of political ecology. To move beyond political ecology and other similar concepts (e.g. cultural landscapes, more-than-human geographies), we must develop an understanding of the structural framework(s) to determine how to best decolonize it. While this may present a more challenging structure, it is the most appropriate to achieve my aims. My empirical chapters/papers further develop the concept of a decolonial political ecology.

I am interested in placing diverse knowledges from different settings (eg. political ecology framework and Iban epistemologies) into juxtaposition with each other, and remaining alert to alternative articulations of/within power (Grosfoguel, 2012; Povinelli, 2011; Slater, 2008). In particular, I understand and communicate relationships with species and landscapes from an Indigenous point of view; meaning that these relationships contain ethical structures, inter-species

agreements and protocols, and that non-human species and land are able to interpret, discern and take action (Country et al., 2016; Suchet-Pearson, Wright, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Country, 2013; Todd, 2014, 2016; Watts, 2013). For example, Povinelli (1995) examines the ways in which Indigenous relations to non-human beings, knowledge and praxis are reduced by euro-western dominance over universal knowledge, and dismissed as mere belief. Belyuen Aboriginal ontologies and cosmologies were found to be difficult to reconcile within colonial paradigms and logics, and thus regarded as irrelevant to the rule of western colonial logics (ibid. 1995).

In relation to this thesis, Métis scholar, Todd (2016, p. 13) further argues that the incomplete framework of 'TEK' (traditional ecological knowledge) applied into research and the understanding Indigenous human-environmental and human-animal relations in Canada, misconstrues Indigenous environmental knowledge as an 'analog of ecological-scientific knowledge rather than an expression of inter-species legal governance which encompasses ecological, cosmological, political, and socio-cultural domains.' When Indigenous peoples assert their laws in relation to other species, this is an 'act of inter-nation diplomacy between Indigenous peoples, the state and more-than-human collectives' (ibid 2016, p. 13). Thus she suggests that 'questions of co-management and conflicts over governance of lands and waters between the State and Indigenous peoples should be approached as a matter of *legal-governance plurality* and an expression of Indigenous legal orders' (ibid, 2016:13). Todd draws upon this foundation importance of stories-as-theory, based on Napoleon's (2007) and Cruikshank's (1998, 2014) work that emphasizes Indigenous stories as *legal* realities and the importance of listening *for* stories rather than listening *to* stories, in regards of taking the seriousness of accounts within larger academic narratives themselves.

As an Indigenous Bidayuh scholar from Borneo with my own extensive fieldwork experience in conservation with local and Indigenous communities, I have come to the conclusion that it is vital to center Indigenous knowledge, ways of knowing and ways of life, and then coming to further understand and articulate theory and research from our (Indigenous) own perspectives and our own purposes, as suggested by Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2013) in her seminal work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

My 12-year long participation of conservation programmes and Western-led activist campaigns in Sarawak, and elsewhere in Borneo and West Malaysia, that seek to center euro-western knowledge and supremacy, and the constant derogation (or at times, over-romanticization) of rural Indigenous peoples and their way of life and by extension, the local State and urban-based local or Indigenous peoples, have convinced me that we need a better, more dignified approach in how we address present Indigenous ways of life, protocols, socio-ecological knowledges and responses. Thus, I frame both past and present experiences of Indigenous Ibans as impacted by processes of on-going colonialism, particularly in the context of ontological and epistemic violence authorized by euro-western centric scholarship and everyday life (see Mignolo, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013; Sundberg, 2014).

I am inspired by decolonial scholarship that regard the value of bringing Indigenous and non euro-western philosophies into more mainstream worldviews with the aims of untangling euro-western ontological dominance, attending to structures of power embedded within knowledge production, and enriching academic disciplines' fields of knowledge. Here, I acknowledge seminal thinkers whose work enabled generations of scholars to analyse and theorize beyond an Eurocentric epistemology and ontology, and whose work similarly shaped my own

understandings of colonialism, globally and locally: Aimé Césaire, Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, Stuart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, Syed Hussein Alatas, among others.

The act of using Indigenous theories and philosophies alongside euro-western philosophies could lead to decolonization of these fields, and rewrite colonial notions of whom produces theory and about whom. I take heed of Esson et al's (2017) intervention particularly in the field of (British) geography, that quotes Tuck and Yang's (2012) and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o' (2011) calls on how decolonisation begins from the Black and Indigenous peoples, and should be led by that scholarship.

I also take in careful consideration of important critiques by Indigenous and Black scholars in regards of continued application of euro-western theory in the analysis of Indigenous and Black ontologies/epistemologies and other experiences (e.g. Mbembe, 2015; L. T. Smith, 2013; Todd, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Kwakwaka'wakw scholar and geographer, Sarah Hunt (2014, p. 28) further cautions that 'making ontological shifts in the types of geographic knowledge that is legible within the discipline requires destabilizing how we come to know Indigeneity and what representational strategies are used in engaging with Indigenous ontologies, as differentiated from western ontologies of Indigeneity.' Hunt argues that euro-western ontologies of Indigeneity are not the same as Indigenous ontologies. Hunt (ibid., 2014) adds that 'it is not enough to talk about Indigenous ontologies without addressing how we come to understand Indigeneity and ontology themselves mean'. With this in mind, I follow Sundberg (2014, p. 34), in 'recognizing on-going epistemic interactions across time and space while acknowledging the existence and particularities of Indigenous epistemologies'. Similarly following the ideas of Spivak (2017), as a researcher, I do not assume I can recover the standpoint of the 'subaltern'. There is always a need for rigorous

interrogation of the politics of speaking and writing, of which this thesis considered by extensively discussing my positionality in various chapters. Additionally, this study considered the frictions that arise from these interventions/interactions (Tsing, 2011) with other actors, including from tourism and conservation.

With this provocation of a decolonial approach, I now turn to the following discussions on political ecology, cultural landscapes and more-than-human geographies that provides some good critique in understanding the power imbalances in conservation between people. However, while very useful to think through these power relations in relation to land and more-than-humans, these frameworks do not provide enough attention and care to Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, and of relations with land and more-than-humans, of which this thesis aims to fill this gap.

2.2 Conservation from the conventional viewpoint: moving towards a decolonial political ecology.

I will first discuss conservation from the conventional viewpoint, and then describe the following important critiques of this viewpoint from political ecology, cultural landscape and more-than-human geographies that seek to bring in human-landscape or human-animal relations further. However, as I further demonstrate, some of these theories may end up entrenching North-South status quos, coloniality, and the instrumental separation of humans and nature. While other approaches seek to respond towards 'new conservation' (Marvier, Kareiva, & Lalasz, 2018) and longer-standing neo-protectionist conservation traditions⁸, by offering a new

⁸ There is a considerable trend of thought examining cultural ecosystem services (eg. Costanza et al., 1997). These are mainly contingent forms of valuation rooted in neo-classical economics, and as such there are debates on this concept from a Marxist political economy perspective (see Brockington, 2011).

approach to understanding and practising environmental conservation, I follow Indigenous scholars, such as Kyle Powyes White, call to decolonize conservation and also offer further insights on why it is important to support Indigenous-led work and center Indigenous and local communities who live on the same lands we seek to conserve. I argue that moving towards a decolonial political ecology leads towards a more profound reorganization of relations with more-than-humans, lands, and other co-constituents that is much needed in a world currently in environmental crisis.

Much of euro-western⁹ conservation literature relies on contrasting paradigms on how local and Indigenous communities conserve their forest resources. From a conventional conservation standpoint, these communities do not have recognizable conservation strategies (Kay, 1994; Krech, 2000; Redford, 1992; Redford & Stearman, 1993) and thus need to be provided ‘strong incentives’ either through education or via initiatives based on the economic model of optimal rational behaviour and participation in co-management of the protected area or conservation area of interest (e.g. see Smith & Wishnie, 2000). This however neglects the fact that Indigenous communities have always had their own way of traditional land management and conservation, and have been problematized as a barrier or problem towards conservation. This is due to overwhelming negative framings of their way of life and Indigenous responses towards multi-scalar (Tsing, 2011) forces (whether political, economic, social, cultural or ecological at local and global scale) that express and act on interest in different ways over different periods of time towards traditional lands and non-human species. In this respect,

⁹ I further discuss in one of my empirical papers, how the dominant knowledge formation is not so much Western as it is *imperial*. Information was collected across the colonies, brought back to the imperial centre, processed and assembled into academic disciplines we know today (Connell, 2007).

there has been much critical literature conducted on the political ecology of conservation (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2006; Agrawal et. al., 1997a; Cleary, 2008; Colchester, 1993, 2004; Dowie, 2011; Igoe, 2004; Stevens, 1997; West, 2006).

Polarizing euro-western¹⁰ paradigms on Indigenous¹¹ conservation include viewpoints that suggest it is either based on a deep ecological understanding and evolved resource governance systems (Berkes, 2017) or is an unintended result of low population density, 'primitive' technology, belief systems or limited needs (Smith & Wishnie, 2000). In classic anthropological studies, conservation also varies with each culture's 'ethnometaphysics' (Hallowell, 1960, p. 20), or metaphysical beliefs that shape the ways people act in the world and their thoughts; either through rituals, or worldview of the infinite renewal of natural resources (Brightman, 1993; Fienup-Riordan, 1990).

Additionally, a conservation ethic is linked through predictable limiting resources that is under control of a social group (Berkes & Folke, 1998), and where there is intent to leave the environment and resources in a "usable state" for succeeding generations (Krech, 2000). This idea of "designed restraint" helps prevent overharvesting of resources or environmental damage (Smith & Wishnie, 2000).

¹⁰ Here, I follow Sundberg (2014, p. 34) who cites Blaut (1993) and Dussel (1995), to define 'euro-western' -centrism as "contingent conceptual apparatus that frames Europe as the primary architect of world history and bearer of universal values, reason, and theory".

¹¹ Here, I follow the United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues working definition of the word, "Indigenous" to refer to "communities, peoples and nations" who have a "historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system" (United Nations Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2004, p. 2).

Ostrom (1990) further highlights the importance and agency of the social group through the institutional choice framework, where rules are developed to govern benefits and costs, participation levels, systematic monitoring, conflict resolution, effective sanctions and external recognition of communities' rights to govern their own resources. Ostrom's rule-based design principles have helped influence policy-makers working on institutional arrangements to protect resources and biodiversity (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2006).

Many however argue that the archaeological, ethnohistorical and ethnological data do not support the case for Indigenous conservation (Diamond, 1992; Kay, 1994; Krech, 2000). The preservationist ideal further envisions a full range of genetic, species and ecosystem diversity that ought to be maintained or restored to "natural abundance" before human influence (Redford & Stearman, 1993). This ideal often has been adopted by contemporary conservation, whereby conservation is framed from a moral urgency, both to save habitats and species from human destruction and to 'develop' or 'empower' local and Indigenous communities to reduce their impact on biodiversity, as opposed to merely living sustainably or according to the status quo.

If Indigenous knowledge (or TEK: traditional ecological knowledge) is acknowledged within contemporary conservation, it is often from a paradigm that overly romanticizes Indigenous knowledge and expects Indigenous communities to remain unchanged over time despite the changing landscapes due to socio-economic pressures on traditional lands. This static view has been criticized (see Bicker et al., 2003; Brosius, 1999) and attempts at implementing local and Indigenous knowledge for conservation have been misguided at best (Agrawal, 2002; Agrawal et al., 1997b; Escobar, 1998). Indigenous knowledge has typically

been made abstract, rendered as mere “data” from its original integrated and emplaced context, and either ignored or re-configured to fit the contemporary conservation framework. The politics and governmentality of incorporating TEK or Indigenous knowledge into policy thus typically marginalise Indigenous people and their perspectives on how their knowledge should be applied (Nadasdy, 1999).

The lack of local context of social-ecological processes, evolving local situations and localized knowledge production is illustrated in many studies that point out striking discrepancies between discursive simplifications and the diversity of situations within local contexts (Adger et al., 2001; Fairhead & Leach, 1996). Li (2002), Carrier and West (2009) and others further point out systematic effects that arise when predetermined models or institutions are imposed onto complex situations. Failing to recognize traditional or informal institutions, whilst implementing new ‘participatory’ institutional arrangements for conservation, may weaken local communities’ agency and buy-in. Further, the negative portrayal of the state for effective conservation in many development narratives dismisses the complex and necessary institutional roles that governments play (Geoghegan, 2009).

2.2.1 Political ecology

Political ecology (as per William M. Adams & Hutton, 2007; Agrawal, Smith, & Li, 1997b; Dove, 1995; Hall, Hirsch, & Li, 2011; Jeffery & Vira, 2001; Li, 2007, 2014; Neumann, 1997; Peluso, 1992; Robbins, 2011; Sivaramakrishnan, 1999; Tsing, 2011; West, 2006; Zimmerer, 2000) as a framework, works to critique dominant ideas of nature and conservation, through bringing attention to the political relations and the entrenched ideas of ecology. Political ecology has drawn from political economy to analyze underlying drivers of environmental degradation and

conflict (Blaikie, 2016; Robbins, 2011; Wolf, 1972), a theoretical approach that overlaps with those of Marxist environmental geography (Castree, 2002) and green environmental politics. In this political economy of nature, the capitalist production of nature has considerably transformed the social relationship with the natural world (Smith, 2009). The critique of how capital absorbs or subsumes nature, for example “fictitious capital” (Marx, 1967), is important in the context of biodiversity conservation where animals serve to further a ‘conservationist mode of production’ (Brockington & Scholfield, 2010). Charismatic animals such as the elephant and tiger, are exploited to serve particular policies and planning initiatives, which in turn reproduces conservation institutions (Barua, 2013). Similarly, Duffy and Moore (2010) point to the ‘palimpsest ways’ of how global tourism, including ecotourism, alters animals, as commodities, into palatable consumerist products.

For this thesis, I am particularly interested in the conservation and control strand of political ecology. Within the conservation and control thesis of political ecology, local producers have lost control of their natural resources and landscapes through the implementation of efforts by the state and global interests to preserve ‘sustainability’ or ‘nature’ (Robbins, 2011). In the process, local systems of livelihoods, production and socio-political organizations are dismantled. Such implementation reifies and regulates borders around land and territories. It also controls who gets to move, live, and maintains customary practices in certain places. Related research has further demonstrated that ‘where local production practices have historically been productive and relatively benign, they have been characterized as unsustainable by state authorities or other players in the struggle to control resources’ (ibid., p. 178). In other words, local and Indigenous practices and relations to environment and animals are continually marginalized and dismissed.

The four fundamental theoretical propositions of political ecology (ibid., pp. 178–179) relevant to this thesis are: 1) conservation reflects a form of hegemonic governmentality (Foucault, 1991); 2) traditional resource management strategies are recognized as institutional systems; 3) ‘wilderness’ is a social construct, a form of nature without people; and 4) contemporary conservation protected areas are ecologically and socially problematic, and inadequate.

I am also interested in how environmental histories of postcolonial landscapes have been re-examined against colonial narratives of nature, thus critiquing Western constructions of nature and of who benefits when wildlife is conserved (Fairhead & Leach, 1996; Guha & Alier, 2013). These influential texts provide convincing critique of Western constructions of nature, and following this framework, of who benefits from nature and wildlife conservation. Another useful strand of political ecology’s engagement with animals to consider include contestations over animal meanings, representations and conservation as part of the broader political struggles (McAfee, 1999; Woods, 1998). The ways of how colonial or Western representations of the environment or animals serve as a power function, and thus erasing local epistemological modes of knowing have been paid attention to (eg. Adams, 2013; West, 2006). Political ecology studies like these that study power relations in knowledge production are influenced by various classic concepts and expressions such as academic imperialism (Alatas, 1969, 2000), imitation and the captive mind (Alatas, 1972, 1974), decolonization of knowledge (Fanon, 1961), critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970), and Orientalism (Said, 1995) that are part of the larger discourse of the power relations inherent in claims over knowledge.

Far from centering the ‘*anthropos*-centric understanding’ of animals and the environment, understanding Indigenous human-environmental and human-animal relations in Borneo from a decolonial approach, moves the discourse on human-animal relations beyond questions of epistemological or ontological incompatibility

of Indigenous knowledge with western/imperial knowledge or conservation for example, and instead recognizes that Indigenous relations *is* more-than-human relations and further, necessitates fresh inquiry into specific politics and strategies of concealment that rural Indigenous communities may employ in response to conservation actions.

2.3 Cultural Landscapes & conservation: thinking beyond political ecology.

Whilst political ecology unpacks the deeper political impacts on human lives due to social orderings of space, there is lesser weight on co-relations with humans and landscapes, of which this thesis seeks to emphasize. This inclination may likely stem from colonial landscape renderings of *terra nullius*. Landscape becomes a space of which institutional arrangements are made, to where humans and animals are prescribed accordingly (Hinchliffe, 2003; Ingold, 2002). This notion is rather limiting, and does not account for any agency that animals or Indigenous and local peoples may have in how the living inhabit landscapes before colonial European capitalist thought of ownership, property and culture. Therefore, this thesis also considers cultural landscapes within the context of political ecology and therefore, in turn, brings in scope for new conversations between human and eco-geographers.

Euro-western traditions of thought on understanding how human culture and activities interact with surrounding landscape, goes as far back as to the 19th century (eg. MacKinder, 1887) however the term, 'landscape' itself has been used since the 17th century (Tuan, 1979, p. 6). By the mid-20th century, the 'cultural landscapes' concept developed by Carl Sauer and the Berkeley School, demonstrated emerging interest with how humans co-constitute with landscape. Using mostly empirical methods such as morphological analysis and cultural

history, Sauer sought to understand people's role in the evolution of landscapes (Leighly, 1963). Around this period, there was a move from spatial determinism to more cultural geography understandings of subjective and actual aspects of landscape (eg. Jackson, 2012; Meinig, 1979; Tuan, 1979) and the landscape's role in ideologies (eg. Bender, 1993; Cosgrove & Daniels, 2008). The significance of landscape (or related idea of place) to communities and their cultural identity has been explored from many anthropological, 'place identity' and gender aspects (eg. Hay, 2009; Massey, 2007; Tilley, 2006). Landscape has been described as a 'prospect seen from a specific standpoint' (Tuan, 1979, p. 133), a 'fundamental temporality' of 'dwelling perspective' (Ingold, 1993, p. 164 and 2002, p.189), and 'veins of myth and memory' (Schama, 1995, p. 14). Places are also not unitary in space and time but also include subterranean landscapes, where the past is in contact with the present (Cragg & Travlou, 2001).

Indigenous scholarship on landscape or rather, place, have always emphasized how place is not an object of study (Daigle, 2016; Todd, 2019) but rather a sustaining complex of relations and with more-than-human kin (Coulthard, 2010). Place has its own agency and relations, and with this, calls on humans and more-than-human, to act and learn from (Larsen & Johnson, 2017). Place has agency, knowledge and law (Bawaka Country et al, 2016). Indigenous concepts of place are very diverse, rich and more complex than any introductory forms that could be shared with non-members of (differing) Indigenous communities. I heed the call from Indigenous scholars including Kwaymullina (2016) on the limits on what can be shared, spoken or understood. In further chapters, I point out to different Indigenous ways of understanding place and cultural landscape that are central to my thesis.

From these differing ideas of how landscapes or place are constituted by euro-western scholarship, I bring attention now to the world's contested areas for conservation and Indigenous territories that currently lie within heterogeneous landscapes or cultural landscapes. For example, in many protected areas in the tropics, local and Indigenous communities are allowed restricted access to continue farming along buffer zones. The structural heterogeneity of landscapes allows for different functions including conservation and ecosystem services (Allan, 2004). There have been calls for the integrated landscape approach to address several conflicting land values and practices amid growing competition for land (see Sayer et al., 2013). Ostrom (1999) introduced the concept of the polycentric but uncoordinated, and even conflicting, understandings of social-ecological concepts and interactions with land.

From an ecological perspective, landscapes are not comprised of a single structure but rather, are usually mosaics that incorporate a combination of ecosystems (Forman, 1982). Based on fieldwork with Indigenous Penan in Sarawak, Brosius (2001, p. 148) notes that 'the landscape is more than simply a reservoir of detailed ecological knowledge. It is also a repository for the memory of past events, and thus a vast mnemonic representation of social relationships and of society.' Landscapes are also created by people – 'through their experience and engagement with the world around them' (Bender, 1993, p. 1). This relates to the historical ecology's percept, where all landscapes involve the co-evolution of human and non-human species and their interactions (Balée, 2006).

Similarly while concepts such as cultural landscapes are useful in thinking through my research and empirical data, I also want to *think empathetically* about how Indigenous Ibans strategize and at times, conceal around conservation

practices whilst practicing relations with animals and land. To achieve these aims, I mostly engage with Indigenous theorists and theory in my empirical chapters.

2.4 More-than-human geographies: Recolonizing efforts?

I now turn to the literature of more-than-human geographies that seek to further understand the 'ecology' of political ecology and pay more attention to more-than-human agency. However, as other critical geographers have pointed out, this may not be enough to center Indigenous world-views and ontologies, and in fact, at times, entrench North-South status quo and coloniality. From the earlier animal geographies (Philo & Wilbert, 2000; 1998; Wolch & Emel, 1998) to the 'turn' to animals and relational ontologies in 'more-than-human' geographies (Hinchliffe, 2007; Whatmore, 1999) and 'animal geographies' (Philo & Wilbert, 2000) brings in new euro-western articulations on mediating on the human and animal social life, values and relations, and how their mutual environments are co-constituted. The influence of Whatmore's (1999) *Hybrid geographies* and the popularity of actor-network theory (championed by Latour, Callon, Law and others) in cultural geography have provided additional ways to rethink the dichotomy between humans and non-humans. With the 'more-than-human' approach, Barua (2013) suggests that it does three things: i) it acknowledges the 'liveliness of life' beyond the earlier geographic approaches that favour discursive interpretation and representation (Braun, 2008; Lorimer, 2008); ii) it seeks to rethink human ontologies by focusing on heterogenous organisms, forces and materials with which agency, and therefore outcomes, are co-produced (Hinchliffe, 2007; Hinchliffe, et al., 2005; Whatmore, 2006); iii) it looks at issues of embodiment, performance, affect

and skill as relational forces and competencies beyond discursive ideas of human and animal (Bear & Eden, 2011; Despret, 2004; Latour, 2004; Lorimer, 2008).

Following recent work in 'more-than-human' geography (eg. Whatmore, 1999), there has been theoretical engagement in the same discipline opening up beyond western/white-Anglo framings of society and environment to engage older, Indigenous cosmologies (eg. Rose, 2011; 2013; Wright et al., 2012). These engagements recognise an ontology of belonging and co-becoming, wherein beings, things, and non-tangibles have less-than-clear boundaries that can never be entirely known (Wright et al., 2012). Many Indigenous peoples' ontologies are based upon notions of co-emergence and co-becoming with place (Country et al., 2016; Larsen & Johnson, 2012; Rose, 2004, 2011). Such efforts demonstrate the significance and richness to be gained by moving beyond dominant forms of western (social) science and ethics (Panelli, 2010).

Sundberg's (2014) *Decolonizing posthumanist geographies* has been particularly instructive in critiquing the ways geographic engagements with posthumanism tend to reproduce Eurocentric and colonial imaginaries and ways of knowing and being by enacting universalizing claims, and as a consequence, further subordinating other ontologies. Colonialism have attempted to flatten and homogenize the world, partly through claims to universalism. Here, I acknowledge the contextualizations and specificity of Indigenous thinking and theorizing. I do not assume similar claims to (Indigenous) universalism, but rather, hold this plurality of formulation in theorizing as I think through the possibilities enacted through my own thinking around Indigenous Iban-led responses towards conservation actions. There might be commonalities but there are no universals.

The limits of Enlightenment thinking and euro-western systematizing and subjugation of nature and other knowledges have been pointed out (Johnson & Murton, 2007; Panelli, 2010). In other words, 'new' posthumanism work is perhaps not all that new. As such, taking inspiration of 'alive' from Chakrabarty's (2000) *Provincializing Europe*, Sundberg suggests that Anglo-European scholarship is the only tradition truly alive in posthumanist theorizing (Sundberg, 2014, p. 16). In turn, Indigenous scholarship and alternative Indigenous knowledges brings 'liveliness', in ways that offer deep and critical meanings, in mainstream academic disciplines.

Consequently, a key part of my thesis is concerned about giving more attention to Indigenous epistemologies in all its discontinuous iterations (e.g. stories, memories) and its dissemination, coexistence and disruptions in everyday life, particularly in conservation practice. Indigenous perspectives on more-than-human relations provide social geographies with additional complex ways to understand such relations within both Indigenous populations and wider ones. In doing so, I build on a strong body of emerging, yet important work by Indigenous scholars. For example, using Maori examples, Panelli and Tipa (2009) illustrate some of the more-than-human relations surrounding diverse Maori food practices. In this case-study, while not all Maori people will have access to their traditional lands, resources or *rangatiratanga* (exercise of tribal authority), forms of co-relation with place via *whakapapa* (genealogy and cultural identity), *whenua* (land), *moana* (sea) and *mahinga kai* (traditional food resources and practices) can provide ways in which Maori can access sense of connection and respect (Panelli & Tipa, 2009). Watson and Huntington (2008) also demonstrate the continuance of Indigenous social and cultural knowledges and relations in contemporary contexts with Koyukon Athabascans moose-hunters and wildlife biologists and ecologists.

Forms of Koyukon knowing, whether conscious or other, are recounted as ‘the practice of an ethical relationship with the nonhuman’ – including the need ‘to think like a moose to hunt them with respect’ (ibid, pp. 257, 265). Watson (a non-Indigenous academic geographer) and Huntington (an Athabascan hunter and gatherer) (2008) further suggest that Indigenous approaches can ‘also productively contribute to discussions of the ethical and political implications of posthumanism’ (ibid, p. 258). Whyte (2016) points out to Indigenous conservationists who tend to focus on sustaining particular plants and animals whose lives are entangled locally, and over many generations, in different forms of relationships with human societies and more-than-humans, and suggests that we learn and put into practice, these relationships. These perspectives shed new light to think more deeply about diverse social-nature relations with Indigenous peoples, of which Indigenous relations are also more-than-human relations.

To this end, my focal point of interest for this thesis is to think through human-orang utan relations, as part of a decolonizing praxis, as to understand how contrasting power relations in conservation practice produce different forms of responses within the political ecology framework (Robbins, 2011) where conservation literature shares at-times an uneasy space. In doing so, I unpack some of the problems that I feel privilege a certain dominant imaginary that dismisses the heterogeneity and plurivocality that Indigenous responses and relations engenders. The dialectic cycles of the dominant ‘*anthropos*’ (human) vs the non-*anthropos* (non-human) and the euro-western/imperial knowledge vs Indigenous epistemologies are blurred, dismantled and overturned.

2.5 Conclusion

Examining human-animal and human-landscapes relations through a decolonial Indigenous lens in the context of the political ecologies of conservation, through its social, material and political dimensions, provokes new questions across both political ecology and social geographies. Sundberg (2014) reminds us that there is a tendency to think of revitalizing relations concepts as ‘new’ when in fact, it is not new and is based on Indigenous relations with nature and more-than-humans.

My contribution to the scholarship of decolonial geography¹² is to bring in further nuance from postcolonial and non-settler colonial contexts for the scale of such work has been conducted in the global North. Bringing insights from a decolonial perspective into conversation with ‘third world political ecology’ (Bryant, 1998; Bryant & Bailey, 1997) is essential in bridging these ‘North-South’ decolonizing conversations.

I follow Stoler (2016) where research on histories of imperial societies equip us to better understand contemporary forms of exploitation, including conservation practices. As such, the structures of the colonial are still on-going. I therefore link postcolonial scholarship (through its rich tradition of challenging the insularity of historical narratives and historiographical traditions emanating from Europe) with Indigenous decolonial scholarship by focusing on the entry point of the agency of place and more-than-humans based on Indigenous Iban understandings. Here, place

¹² The question could be made on why “decolonial geographies” vs postcolonial or Southern theory. Because my focus is on Indigenous ecological knowledges, that is locally-based knowledge formations created by peoples, with deep roots before colonization, in the face of international or western conservation action, I am therefore interested in the body of literature that investigates similar responses. Southern theory for example, looks at concepts generated in the colonial encounter itself (Connell, 2007).

and more-than-humans are understood as conscious beings with the capacity to enact responsibilities as per relations of co-existence.

This thesis re-conceptualizes cultural landscapes within the context of political ecology by focusing on Indigenous scholarship on landscape or rather place, where place is not a mere case-study. Place holds its own agency, knowledge and law and its own complexity of relations. Therefore, I *think empathically* of the strategies and concealment by Ibans around conservation practices whilst practising relations with more-than-humans and land.

I acknowledge the time- and place-based meanings of Indigenous thinking and theorizing. I do not assume claims to Indigenous universalism but rather, hold this plurality of formulation in theorizing as I think through the possibilities enacted through my own thinking around Indigenous Iban-led responses towards conservation actions. I also wanted to acknowledge and reference prior work by Indigenous and other marginalized theorists and scholars, in my work that draws in ideas of critical reflexivity, fieldwork ethics and decolonization. I am conscious of replicating epistemic colonialism (colonization of thought and knowledge), and thus, situate my claims in their original context while acknowledging previous work that local scholars¹³ have done. What I hope to lay down, is theoretical groundwork for future Sarawakian, Malaysian, Bornean and Southeast Asian scholars to improve on, as we continue to dismantle and reveal the ways in which western colonial logics, assumptions and concepts have shaped and framed conservation practice and theory into what it is today.

In the following chapter, I bring further attention on my positionality as a 'native geographer' as part of theory. This labour is instructive for demonstrating that we cannot separate nature, research from self despite our best attempts. After

¹³ Any mistakes I may have made in missing local scholars' contributions are mine alone.

completing my research, I was struck with my responsibilities as disclosing the self, while protecting my interlocutors from further anthropological-type inquiry as per politics of refusal (Simpson, 2014). What would a decolonial political ecology through human-orang utan relations look like in practice and further support efforts to build and tend similar relations with more-than-humans and other co-constituents elsewhere? In the following chapters, I demonstrate how we may think with the lands, remembering, orang utans, and humans as part of decolonial practice.

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CHAPTER 3

Doing ethnography ‘at home’: Situating the ‘Indigenous’ and the ‘local’.

‘Within an Indigenous (decolonizing) framework, methodological debates are also ones concerned with the broader politics and strategic goals of Indigenous research. It is at this level that the researcher has to clarify and justify their intentions’ (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013, p. 143).

3.1 Setting the scene.

This chapter first begins with the blurring of the boundaries between the literature review, theoretical approach(es), field observations and acknowledging the personal with the research. This approach reflects the hybridity of reflection and the diverse methodological approaches to understand the dynamic and complex negotiations and relationships to orang utan, land and humans that Ibans articulate, enact and mobilize in present day.

Methodologically, this research builds on the following concern: how do we gain ethnographic understandings of human-orang utan relations in a decolonial political ecology framework. The practice and politics of such research generates a commitment to a theoretical project and to both people and orang utans with whom these research materials are co-produced. This chapter illustrates one of the theoretical, methodological and epistemological ways of articulating such a decolonial project.

Decolonization in itself, indicates direction but not necessarily one destination; there could be several decolonial destinations, in any case, and the closer we get to them, the more questions we have to seek. Decolonization at its core, is a process of concrete actions and changes rather than theoretical posturing (Boudreau Morris, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013). The process of decolonization could perhaps be best encapsulated in the preposition 'towards'. 'Towards what'? Many Indigenous activists for example, advocate returning all lands back to native communities as an important material act of decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012). For the context of my research and overall journey, decolonization is a call to recognize and explicitly support native customary rights to lands and livelihoods in Sarawak and elsewhere.

In thinking through this call and the ways it may materialize in reclaiming Indigenous lands, I first think back to the different ways Indigeneity is experienced in Sarawak. Therefore, I explore the significance of the positionality and the meanings of Indigeneity in Sarawak.

I describe the 'Indigeneity or the Local' in the Sarawak and Malaysian context, to further contemplate the relationship between broader Indigenous and decolonial literature and encounter, to focus on how Indigenous individuals from across the world interact with each other through scholarship: how we inhabit geographies and different configurations of time, and are not simply 'other' or 'alternative'. In doing so, I demonstrate that the ideas of Indigeneity are not entrenched in a specific way, including from a global North settler-colonial

perspective but rather also reflect global aspirations and movements to resist a particular type of 'modernity'¹⁴.

Through elucidating my personal narrative as a woman with native heritage in Sarawak, I situate my work in the erasures of Indigenous ontologies in the face of modernity, conservation, and the colonial traces through law and how they erase at different times. Similarly, one cannot think of Indigenous ontologies without invoking relations with more-than-humans and the environment. Hence, I further build on the understandings of the cultural/social landscape as previously described in Chapter 1, within the context of native customary lands (NCL) in Sarawak. As an object of analysis, native customary lands, and their corresponding relations to humans and more-than-humans, bring together a complex set of concerns: local (Indigenous) understandings of the environment, protocols and conventions for resource use, community histories and geography. I therefore highlight the particularities of NCL through invoking Indigeneity as a positionality, of which I cite mostly native Sarawakian and Malaysian academics as part of a decolonial citation praxis. From a political ecology framework, we understand how federal and state policies and laws have consequences on how native communities continue to navigate through differing powerful interests, including conservation interest, on their native customary lands (Figure 2).

¹⁴ Similarly with Bhambra (2014), I follow the theoretical distinction 'modernity/coloniality' as articulated by Anibal Quijano (2007) whereby the "coloniality of power, expressed through political and economic spheres, was associated with a coloniality of knowledge (or of imagination), articulated as modernity/rationality" (Bhambra, 2014. p. 117).



Figure 2: Harvesting wild ferns for the night's supper on native customary lands that are also orang utan conservation lands.

The common thread in the methodological consideration is that how do we reflect on ethnographic understandings of human-orang utan relations in a decolonial political ecology context. I bring into conversation, the challenges of writing this experience from a 'native geographer' perspective. Although at times, I feel that this identity at times is essentializing and that my identity/ "self"-hood is much more complex and fluid, acknowledging this messy vulnerability and reflexivity are a fundamental revelation of the process of this thesis. In doing so, I take the cue from fellow Indigenous scholars who state the importance of clarifying our positionality in our research (eg. Tuhiwai Smith, 2013) and to be aware of the problematic issues that may arise, including claiming to be the 'authentic native/local/Indigenous voice'.

3.2 Situating the 'Indigeneity' and 'Local' in the Sarawak context.

I first begin with understanding my ontological relation to place that informs my epistemology. In sharing my part of my lived experiences as a woman with dual heritage including native Bidayuh, I depict the nuances, complexities and gaps that many other native Sarawakians may experience in life. This specificity is not to be seen as limiting, but rather offers discerning insights to racial, gendered and class dynamics as part of my analytical lens. As part of a decolonial practice, I demonstrate that our social contexts inform how we understand, think and conceptualise the world, based upon our lived experiences.

In particularly understanding Indigeneity or Indigenous identity in the context of Sarawak, I take my cue from my Bidayuh father, who once remarked rather ironically, 'We never had to call ourselves Indigenous, until the land laws took away our native lands' (P. Rubis, pers. comms., 2014). Similarly to Moreton-Robinson (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 12) who writes about her understanding as an Indigenous woman in Australia, I am connected by descent, place, country and shared experiences, and these are learnt through 'obligation, shared experiences, reciprocity, co-existence, cooperation and social memory'. Identity, according to Hall (Hall et. al., 2017, p. 16) who was theorizing on black identity in Britain and Jamaica, is not a set of fixed attributes, but rather a constantly shifting process of positioning. Thusly, if viewed as a political concept, the term, 'Indigenous' could be viewed as shifting and elastic.

Prior to asserting Indigeneity particularly in the last couple of decades, my father taught me that we identify ourselves to the villages to where our parents, grandparents and ancestors were born, and with this, comes a life-time set of obligations, expectations and co-existence. My dad was born and raised in the

Krokong area, in his maternal village of Belimbin (Figure 3). His father was born and raised in a nearby village of Gumbang. To be Bidayuh and to not know where your parent's village is to akin to not knowing who you are or your roots, or both. 'This is how we know ourselves and others as Bidayuh or Orang Asal (Indigenous),' my father later explained. Later, I would further learn, that to be Bidayuh especially one who is mobile, was among other things, to maintain close relations with our relatives who continue to live in our ancestral lands. There is a sense of obligation, expectations and life-long cooperation that one holds, even if one leaves the village.

Therefore, to my father, these ideas of being Indigenous while seemingly in disjunction hold true. Identity is where our roots are, the part of us that remains essentially the same across time. We are Bidayuh from Krokong, with relations specifically from Belimbin and Gumbang villages. Identity is also a process of positioning to assert what was once ours.



Figure 3: My father, Dr. Patau Rubis, followed the footsteps of his father, my grandfather, to become a traditional Bidayuh priest. Here, he is being welcomed by the head priest, in a Bidayuh village of West Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo (June 2015).

To people outside our community, we are Orang Asal or Indigenous, and through asserting this Indigeneity, we remind them of our lost native customary lands turned into state lands, our customs and language reduced to tourist attractions and academic career pursuit. To describe one's being, or particularly Indigeneity, in the world is more than just observing exclusion/inclusion or majority/minority dichotomy.

My thinking on Indigeneity emerges from and tries to incorporate the seemingly contradictory spaces between my upbringing in Sarawak, the resulting experiences that have shaped me, my subsequent life as a professional conservation biologist in Sarawak and finally my euro-western postgraduate education. Growing up, to be a literate native in Sarawak meant reading colonial memoirs, re-published in the late 20th century and sold in Kuching bookstores for tourists, about the colonial imaginary (often patronizing or dismissive) of the native. When I started reading academic literature on the Bidayuh and Ibans, it further created a sense of cognitive dissonance of what I knew growing up and being exposed to my father's cultural traditions and stories, to what seemed to be the authoritative voice on how to be a proper native, or who was playing native in Southeast Asia, as argued by non-native academics, including migrant and diaspora Southeast Asian academics based in the West.

Particularly in conservation literature, rural native people of Borneo are often written off as 'unruly', and represent a constant threat to nature and wildlife, and thus have to be managed in different ways (see Bennett *et al.*, 2000; Bennett & Gumal, 2001). I do not assume to have more of an authoritative voice about my people, or other native peoples in Sarawak, or my thesis topics by virtue of my professional experience. But rather, my position as a PhD researcher allows me to

question many of the assumptions normally taken while doing ethnographic work. In reflecting on her decolonizing-self journey, Wane (2008, p. 193) reflects that ‘academic practices take place within the context of a history of colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonial, post-colonial and anti-colonial conditionalities.’ Wane (ibid., p. 193) further asks, ‘as a scholar, how do I disrupt this agenda in a constructive and meaningful way?’ With this scholarly disruption in mind, I am disinvested in colonial and post-colonial scholarly work by anthropologists and other researchers who have described native peoples, environments and animals in Sarawak for decades¹⁵. Instead, I am interested in native Southeast Asian, Indigenous and Black literature that focuses on shared experiences of the following: of politics of dispossession, of countries’ histories of colonisations, of lack of epistemic authority within the academy, of continued denial of land sovereignties, and also of non-dominant ontologies, epistemologies and relationalities with land, nature, spirits and more-than-human beings. While not denying the vast diversity and incommensurability of these distinct concrete experiences, it is with reading these shared knowledges and experiences within hierarchical relations of ruling and power converging and operationalising that I begin to understand my own standpoint and ways of knowing as a Bidayuh-Filipino woman and now, PhD researcher (re)tracing my steps back into conservation fieldwork.

Hall (2017, p. 58) describes how the ‘larger social tensions of the nation [are] displaced onto, and re-enacted in, the ‘little theatre’ of family life’. I therefore briefly describe part of my childhood as to detail deeply contradictory aspirations and identifications as a native/Indigenous woman (of Bidayuh and Tagalog dual

¹⁵ However, it should be noted that their research have consequential outcomes in setting dominant discourses (for example of such work in Sarawak, see L. Chua, 2012; Couderc & Sillander, 2012; Harris, 2002; Padoch, 2012; Parreñas, 2018; Sather, 2012).

heritage) in Sarawak. I grew up in post-colonial Kuching in the late 1970s and 1980s, where nature, spirits and disappointment were matter-of-fact. My parents had returned from Canada in the mid-1970s with my sister, as my father knew his (and my mother's by marital default) future was in Sarawak. I, along with my siblings, were born and raised in Kuching, Sarawak and during our childhood, we travelled to my father's village and lands (but not enough, according to our relatives). We were also viewed primarily by others as Bidayuh (but not enough, according to our relatives), as per traditional convention of children following the father's ethnicity.

My father was the second Bidayuh ever at that time, to be trained as a medical practitioner, and his hard work earned him a position as the Assistant Director of the Sarawak General Hospital. My siblings and I were raised as the emergent middle-class, the first generation in both our parents' families, with parental hopes that we would become fluently literate in English and obtain a formal western education one day, as part of the generational journey for a 'better life'. This was not uncommon for many Malaysians or similarly anyone else in a once-colonized country now living in the post-colonial era who viewed a western university education as the key to greater economic advantages, political power and self-advancement.

At that time, it seemed that we were the only Bidayuh middle-class family in Kuching. My father entered politics and soon became the Assistant Minister in the Sarawak Government Cabinet. My family were rising relatively quickly in the emergent social middle-class of Kuching but without the usual accumulation of generational wealth due to political and elite connections. My father returned home to his village which was a couple of hours drive from the town, and brought us as

well so we could swim in the same rivers as he did, and understood his childhood and upbringing better. He had his Bidayuh nature-based rituals at home where he would not answer our inquisitive questions – ‘to ask directly about what rituals mean’, he scolded to me once, ‘is to be rude and disrespectful’. One instead had to learn by observing their elders for that was the right way, as he further explained. This experience in turn, also shaped the way I conducted ethnography, of which I describe further in the following chapter.

My parents maintained separate diets -- he stuck to his traditional diet of *kasam* - of preserved pork and fish he prepared, thickly coating the olfactory senses so much so that one was left with the lingering scent of *kasam* if they were in the kitchen for a certain amount of time - and local fresh vegetables, *umai*, that he grew in our garden. It was only later in my adulthood that I began to appreciate food from my paternal heritage, having rejected it in my childhood for more ‘modern’ foods that everyone in town was eating, like deep-fried spam or canned corn beef from China or Brazil. He also adhered to the overriding, singular ideology of development which still prevails in today’s nationhood politics, that is to bring roads, infrastructure and economic opportunities for those living in the peri-urban and rural areas, is to bring them ‘modernization’. To this day, even after his death, he is remembered fondly by many Bidayuh communities of his and my generations, for his role in bringing economic advancement to the area.

For my siblings and myself, others constantly reminded us in little ways, that we did not really belong in the small town of Kuching. We did not share these encounters as to commiserate amongst ourselves as we recognized that we lived and continue to live a relatively more comfortable life than our rural cousins but rather we brought them up as amusing childhood stories when we grew older. Only

in hindsight, did I realize we shared common experiences. I remember encountering many at times casual racism from the Chinese folk in Kuching who questioned with passive actions, my right to move around in middle class urban spaces. Growing up, I remember the words, 'native' and 'Dayak' (which used to only refer to Ibans and Bidayuhs, and is now being collectively used to refer to all native peoples in Sarawak and Sabah) being used as a pejorative term to describe those who chose to live in the kampung (village). The term, Dayak (and subsequently, native or Indigenous), had not yet become a positive or favourable term to be identified with, or for collective political organization against the state's policies on native customary lands - although this perception had started shifting in the 1990s through organized native protests against logging, and onwards to the present-day. Identity politics as initially coined by Crenshaw (1990), is not a presumption that one's identity is shaped by one's politics, but rather one's perceived identity shapes how one experiences and navigates power. For example, I was often asked by my Chinese friends, 'you are Bidayuh but why are you different from the rest back in the kampung'. This was a line of questioning that I had felt shamed by on many levels but did not understand until many decades later why I had felt shame instead of the presumed pride. The memories of being told that I was only in the (hard to get into) Science stream in secondary school because of my native heritage (e.g. fulfilling the racial quota), still frustrate me, including my own guilt and shame for disassociating with forms of nativeness that I had at that time found undesirable.

The main social divisions of class, race and gender in Sarawak inherited from the British colonial system, still marks us in mutually reinforcing and destabilizing ways that tell us who we are supposed to be, and to feel ashamed and guilty while navigating through ingrained stereotypes. I was often told especially by non-native

Sarawakians that I was the 'right kind of native', that is, to be held as a shining example in contrast to my cousins and other Bidayuhs living in the kampung. In their eyes, I had no real grounds to complain, and therefore, I should be grateful for my opportunities.

Hall (2017, p. 24) describes the post-colonial as 'not just a matter of the passage of time' but also,

'one configuration of power, institutions and discourses, which once defined the social field, has been replaced by another. The old has indeed radically changed its form. However, the old has not been transcended. We continue to stand in its shadow. In the case of the colonial and the post-colonial, what we are dealing with is not two successive regimes but the simultaneous presence of a regime and its after-effects. Colonialism persists, despite the cluster of illusory appearances to the contrary' (ibid, p. 24).

As such, to live in expressed ideas of 'being native' in Sarawak especially in the 1980s and 1990s was seen to be in contrast with modernity¹⁶, and to embody resist development. This was particularly marked by the rising of several rural native communities in Sarawak at that time, to protest against state-sanctioned logging in their native customary lands.

Living in Kuching, and buffered from social realities in rural landscapes, I was only able to learn about these protests through the narrow gaze lenses of the state media. As a teenager, I could not understand why my peers were not as invested as I was, in the logging and protest developments that was happening in

¹⁶ Modernity as a 'normative ideal and concept', including a movement from agrarian-based society to market economy and capitalism, industrialization, secularization, urbanization and creation of a nation-state, representative democracy among others' (see Foucault, 1977, 170-177).

our state. In the early 1990s, a decision was made to build the first mega-dam in Sarawak, what would be Southeast Asia's largest dam, in the Bakun area. About 10,000 native people were displaced and relocated to a longhouse settlement called Sungai Asap. I created a scrapbook of media articles on protests and controversial development projects as part of my school assignment. I was the only one in my class it seemed, who was so invested in these protests that I turned it into a school project. I could not explain to myself either why I was so interested, including reading and saving clippings of then (and now) the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohammad, standing up to the West and becoming at that time, one of the more vocal Global South leaders speaking up in the 1980s and 1990s. I followed these developments closely and it became a part of my learning processes that I couldn't otherwise obtain in conventional Malaysian public schooling. All of these experiences have therefore shaped my ways of thinking and understanding of the natural resources management/exploitation debate and its geopolitics.

Heading towards the present, I have found my Indigeneity challenged in the academy in subtle yet aggressive ways. Questions such as, 'but where did you grow up, where did you study English, if her mother is Filipino, how can she be native,' were often asked as to invalidate my nativeness and therefore, my research, and re-assert their own academic authority onto Sarawak's natives peoples or the idea of Indigeneity. As someone with dual heritage (of both heritages considered as socio-political and economical minorities¹⁷, in Malaysia), I am reminded of Gloria Anzaldúa's (2012) writings on her consciousness of being a mestiza, a consciousness of the borderlands. She argues that this is a very complex and painful

¹⁷ Being Filipino through shared heritage meant being the recipient at-times for disparaging jokes about being the 'maid' or 'domestic worker/lounge singer' and 'illegal immigrant' from middle-class Chinese- and Eurasian- Malaysians.

identity (on the borders) that 'results in mental and emotional states of perplexity, ... the coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference causes un choque, a cultural collision' (Anzaldúa, 2012). Whilst this 'borderlands' position may be problematic at times, it also opened up possibilities and an ability to shift into different modes of identity. I was able to embrace the complexities of being and not being 'native' whilst doing ethnography with my interlocutors, which meant they could, at times, forgive me for my research transgressions, when I was a little too inquisitive than a native person should be.

My experiences as growing up in the emergent native middle-class in the 1980s were not uncommon. The recently retired Chief Justice of Malaysia, Richard Malanjum, has suggested in an article published by the Borneo Post, that the word, 'native' should be replaced with the 'United Nations term of original peoples or Indigenous' in the legislature because the word, 'native has a negative connotation' whereby the community was judged as 'undeveloped and outdated' ('Change "native" to "indigenous" – Judge', 2013). He therefore suggested that replacing 'native' with 'Indigenous' would 'change the public perception of the community' (ibid., 2013).

To be remain native is therefore considered problematic. To be seen as Indigenous was to be more contemporary and dynamic, and aligned with other Indigenous struggles around the world, particularly in the global North. Feiring (2000, p. 29) puts forward the construction of Indigeneity as a 'fundamental negation of the western self-construction' that takes different meanings on different platforms, whether international, regional or local. Within international arenas, Indigeneity may refer to romanticized euro-western ideas or myths detached from social realities, whereas in local arenas, Indigenous peoples remain disempowered

and detached from political reality and discourses (Wane, 2008). This argument acknowledges the performative role of advancing for Indigenous recognition particularly on the local level, and the marginalization of many other native voices in expense for more politically dominant native groups. The diverse historical settings and many centuries of fluid migration of many societies around the world inevitably make it difficult to come up with a uniform description for Indigeneity in the present day and therefore it is rightfully contested on by many critical Indigenous scholars themselves. Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate professor, Kim TallBear (2007) has pointed to the ways that the term can be overly generative and therefore invisibilizing, and yet she and other Indigenous scholars also note the ways in which it provides a mechanism for collective critique and activism against an ethno-nationalist or ethno-religious state with their own intentions for native customary lands. There is therefore no single consensus on this issue and every concept that travels, has its problems.

Emphasizing Indigeneity is to also signal a transnational political identity (recognized in international legal frameworks) that is independent of claims to belonging based on singular ethnicities or colonial states. This term is used more frequently in South and Central America (and now in Australia and New Zealand), and centres a politics of Indigenous identity and Indigeneous cultural action (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013, p. 146). This privileging of Indigenous voices which counters the negative connotations of its meaning in global south countries, where it has become synonymous with the 'primitive', or with backwardness, helps provide a basis for a conceptualism of Indigenism that is grounded with alternative conceptions of world views and value systems.

For many native activists in Malaysian Borneo aligning with the particular term, Indigenous, using the definition as recognised in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)¹⁸ and other international instruments, means being able to invoke free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) to any activities that may affect them or their territories. The current state receptiveness for the term 'Indigenous', in Malaysia has its roots in the twenty years of discourse led by native activists and Indigenous movements working closely with regional and international networks to resist existing ethno-nationalisms. The current Chief Minister of the neighbouring Malaysian Borneo state of Sabah, is making similar calls for a study to replace 'native' with 'Indigenous' as to align with the United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) ('Chief Justice calls for govt audit on rights of indigenous people', 2019). The term, Dayak or native/Indigenous has acquired its positive contemporary associations, and profoundly transformed the possibilities for desired existence.

To trace back the term 'native' itself and how it was first introduced in Sarawak, we have to look back in the British colonial history that still determines the present and organizes our contemporary post-colonial world. The very concept of race, and the legal category of 'Malay' (that currently politically dominate in Malaysia, over all other non-Muslim native groups and non-native groups) date back to the colonial era and they remain inextricably linked together by way of state law (Moustafa, 2018). In Sarawak, on February 2, 1842, the ruling white Rajah Brooke promulgated in a Code of Law, clause 275, a reference made to the Dayak and 'Dayak tribes', presumably referring to all Indigenous tribes/groups as opposed

¹⁸ Malaysia is a signatory of UNDRIP that was adopted in 2007. The UNDRIP and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 1989 ('ILO 169') are specific and mutually reinforcing instruments which now provide the framework for the universal protection of Indigenous and tribal peoples' rights. However the ILO 169 is not widely ratified.

to the Malay or the Chinese (Fong, 2011). The earliest statutory definition for 'Native' as stated in the Rajah Order No. VIII, 1920 (1920 Land Order) states the following: 'A Native means a natural born subject of His Highness the Rajah' (ibid, 2011). The definition of 'Native' was then modified in 1931 when the British introduced the Land Ordinance. Under the ordinance, natives were defined as people encompassing the Malay Archipelago or natural born subjects of any race of His Highness the Rajah. The making of state land (and subsequently, of who was deemed native) was a significant epistemological event of which colonial order was defined in Sarawak and nearby British colonies.

In present day, the post-colonial Federal Constitution of Malaysia further highlights a more definite definition of 'Native' in relation to Sarawak. According to Article 161A (6) (a), the 'Native' of Sarawak is a person who is a citizen and either belongs to one of the races specified in Clause (7), deemed as Indigenous to the State or is of mixed blood derived exclusively from those races (SUHAKAM, 2012). Article 161A(7) of the Federal Constitution of Malaysia and Section 3 of the Sarawak Interpretation Ordinance (Cap.1 1958 Ed.), further highlights the races in Sarawak that are to be considered as Indigenous. The races to be treated for the purpose of the definition of 'Native' in Clause (6) as Indigenous to Sarawak are the Bukitans, Bisayahs, Dusuns, Sea Dayaks (Ibans), Land Dayaks (Bidayuhs), Kadayans, Kalabits, Kayans, Kenyahs (including Sabups and Sipengs), Kajangs (including Sekapans, Kejamans, Lahanans, Punans, Tanjongs and Kanowits), Lugats, Lisums, Malays, Melanaus, Muruts, Penans, Sians, Tagals, Tabuns and Ukits' .

The Malay term, 'bumiputera' is often used interchangeably with 'native' in Malaysia, yet is politically charged and controversial, and further renders the Orang Asli (Aborigines) of West Malaysia and the natives of Sabah and Sarawak invisible under the

umbrella term of ‘sons of the soil’ of which the Malay communities of West Malaysia are included and their elite continue to predominate in politics, national economy and federal governance in the post-colonial order¹⁹. The bumiputera term as stated in Article 161A(7) of the Federal Constitution, originates from British colonial rule in the 19th and 20th centuries, in which it refer to the non-Malay natives (the Iban and Bidayuh) during the era of the Rajahs. During the post-colonial period, this term has evolved as a collective descriptor for other non-Muslim native groups including the Orang Ulu and others (Mason & Jawan, 2003).

To differ from the Muslim²⁰ Malays who hold collective political and cultural power, the colonial term, ‘Dayak’ has grown in popularity over the recent decades and refers to the non-Malay natives of Sarawak. While some scholars (Nelson, Muhammed, & Rashid, 2016) note the term Dayak being used to refer to Iban and Bidayuh only, and other native groups are called Penan or Orang Ulu, I have noticed in recent years, native activists from both Sarawak and Sabah, embracing the term, Dayak, to invoke transboundary native solidarity with other native groups from Indonesian Borneo (see Samad, 2019) and to reclaim native customary law.

3.3 Positionality, Indigeneity in Sarawak politics and meanings of Indigeneity in Sarawak and Malaysia.

Indigeneity is defined, fitted into a framework, written down in registers, numbered, testified to, labelled, and outlined in Schedules and Ordinances. These rigid processes in turn are antithetical to how Indigenous individuals and communities relate to each other and to land, waterways, atmospheres, more-than-humans and spirit agencies.

¹⁹ Since independence from the British, race has provided the organizing logic of political life in West Malaysia which then sets the racial tone for the Bornean states of Sarawak and Sabah.

²⁰ In a broader political sense, Islam has been instrumentalized for Malay dominance in Malaysia.

In short, relations matter than individualistic identity. In understanding human-orang utan relations as a framework, I first set the scene on why emphasizing Indigeneity as a positionality is important to maintain relations to lands, and as consequence, more-than-humans and other co-constituents.

Firstly, I am concerned for Indigenous or native voices being absorbed as ‘data’ or ‘evidence’, or for Indigeneity to be theorized (and subsequently, dismissed) to death, rather being viewed as legitimate modes of theory or as challenges to the conceptual assumptions that drives research. With this in mind, I continue to use the term, Indigeneity and Indigenous or orang asal (native) with great care, because it is used by the native activists and communities with whom I respect greatly, work and think with, and who in turn, consider me through my native relations to place. For the sake of organization of this thesis, I use the terms, ‘Indigenous’ and ‘native’ interchangeably to describe the communities I have collaborated with for this research, and to describe my heritage.

For the sake of thesis convention, I follow the United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) working definition of the word, ‘Indigenous’ to refer to:

‘communities, peoples and nations’ who have a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system’ (United Nations Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2004, p. 2).

This concept of Indigenous was put forward as early as 1986, by Special Rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo²¹, and was endorsed by the Working Group on Indigenous Populations/Peoples (WGIP²²) to define Indigenous Peoples around the world. In the context of Indigeneity as positionality, the final criterion of the UNPFII working definition of Indigenous is also key:

‘the determination to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories; underlying this determination is a special relationship and an umbilical connection with their land. For many of these groups, the land is more than just a habitat or a political boundary; it is the basis of their social organization, economic system and cultural identification’ (United Nations Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2004, p. 2).

I now turn to the Malaysian courts because more than any other political forum, the courts have shaped the Indigeneity discourse in public consciousness in Sarawak and rest of Malaysia. This UNPFII criterion was recognized by the Malaysian High Court (Kuala Lumpur) in the case of *Kajing Tubek v Ekran Bhd.* [1996] 2MLJ 288. The plaintiffs had asserted that their special relationship to the land, of which the land and forest were not just a source of livelihood but constitute life itself, fundamental to their social, cultural and spiritual survival as native peoples, and therefore they would suffer more greatly and directly, as being natives of the affected area planned for a hydroelectric dam project in Bakun, Sarawak, than any other members of the public. This

²¹ See Jose R. Martinez Cobo, “Final Report: Study on The Problem of Discrimination Against Indigenous Populations”, Vol V at 29, UN Doc E/CN.4/Sub.2. UN Sales No. E 86.XIV3 (1986).

²² The WGIP established in 1982, was proposed by the sub-commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in its Resolution 2 (XXXIV) of September 8, 1981. This resolution was endorsed by the Commission on Human Rights in its Resolution 1982/19, March 10 1982, and authorized by ECOSOC in its resolution 1982/34 of May 1982.

was considered by the court as sufficient to justify a declaration of their legal position and that they had a substantial or genuine interest²³ (Bulan, 1998).

Similarly, in another landmark legal case of *Adong bin Kuwau & Ors v Kerajaan Negeri Johor & Anor*, the High Court ruled that Malaysian jurisprudence recognized native customary rights of Orang Asli plaintiffs. The recognition of land ownership is also reflected in specific legislation that provides land reserves for Indigenous groups (Bulan, 1998). The concept has been upheld in subsequent High Court, Court of Appeal, and Federal Court judgments. For instance, in May 2001, Justice Ian Chin handed down a landmark decision in *Nor Anak Nyawai and ors v Borneo Pulp Plantation Sdn Bhd and ors* that affirmed native customary law and practices associated with creation of *pemakai menoa* (territorial domain of a longhouse community, where customary rights to land resource were created by pioneering ancestors) and *pulau galau* (communal forest reserve of primary forest maintained under Iban custom, from which the people derive food, medicines and other produce) has force of law. As such *pemakai menoa* and *pulau galau* are part and parcel of native customary rights within the meaning of the Sarawak Land Code and any other written laws for the time being in force in Sarawak (e.g. see court judgment written by Chin, 2001).

Therefore, the emphasis on claiming Indigeneity is significant because it forms the nation-state rationale for certain basic rights for rights to ancestral lands, and some rights to continue native customary orders and rules, through relations with lands and waterways. More importantly, in an increasingly ethnocentric Malaysian state that favours Muslim Malay political elite, these court cases involving the plight of non-Muslim natives and their tenuous relations to native customary lands, cast a public legal eye towards a host of economic and political grievances.

²³ Sadly, on appeal of the judgement, it was held that though the Bakun project would deprive the natives of their livelihood and their way of life, the construction of the dam was done in accordance with the law, and therefore, no remedy was available.

The native system of customary land tenure is based on adat where rights to land descend from the ancestor, sometimes several generations back, to the family that first farmed the land. Within Sarawak, the term adat is used to describe this body of customary rules or laws; whereas ‘native customary law’ or ‘native customary rights’ is the English equivalent. Where these rights relate to land, the expression ordinarily used is either ‘native customary tenure’ or ‘native customary rights over land.’ Native customary rights (NCR) encompass land cultivation, burial and ceremonial purposes, harvesting jungle produce and inheritance and transfer. This system of land tenure existed prior to the first White Rajah’s (James Brooke) arrival in Sarawak in 1841. According to NCR, the clearing and cultivation of virgin forests confers permanent rights for the original farmer. It should be noted that the adat perspective always exists in tension with kinship understandings over land ownership, which is often at times, exploited by companies and powerfully-aligned individuals interested in procuring native customary land for logging or plantations. Fluctuating alliances of inter-community relations and crosscutting wider kin networks play a significant role in determining certain outcomes of adat around land. While adat may at times obscure, rather than illuminate its political conditions, it is nevertheless important to think along how the laws and court judgments are created around adat as these outcomes are very real in the material sense, and destabilizing to land and more-than-humans relations for many rural native communities.

These rights are upheld to some extent for the native peoples in Sabah and Sarawak where the law gives partial recognition to native claims over ancestral lands: e.g. Land Code 1958 in sections 2, 5, 15 and 41 and the Land Ordinance in sections 15, 78 and 79 provide for ‘Native Customary Land’ (NCL) and ‘Native Area Land’ (NAL). NCL is held under customary land tenure, while NAL is held under a registered title.

However, in spite of the many rulings in favour of native plaintiffs who have turned to the nation's courts to plead for judicial intervention, these partial native rights are constantly being contested and diluted in several ways by the federal and state governments' continued adversarial approach to native land issues. For example, temuda (cultivated or farmed land; Figure 4) are recognized as NCR land yet other forms of pemakai menoa including pulau galau are not recognized. Instead, since the 1980s, state licenses were issued in large numbers to timber companies to extract logs within pemakai menoa and pulau galau. Provisional leases over these native lands were also issued to plantation companies. Sarawak's legacy of laws and policies relating to native customary land has steadily eroded the rights of Indigenous people and, subsequently, their adat over land.



Figure 4: Temuda of pepper crops, Batang Ai.

This act is what Peluso and Vandergeest (2001) refers to as 'territorialisation' of Southeast Asian forests, upon which control from a decentralised system of community-based management is transferred to a centralised state control through legislation, use of

mapping and other technologies. Under the premise of ‘politics of development’, numerous amendments to the Sarawak Land Code of 1958 provide power to the Minister in charge of land affairs to extinguish NCR to land. The restricted concept of NCR has made it difficult to assert Indigenous rights under the Land Code since 1958. In other words, if the native customary land was not cultivated before 1958, these lands are under dispute and are assumed to belong to the state.

The government asserts that Native Customary Land (NCL) is restricted to cultivated areas, excluding forested and fallow areas that are part of the shifting cultivation cycle. Further, the government does not recognize NCR on any land that is not continuously cultivated. This effectively locks Indigenous communities onto poor tropical soils with depleted nutrients. The colonial view that native forms of agriculture and resource management are unruly and haphazard, and therefore not regarded as a viable system is still upheld by present-day administrators in Malaysian Borneo (Doolittle, 2007). In the neighbouring island of Sulawesi, Li further points out the necessary changes that native communities have to adjust to such as land availability and agrarian change brought by agrarian capitalism, with its disruptive social relations that accompany market demands (Li, 2014) .

During my fieldwork, Apai²⁴ had remarked to me in passing, that ‘the land is too old,’ (Apai, pers. comms. 2 December 2015). Apai was referring to land that had been re-cultivated too often, for rice planting. In Batang Ai where my study took place, longhouse communities are discouraged from opening up new farmlands beyond what is already cultivated. However, the requirements of forest-fallow farming system is such that the average fallow period in Sarawak is in the region of 10-15 years (Hatch, 1982, p. 65). On this basis, a family could not possibly survive on only three acres of land

²⁴ Apai was one of my closest interlocutor and who is part of an Iban community that I had lived with, who I describe further in my empirical chapters/papers. Apai means ‘Father’ in Iban, and he had ‘adopted’ me as his daughter whilst I was doing research for my thesis.

(Ngidang, 2005). The continued use by the federal and state government and private companies of large tracts of native customary lands for plantations and other projects continues to be highly controversial, despite theoretical legal protections and recent court victories (Minority Rights Group International, 2018). Over the decades, there have been many direct violent conflicts over disputes over land encroachment by companies, leading to deaths²⁵.

Whilst it is held in popular sentiment that the colonial Brooke period recognised all forms of native lands, including pemakai menoa and pulau galau as customary lands, it was recently ruled in the Federal Court, on Dec 20th, 2016 that the state land code, Tusun Tunggu (Codified Customary Laws), Iban Adat 1993 and a number of (the colonial period) Rajah's Orders only recognised temuda as NCR land (Ling, 2017). This legal ruling continues to complicate land claims, and undermine oral histories, land relations and adat. This ruling was in disagreement with other rulings from the High Court and Court of Appeal, which ruled pulau galau and pemakai menoa as native customary law that had recognition in law under Article 160 (a) of the Federal Constitution.

Further, pemakai menoa and pulau galau as a pre-existing right that is 'well-embodied and an integral part of native customary law and practice since time immemorial, prior to arrival of any European in Borneo and the enforceability thereof never been abrogated or abolished by any written laws', have been asserted by native activists in various forms over the decades, including in a recent native customary law conference held in Sept 2017 ('Indigenous customary laws conference Sept 30-Oct 1.', 2017). The Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM) that was established

²⁵ For instance: Dec 24th, 1997: the shooting of village headman, Bangsa anak Andom in Bakong, Baram; Sept 1st, 1999: four murders in Ulu Niah; Feb 14th 2011: attack on Minggat anak Nyakin and his son by loggers; June 21st 2016: shooting of NCR land activist, Bill Kayong in Miri, are some of the examples of NCR land cases in Sarawak that had turned violent.

by the Malaysian Parliament under the Human Rights Commission Act 1999, Act 597, also came up with proposals in the National Inquiry Report on Indigenous Land Rights in 2013, which have yet to be implemented (Y. S. Chua, 2016).

Invoking Indigeneity is part of a diverse set of political strategies for contesting the unjust state displacement from native customary lands. This lies in tandem with stricter legal definition of what it means to be 'native' in Sarawak, where the Superintendent of Land and Survey department can determine based on the Interpretation Ordinance on the definition of 'native' as to matters of claiming native customary land. Firstly, those declared as native must have their ethnic grouping listed appropriately in the Federal Constitution and Sarawak Interpretation Ordinance 1958, where colonial names like Sea Dayak (Iban) and Land Dayak (Bidayuh) still exist (this has since been updated in the Sarawak Interpretation Ordinance 2005). Natives of dual heritage where one parent is non-native have to apply for native status with the Native Court and the State Secretary's Office, while providing sufficient evidence that they are maintaining close and regular contact with the village community. Many do not bother apply for native status through the limitations of the law unless they need to acquire rights to native land or Native Customary Rights land, or if they need to apply to local institutions of higher learning of which the native status matters in terms of acceptance and funding. They, like myself, prefer instead to acquiesce to their/our families, extended relatives and community's acceptance of who we are and what we mean to the local community and our corresponding responsibilities and expectations. This in turn, reminds me to look beyond the limitations of law, restrictive race and biology identification, and academic 'debates' to understand Indigeneity and land relations, and instead pivot towards native community affiliation and kinship, and corresponding Indigenous-environment and more-than-human relations, to learn what it truly means to be native.

The journey to be forward with the blurring of the boundaries between what is seen as conventional or personal, to demonstrate the hybridity of reflection and methodological approaches, was initially difficult. However, in doing so, it made me reflect what ‘decolonisation’ would mean to me, in terms of academic writing. The process should never be comfortable. In doing so, this chapter builds my thesis in contributing to a decolonising political ecology, and this merging and shifting of personal disclosures, literature review and field observations, is a vital part of this. Having set the methodological scene in place, I now turn to describing the study site and research methods in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER 4

Methodology

This section introduces the land (site) and the emerging relationships I have with the land, people and more-than-humans, and elaborates on my positionality, the emergence of the kin-study, and role of place and relationships as I work towards a decolonising approach to my work.

4.1 Introducing place (site).

In considering where I wanted to learn from for the basis of my research, I first reflected upon my work experience²⁶ of working in the Batang Ai-Lanjak-Entimau complex during 2004-2007, as a conservation biologist for WCS-Sarawak Forestry Corporation (SFC) and U.S. Fish & Wildlife (USFW) funded project, “Setting Priorities for Orang Utan Conservation in Sarawak: Assessing Status and Threats.” This field project was initially supported by the Orang Utan Foundation UK. Much of my reflections for this thesis are derived from my previous experience as a conservationist, and my regret with how we continue to treat Indigenous knowledges and stories as inferior in matters of science and, more importantly, of relational ethical care and belonging in Sarawak. In reflecting part of my life-story as a conservationist for this thesis, I follow Wright et al. (2012, p. 57) who offers the idea of ‘storytelling as a methodology, as a way to think differently about the complex dynamics that inform our research. Such reflexivity is transformative, and has ethical dimensions’ (ibid., 57). In other words, I want to think more about how I have been participant in, and subject to

²⁶ As a trained conservation biologist and Indigenous land rights activist, I have in total, over 12 years of conservation and Indigenous customary rights experience in Sarawak, Sabah (Malaysian Borneo) and Central Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo).

sites of social struggle within the control thesis of conservation, and how they have shaped my experience and of the rural communities' that I have worked closely with.

In conventional conservation scholarship, Borneo island (of which Sarawak is part of) is considered as an important ecological 'case study' to describe post-colonial ecological devastation over the past several decades and the marginalization of native communities. In the following paragraph, I describe how the overall land (Sarawak) is considered as it helps shape the dominant imaginary of how these lands and atmospheres are understood and then studied.

Sarawak has been going through several decades of rapidly increasing environmental stress, mostly through intensive rural development that features logging and large-cash cropping estates, and of climatic stress such as the El Nino events of 1991-1995; 1997-1998; and 2006-2007 (Curran et al., 1999; De Koninck, Bernard, & Bissonnette, 2014; Gaveau et al., 2014). About 3% of Sarawak's land area (124,450km²) remains covered by intact forests in protected areas whilst much of Sarawak has been heavily logged or cleared for timber or oil palm production (Yong et. al., 2014). Sarawak has one million ha of land under oil palm and the state government had planned to double the area to two million ha in 2015 (Yong et al., 2014). In the year 2017, there were 940,266 hectares of palm oil certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and 245,413 hectares certified by the Malaysian Palm Oil Certification (MSPO). However, as I have explained in earlier and later sections of this thesis, I have my own personal reasons, and relations to consider Sarawak and Batang Ai as my 'site'. In other words, the land is beyond a 'research site' to be studied, or rather the land/place had 'selected' me, through sense of obligation and reciprocal relations with place, to learn from and as a call to action (as per Larsen & Johnson, 2017).

I conducted most of my fieldwork in three Iban communities (Nanga S.; Nanga J. and Rumah M.) at the southwestern tip of the Batang Ai - Lanjak-Entimau complex, located in southwest Sarawak (Figure 5 and Figure 6). In Batang Ai national park, a high proportion of the forest is old secondary forest due to previous clearing for shifting cultivation. Interspersed in this matrix, are smaller areas of abandoned rubber gardens. Throughout the complex, the terrain is very steep with an altitude range of 100 to 760m. The complex has various points of access through several rivers by outboard-powered longboats. The tributaries and headwaters of the Batang Ai river form part of the water catchment of a man-made lake, formed by the Batang Ai hydro-electric dam, located outside the park. The closest rural towns for the several entry points are about 300km distance by road from Kuching, the capital city of Sarawak. The journey takes about four to five hours by road, and the remaining boat journey to the Batang Ai longhouses vary depending on the condition of the river. During dry periods, the water level in the rivers may become quite low and people have to push their longboat upstream.

Under the Sarawak National Parks and Nature Reserves Ordinance, Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary (about 1688 sq. km in area) was gazetted in 1983, and Batang Ai National Park (about 270 sq. km in area) in 1991 respectively. Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary Batang Ai National Park is said to be unusual in the sense that people continue to live in it, and have limited rights. Since the gazetting of the complex, seven communities in Batang Ai and 35 communities in Lubok Antu have restricted privileges to hunt, fish and gather jungle produce in the area for their own personal consumption and are not allowed to sell. Activities in the park are limited to farming of previously cultivated areas and gathering of forest goods. In return, the communities are said to ‘benefit’ from employment (e.g. game wardens and park

rangers) in the park, and have formed their own cooperatives (eg. Kooperasi Serbaguna Ulu Batang Ai) that provide transport, accommodation and guiding for visitors. The complex is also part of the Malaysian-Indonesian trans-frontier protected area since the year 1994, as it shares a common border with Betung Kerihun (Bentuang Karimun) Nature Reserve in Indonesia. Together, they form one of the largest trans-boundary protected area in the wet tropics (Hazebroek and Morshidi, 2006). The area comprises nearly 1 million ha (10,000 sq. km) of hilly dipterocarp forests and are considered an important habitat for the Bornean orang utan, the *Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus*.

Batang Ai is one of the few areas in Borneo or Sumatra where visitors may have a good chance in viewing truly wild orang utans, thus it has become a favourable tourism destination for many who are interested in this species. Chances to encounter the orang utan are high when there is high-fruiting season of the favoured fruit trees. The orang utans in Batang Ai have generally never been hunted as aggressively in perhaps other orang utan habitats, thus the local population is not easily alarmed, and in some cases, have adapted well to living near longhouse communities. Tourism development in the area include a Hilton hotel that was built by the shores of the lake and provide high-end international-standard hotel facilities with air conditioning, a swimming pool and television. Many however prefer staying at longhouses. Two longhouses, Nanga Sumpa and Tibu have nearby visitor lodges run by the local residents in cooperation with the tour operator Borneo Adventure.

Besides the orang utan, other significant important (to conservation) mammals and birds that are also found in the Batang Ai-Lanjak Entimau complex include at least seven hornbill species, including the rhinoceros hornbill (*Buceros rhinoceros*) and the helmeted hornbill (*Buceros vigil*), the very elusive clouded leopard (*Neofelis nebulosa*), sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*) and the giant squirrel (*Ratufa affinis*).

Nearly 30 Iban communities within and near the complex have been documented in existence for over 400 years, and today, the complex is considered ecologically important by the conservation community because it contains the only population of orang utans (*Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus*) remaining in Sarawak (Figure 5). Prior to the gazettement of the complex, the Iban communities had fully exercised their native customary rights in the area, without much interruption by the state. During my previous fieldwork in the complex in the mid-2000s, four orang utan corpses that were shot to death were discovered in one year alone (2004), sparking a response by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to focus on working with the local communities through (re)education programmes of perceived lost cultural protocols that include a general taboo on hunting orang utans. Ever since, it has been taken for granted by policy-makers and conservation NGOs in the state that the fault remains on the local community level, and as such, conservation policies and initiatives have followed this lead. Many communities previously living within or near the complex were displaced several decades ago during the gazetting of the protected area, lost most of their rights-to-access to the complex, and were encouraged to participate in the government oil palm schemes in nearby rural towns. This represents a common theme throughout Sarawak, and many tropical countries.

In thinking through land relations and broader contextual struggles through material realization, it is worth noting federal-state tensions that are reflected through national commitments to international treaties and the state's constitutional right to transform its land. From a global perspective, Malaysia has demonstrated its conservation commitment by endorsing 33 forestry-related international treaties, including the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD), the Kyoto Protocol, the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Agreement on Conservation of Nature

and Natural Resources. Likewise, the orang utan population in the Batang-Ai Lanjak Entimau complex has often been publicly lauded by Sarawak state authorities as evidence for their long-standing commitment to conservation whilst maintaining the argument that they have a moral imperative to develop the rest of the state land, which includes contested native customary territories.

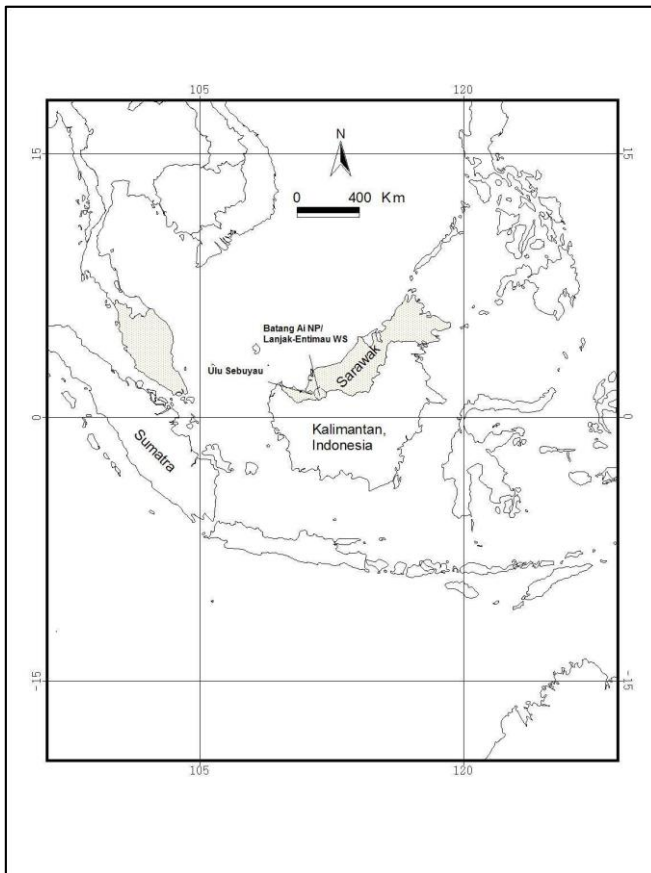
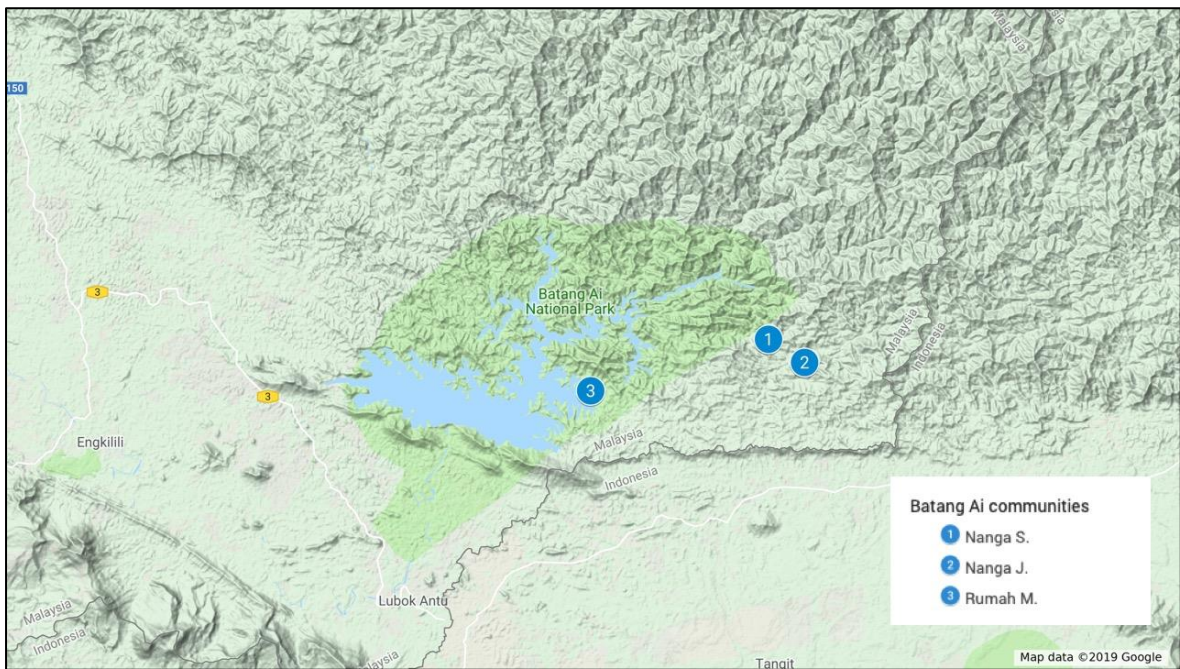


Figure 5: Location of research site in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo: Batang Ai.

Figure 6: Location of communities (Nanga S.; Nanga J.; Rumah M.) in Batang Ai.



4.2 Environment-human relations of Batang Ai Iban communities.

To understand human-orang utan relations in its emplaced context, I first sketch out the local environment-human relations of the Batang Ai Iban communities, who have been shaping the forests and landscapes in Batang Ai, Sarawak for at least a couple of hundred of years. The early Ibans migrated to the south of Sarawak, from the neighbouring West Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo), following the Kapuas river. They crossed over the Kelinggang range and built longhouses on the rivermouths of Batang Ai, Skrang river, Saribas and the Rajang river (Benedict Sandin et al., 1967; Apai, pers. comms., 2015). These longhouses are stilted structures with a large number of bilik or rooms housing generations of families. In today's longhouse, they blend both modern and traditional sensibilities; some might have washing machines, tvs with satellite dishes and solar panels donated by the government. In Appendix 1, I provide an ethnographic vignette that was published in the Environment & Society website, on the building of solar panels in one of the longhouses I had stayed in (Rubis, 2016).

The idea of rural poverty and being ‘tertinggal’ (left behind), has led to Sarawak’s quest to accelerate ‘pembangunan’ or land development over the 40 years. This meant the vast transformation of swidden farming subsistence to intensive rural development of large-scale cash crop plantations and modern infrastructure including roads, electricity and piped water (Ngidang, 2003). Further, rural natives are constantly pressured to participate in the market economy through large-scale commercial plantation agriculture (Ngidang, 2005). The dream of development has become a nightmare for many rural native communities, producing tenure insecurity and labour exploitation.

Customary law or adat is held in the collective memories of native communities, and are instrumental for maintaining order and provides a state of balance between individuals, between individuals and community, and between community and the environment, both physical or spiritual (Langub, 1998).

Customary law is also an integral part of institutions of inheritance however as noted in the previous section, the adat system has been nullified and native rights’ over their pemakai menoa and pulau galau have been denied. Yet, it is through adat that traditional Ibans continue to interpret their experiences, whether worldly or other-worldly, and this guides their actions (Figure 7). Iban adat relates to living with ancestors, spirit agencies and processes mutually intertwined with the environment. Spiritually and culturally, land, ancestors and more-than-humans are very much integral to the Iban’s well-being and sense of self.



Figure 7: A ritual before rice planting, Batang Ai.

Various forms of native land-use types, including conservation functions have been recognized in law, including international law. These include individually or community controlled land-use systems such as umai (fallows) and different types of forest gardens (including for rattan and rubber), pulau (forest reserves) and settlements. The various native forest classifications include the temuda (cultivated or farmed areas) (Figure 8), pulau galau and pemakai menoa. However, as described in the previous chapter, these native land-use forms and forest classifications are part of uneven power relations with state aspirations to develop land for agriculture and other industries, and to conserve the remaining lands for forestry and wildlife conservation purposes (Figure 9). For further readings on native customs, native customary laws, the deconstruction and reconstruction of native customary rights including during precolonial times, I suggest the following literature from native Sarawakian academics: Bulan (1998, 2000), Egay (2007), Langub (1998), Nelson et al. (2016), Ngidang (2003, 2005) and Sandin (1967). Cramb (2007) also provides a detailed look into Iban agrarian transformation in the uplands of Sarawak.



Figure 8: Burnt hills of Batang Ai in preparation for the year's rice-planting season.



Figure 9: One of my interlocutors contemplates about his choices on managing his lands. Adjacent are forested landscapes where wild orang utans have been spotted.

4.3 Sarawak Forest Ordinances on Native Customary Lands.

To further understand the current tensions over land, particularly from a conservation perspective, it is necessary to name the ordinances in place. Sarawak forested area occupies almost 8.7 mill ha (70%) of the total land area of 12.445 mill ha (Nelson et al., 2016). The forested areas are divided into three categories, namely, Permanent Forest Estate²⁷ (PFE) (6.0 mill ha), state land (forested land that is not reserved permanently as forest) (1.7 mill ha) and Totally Protected Area (TPA) (1.0 mill ha) (ibid, 2016). The forested areas are managed by the Sarawak Forest Department (responsible for licensing and regulatory functions) and Sarawak Forestry Corporation (operational functions). The protection and management plan and action of Sarawak's forest, including the regulation of extraction of forest resources is governed under the Forest Ordinance Chapter 126 [(1958) 1998] (Laws of Sarawak: Land code chapter 81, 1999). The 1979 Forest Ordinance (Section 90) extended powers of the state to persecute offenders who carry out activities within protected forests, forest reserves or on state land. These ordinances were introduced to protect the logging industry and to discourage natives from encroaching into virgin forests (Ngidang, 2005).

In addition, the following three ordinances also regulate forests and wildlife in the state: the Sarawak Forestry Corporation Ordinance 1995, the National Parks and Nature Reserves Ordinance 1998 and the Wildlife Protection Ordinance (1998). Hunting and gathering activities were restricted with the introduction of Part II of the Wildlife Protection Ordinance in 1990 and 1998. The SLC (Sarawak Land Code) Amendment 1989 (No.2), Section 10(3) re-enforced the previous ruling that any native attempting to create customary rights on Interior Area Land without prior permission from the District Office is guilty of an offence (Ngidang, 2005).

²⁷ However, in many instances in Sarawak, throughout my life, I have personally observed PFE being turned into industrial areas or turned into a tree plantation due to the whims of the state. Sadly, "permanent forest estates" are in name only.

4.4 Orang utans²⁸

From land, ordinances and land relations with humans, I now turn to the orang utan (Figure 10); providing an analysis of the species based on conservation literature, while positing why the orang utan is an important more-than-human relation to think through the broader contextual struggles of decolonising geographies and how knowledges are produced and reified.

The Bornean orang utan (*Pongo pygmaeus*) provides us ways to think through conservation actions and Indigenous responses. It is classified as critically endangered by the IUCN redlist (IUCN, 2016) and therefore, this act renders the species a global conservation icon (see Meijaard & Sheil, 2008). The main threats to both Bornean and Sumatran orang utan species are habitat loss, fragmentation and hunting (Gaveau et al., 2009; Meijaard & Wich, 2007; Wich et al., 2012). Lowland forests (<500 m a.s.l.) are the primary habitat for orang utans but these forests have been increasingly logged or converted to industrial plantations (eg. oil palm, timber) and small-scale agriculture (Koh & Wilcove, 2007). There is also concern for wide-spread hunting of orang utans in Borneo, with about half of the cases occurring in areas within or in close proximity to agri- and silvi- cultural plantations (Meijaard et al., 2011).

²⁸ There are several ways to spell the term, orang utan (eg. orangutan or orang-utan). Because 'orang utan' are derived from two distinct Malay terms, to denote 'person of forest', I continue to spell the term as two words as to pay homage to the influence of the Nusantara region to imperial knowledge-making. I was also taught this distinction by an experienced British conservationist who studied orang utans and this predilection for this spelling has stayed with me for almost two decades.



Figure 10: An orang utan in a wildlife rehabilitation centre (Semenggok) in Kuching, Sarawak.

The Bornean orang utan in particular, while considered relatively well-studied, 'lacks comprehensive spatial management plans that are needed to fulfil national and state level commitments from the Indonesian and Malaysian governments.' (Meijaard et al., 2012, p. 2). Hence orang utans provide avenues for thinking about the spatial politics of conservation. Unlike other big charismatic species like the elephant where Global Positioning Systems (GPS) devices could be placed onto the animal, orang utans cannot be monitored individually or collectively as similarly. My previous orang utan population monitoring fieldwork experience in the mid-2000s in the same field area where this thesis is also based, was to count orang utan nests (rather than orang utan presence itself), as to estimate their population size. Orang utans build conspicuous nests which are widely said to have been used only once. A day nest (for naps and rest) and night nests are built respectively per animal. Several nests can be built in a single day as well. Nests are built when thick branches are piled around the fork of a branch to make a platform

and then lined with leaves. Sometimes, simpler platforms are made. Apart from mothers and their young, the nests are not shared.

Currently, distribution maps for the Bornean orang utan are based on a predictive modelling approach to predict species potential (i.e. areas of suitability) and actual distributions (Wich et al., 2012). Accounting for the intractability of the orang utan in relation to ecological science methodology is important to understand the ways in which Indigenous Ibans cohabit and relate with these animals.

Further, since the eighteenth century, orang utans have been popular in the Western and East Asian imaginations in legend and philosophical debate. The orang utan as a fictive commentator, whether allegorical or interpreted allegorically, to human foibles have been popular by the literary elite of western Europe by the second half of the eighteenth century (Cribb et. al., 2014, p. 107). Orang utans share many genetic similarities and physical characteristics with humans, which likely account for writers being drawn to orang utans as a stand-ins for humans or human traits, foibles and virtues. Sowards (2006, p. 46) further suggests that 'orang utans open up space for identification through both their similarities and differences with humans, which in turn helps humans to expand identification to their elements of the non-human world.' This almost human-like mythology surrounding the orang utan, beyond its native habitats, is of considerable interest to geographers studying nature-society relations and provide important avenues for examining cultural dimensions of human-orang utan relations.

Finally, in practices of conservation, the appealing nature and charisma of the orang utan (Figure 11) particularly next to the image of oil palm plantation expansion in its habitats, is mobilized in form of flagship, iconic or charismatic species to elicit great sympathy and support from funders. Orang utans are seen as appropriate as an umbrella taxa for other elements of biodiversity given their large

home ranges and wide range of interactions with the other species in their environment (Wich et al., 2008). Both orang utan habitat countries feature orang utans among their tourism attractions (Zander et. al., 2014) where the ‘spiritual significance’ of the orang utan especially to the Ibans of Batang Ai is particularly expounded on in local conservation practices (see Chapters 5, and 6). Further, orang utans are seen as a focal point of conflict between economic development and environmental conservation (Meijaard et al., 2011), where the orang utan in Sarawak has been distilled to an economic value of USD13 million to as high as USD 23 million in 2011 (see Zander et al., 2014).

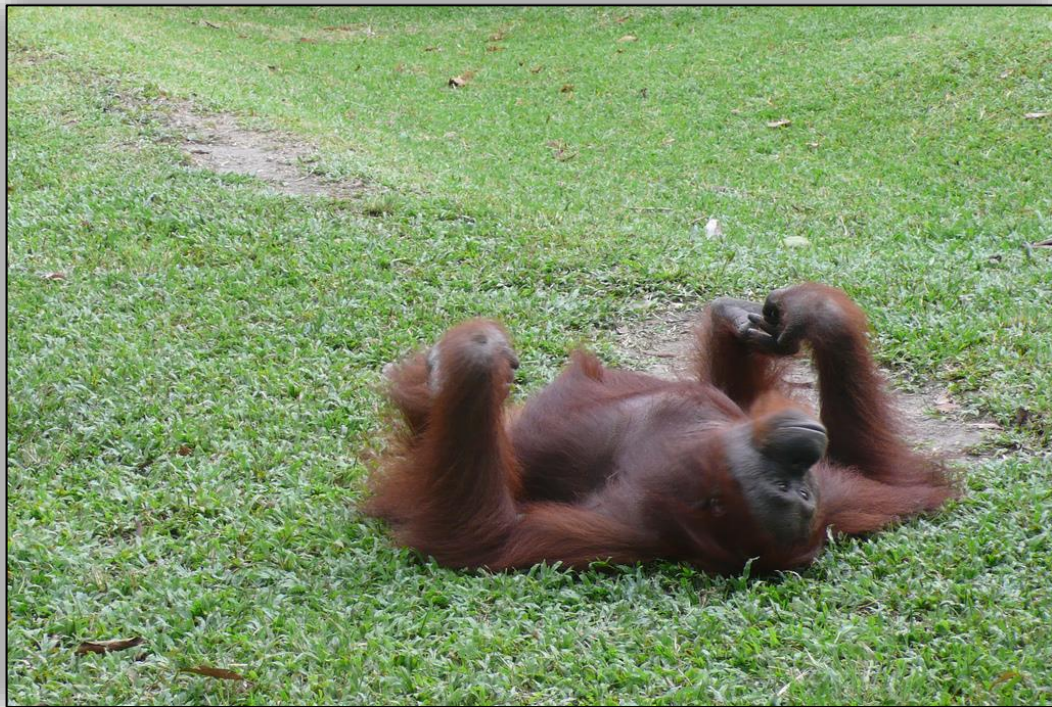


Figure 11: The appealing charisma of the orang utan makes the animal a very pleasing and sympathetic figure to fund-raise for, and insist for its protection and conservation.

Global North epistemologies and certain academic knowledges continue to have a privileged standpoint when it concerns the orang utan. In an article co-authored by prominent western orang utan conservationists describing a specific shortcoming of orang utan conservation, it cites ‘limited input from local scientists’

where 'many Malaysian and Indonesian scientists have been trained in conservation science or specifically worked on orang utans but their contribution to further orang utan conservation remains too limited,' (Meijaard et al., 2011, p. 9).

This assumption is based on a search in the scientific literature databases Current Contents and Web of Science whereby 'about 1% of [orang utan related] publications were written by Malaysian or Indonesian scientists, as indicated by their position as first author' (*ibid*: 9). These raises epistemological differences in relation to the orang utan, and more broadly to academic disciplines, where natural sciences continue to be privileged over social sciences and critical humanities. In decolonizing understandings of human-animal relations, whose knowledge and what sort of knowledges should continue to carry more weight? By taking a closer look at human-orang utan relations, particularly the plural Indigenous ways of relating, concealing and politics, this approach points towards an interdisciplinary reflection such as a decolonial political ecology framework.

4.5 Research Methods

I have completed 20 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo since June 2015, of which ten months were spent in three Iban communities in the southwestern tip of Batang Ai. During my time in Batang Ai, I conducted a total of 40 interviews. Interviews were conducted with both male and female adult participants who were active on land and farming activities. My father unexpectedly died in late March 2016, and my mother was diagnosed with advanced cancer so I returned to Kuching, Sarawak to become her primary caregiver for a year and continued that work in the year 2018. Sadly she also passed away, in October 2018. During my time in Kuching, I attended relevant workshops

and talks and conducted an additional five casual interviews with urban-based conservationists, an Indigenous activist, a local academic, and tourism operators, for a total of 45 interviews conducted overall. I was unable to conduct more urban-based interviews due to my own commitments as a primary caregiver. These interviews with selected resource persons within their respective fields, who may also identify as (urban-based) Indigenous peoples (except for two people), helped paint a broader, more current snapshot of my research.

My identity as a fellow Indigenous Bidayuh Sarawakian and my past ties with the communities as a conservation researcher, provided me with a unique opportunity and also, challenge where I was neither an outsider, nor a full insider. Smith (2013, p. 137) observes the constant need of reflexivity for the insider research, where insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a daily basis, along with their families and communities. To this end, I expound further on my reflexivity and positionality in the methodological sections of my two empirical papers (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

The methods used in this research are informed by an overarching aim of this thesis, as outlined in the introductory chapter. To reiterate, I seek a nuanced decolonial understanding of how Indigenous Iban communities enact, articulate and mobilise strategies in different ways to navigate their day-to-day lives in native customary domains that are also orang utan conservation landscapes in Sarawak, and how these modes of thought and action may contribute to particular mainstream conservation narratives, politics and power relations, from a political ecology perspective. Specifically, I reflect on the framing around the current discourse regarding orang utan conservation in Sarawak, how the framing works and how Indigenous peoples may resist the framing in diverse ways.

To address this overarching aim of examining strategies within human-orang utan relations, this research combines decolonial approaches outlined by Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics such as Bawaka Country et al. (2016), Tuhiwai Smith (2013), Wilson (2008) and Wright et al. (2012) with more traditional modes of ethnographic inquiry in the field of geography (Herbert, 2000). To render Indigenous ontologies and relations to land and more-than-humans more explicit in my research, I follow Métis/otipemisiw scholar, Zoe Todd (2017), in regards of a fresh decolonial inquiry in the idea of a 'kin study' among other theoretical insights such as the 'arts of noticing' (Tsing, 2015). Choice of method and design are influenced by the social theories that inform the research. The theoretical resources of decolonial inquiry mobilized for this thesis have been integral to the ways in which fieldwork was conducted. From a decolonial perspective, this means approaching stories and cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013, p. 15). This presumes learning to respect my place in relation to Indigenous knowledges; Indigenous place-based protocols, governance, orders and laws and acknowledging the on-going uneven power relations through other practices (eg. conservation) on Indigenous lands. The relational is central to Indigenous ways of knowing and acting. I have aimed to embody these relationships in the research process, through the work I cite and the theories from which I take direction, as well as attending to Indigenous ontologies and agencies of more-than-humans, including the orang utan, and of land, in its multiple presences and co-becomings (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Suchet-Pearson, Wright, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Country, 2013; Wright et al., 2012). Indigenous methodologies acknowledge cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an important part of methodology (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013, p. 15). In other words,

research is simply another articulation of Indigenous values and beliefs (Wilson, 2008).

During the initial design of my methodology approach, I focused on the Indigenizing paradigm (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013) that I had framed around my research, as to understand a decolonial perspective on Iban-orang utan relations. This also allowed me as well to maintain relational accountability, that is, to follow proper protocols to work with Iban communities and to build reciprocal and respectful relationships with my interlocutors. A mixed-method approach was utilized to identify knowledge gaps and help triangulate evidence (Table 1). As well, a reflexive approach to research was adopted, where I continuously reflected on the project and data collected (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017; Creswell, 2003). However, as I had spent more time in ‘gathering information’ as per academic expectations, I found myself shifting in different ways in response to what I was experiencing in the ‘field’ and what I had hoped to have accomplished for this research. As such, the following sections also describe a journey of an embodied experience of how I had tried to live more decolonised understandings and approaches.

4.5.1 Participant Observation

Through the kin study approach, I wanted to allow for a more engaged and relational observation with my interlocutors, orang utans and landscape. I conducted participant observation on rice-planting rituals through the period of August 2015 to February 2016. I was fortunate to follow the rice-planting cycles in two longhouse communities, of which I assisted in planting rice along the steep slopes. The culture of rice-planting is marked by brutal labour practices where my interlocutors and I, with long-sleeved tops and hats to shield ourselves from the hot equatorial sun, make our way with cheap rubber boots through the burnt debris of

sometimes still smoking lands. We have to defend ourselves as well from mosquitoes and other biting flies through the steep burnt hills. The days are long and marked by repetitive, backbreaking motions of work that is also gendered: the men stomp the ground with heavy staffs, to create holes (Figure 12) while the women (including myself), carrying woven baskets of rice seeds, stoop forwards to throw seeds into these tiny holes (Figure 13). Tired, sore backs and callused feet and hands often marked the end of the day (Figure 14). As a new worker, I was conscious of the amount of seeds I had clumsily laid to waste especially in the beginning of the work. In return, they made sure I had less seeds to throw away. Rice planting is very labourious, and the most relatively skilled planters, depending on the conditions, can plant thousands of rice seedlings per day.

Despite the incredibly hard labour, under harsh environmental conditions, rice-planting is also a communal bonding experience for the longhouse community, who take turns to assist their neighbours' rice-plots creation, and of ritual that acknowledge relations to lands, spirits and ancestors.



Figure 12: The men leading the way, plugging holes onto the hard, burnt ground with heavy staffs.



Figure 13: The women follow behind, throwing seeds onto the newly made holes.



Figure 14: The backbreaking work of rice planting.

Kelvin Egay, a Sarawakian native and locally based academic, had suggested to me to help break the formality of semi-structured interviews by asking for the 'biography of the object' (Egay, pers. comms. 2015). I would ask simple questions about any objects around me that were related in anyway to the ritual, or farming activities. Through these simple questioning, larger, complex pictures would arise as personal histories to land were elaborated through the object-in-question.

I also took on the gendered role as an 'adoptive daughter' in one longhouse and did all the chores, including sweeping, cleaning up in the kitchen and washing my adoptive father's clothes. I further discuss the affect nature of this role in Chapter 3 (Paper 1).

4.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

During the period of June 2015 – March 2016, a total of 45 people were interviewed, mostly in Batang Ai and also in Kuching as per multi-sited research imaginary (Marcus, 1995). Interviews were carried out in both Malay and Iban languages. Appendix 2 provides the list of questions that provided the framework of the interviews (these questions were subsequently translated into Malay and Iban languages).

Because I already had a history with the communities and the lands, my intention was to reintroduce myself and my new role as a PhD researcher. I approached my interviews as more of informal conversational encounters rather than formal ones. My interview method was as follows: I introduced myself to the community elders and my longhouse hosts, and explained the nature of the study, including a briefing on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). They were my primary key informants, who subsequently introduced me to others for follow-up

interviews. This chain referral sampling method has its disadvantages, including that it may produce more biased samples than if interviews were done randomly. However, because I was seen as mostly a guest on their lands and they already would have inkling on who would be more receptive to answering my questions, it proved vital to follow their advice. I did strike conversations with others who seemed responsive and I then would follow-up in a later period, with more focused discussions. The following interview method description described my initial approach to the study and interviews but as I explain in the next sections, my approach later changed to more of a kin-study type approach, when I realized I was unconsciously replicating conventional research methods that may entrench normative perspectives. The interviews would begin with description and intent of the research project. Each interview would last for about an hour to couple of hours, depending on the receptivity of the interviewee. Open-ended questions were asked to explore various opinions, knowledge and perceptions. Certain key interlocutors were revisited for follow-up conversations. Approaching my collaborators more than once helped, as did my Bidayuh identity and willingness to participate in rituals and household chores. As per FPIC, care was undertaken to omit sensitive details (e.g. ritual knowledge only to be shared within the community) and personal identifying details were anonymized as requested by the interviewees.

Due to the relatively sensitive nature of the research that may be interpreted as challenging the State and other more-powerful actors through the critique of conservation actions, and thus may threaten the interests of the communities who had adopted me into their homes and other interviewees who have been frank with their responses, I have decided to anonymize the names of the interview participants in my thesis, and built larger themes around the data provided. The

interviews were semi-structured, following a set of themes drawing on the literature review, issues known and research questions. All of the interviews occurred in the interviewees' workplace, tourist lodge, rice-fields or longhouse. However, over time, my conversations and interactions ranged far beyond my preliminary interview questions (See Appendix 2). Further ethnographic methods were employed, as described in the next section.

4.5.3 Documentary materials

Prior to, throughout, and after my fieldwork, I monitored press articles on native customary rights, conservation issues and other native land issues as to keep up with the latest information. Much of this material was based on litigation and protest struggles, and the corresponding responses from the affected communities and activists. This in turn, provided a richer basis on the overall context of native customary land issues in Sarawak, as it is very similar to hyperlocal contexts of the stories told to me in Batang Ai. I returned to my archive of conservation and environmental material in Kuching, including the Sarawak's Wildlife Plan that I had collected over the years, out of professional curiosity. I also collected new and additional materials such as tourism brochures relevant to the site. As I read the relevant texts, I reflected upon the relationships between place, thought, and more-than-humans. I coded these materials around the range of themes that were emerging to assist in informing my interviews, and later, in tandem with my ethnographic data for further reflection and analysis.

4.5.4 Kin study as place and more-than-human ethnography.

My ethnographic work represents my understanding of Batang Ai as a result of conversations and interviews held. Some of these conversations were at times designed to mislead me (some interviewees admitted that they still remembered me as a conservationist and were cautious to be seen as 'anti-conservation' through frank disclosures); other interviews and conversations conducted were with people who only had a superficial understanding of the topic I was interested in (or rather, were reticent to reveal their thoughts). My ethnographic responsibility might suggest I needed to make sense out of what I saw, was told, or read. I take in the concerns cited by critical scholars on ethnography including Edward Said (1995) that ethnographic research is but another form of 'white[ness] domination'. The power differentials within the community, the community and myself and with other communities and other people, continue to exist despite my best attempts and therefore, I tried to be constantly aware of how these differences in power can distort my perceptions and skew my interpretations. Much of the time, I felt as uncomfortable as my interlocutors did with during the interviews, and it was easier for them to lead the conversations (as these interviews often turned out to be, in reality, more so of casual conversations) into topics they felt was appropriate for me to know at that time. These encounters helped me understand that I needed to move away from the conventional ways of interviews and obtaining information. I had initially set forth with an ethnographic mind-set but after several months in land/place, I changed my approach. In developing a decolonial political ecology, we must also think about how we engage with place.

When engaging with place as research, it is always political (Barker & Pickerill, 2019), through the differential relations of power, positionality and sovereignty (Hunt, 2014; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Watts, 2013). In rethinking

engagement with place, I am reminded of my unique power relations positionality and responsibilities that in turn, are different for every person (Noxolo, 2017). Place is not an object of study but rather grounds everyday practices of self-determinance and survivance that emerge from Indigenous place-based ontologies (Daigle, 2016; Suchet-Pearson et al., 2013). Place is therefore about relationships, with humans, more-than-humans and other co-constituents (Coulthard, 2010; Country et al., 2016; Daigle, 2016; Todd, 2014, 2019).

It is with these similar lines of thought that I had received especially from my father and my interlocutors that I realized I had to change my approach. I felt accountable to not just my interlocutors, but also to place and orang utans. I wanted to ground my research in a more ethical, to what seemed to me, *truthful* way to place and kinship relations. To articulate this in theoretical form here, I turn towards the kin study approach as proposed by Todd (2017) who argues against the ecological 'case study' as often employed to underscore devastation of place, land and more-than-humans. The deployment of such narratives about the most degraded places and lands to theorize the 'Anthropocene' serves no one but a white, euro-western audience, thus turning human and ecological suffering of the most marginalized into another extractive terrain (ibid., 2019). Following the citation politics work of Sara Ahmed and Indigenous scholars such as Kim TallBear, Leroy Little Bear, Robin Wall Kimmerer among others, Todd (2017) asks us to consider how we approach lands, waters and atmospheres in our citational praxis. It is not enough to reference lands/waters/atmospheres as case types, but to recognize the relations that lands/waters/atmospheres may co-constitute with humans. This means listening to the "instructive form of philosophy and praxis which imbued .. a sense of reciprocal responsibilities to place, more-than-human beings and time" (Todd, 2017: 106).

I therefore paid attention to the quieter, lesser-seen relations with the land and more-than-humans as much as possible, whether in practice such as rice-planting, but also just walking through the landscape (Figure 15), spending as much time with land, plants and animals while integrating local stories and cultural protocols in ways that are respectful and careful. It was through this complex journeying on the land that I began to perceive its spatial and temporal dimensions, and connect the landscape with the wider relations with humans, other beings and shifting atmosphere.

I took care not to pick certain plants when it was raining or when I was on my menses, as advised by my interlocutors. I avoided walking on my own in dusk, even though I was comfortable in the terrain, because of my interlocutors' concerns about roaming spirits.



Figure 15: Every late afternoon, whenever I had free time, I would walk up to the highest point to spend time with the lands, waters and atmosphere.

I sat while I ate my lunch in the langkau (farming hut) instead of eating and walking because otherwise I would attract bad spirits, as advised. I watched wild orang utans whenever I could but also left along with my interlocutors who did not want to spend the whole day looking at them as a conservationist would because they – and also the orang utan - also had other things to attend to. I also took care of an infant palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphrodites*) that was left orphaned when one of my interlocutor's farm dogs attacked and killed its mother in the temuda (Figure 16). During the annual haze in October 2015 that took place during my fieldwork period, I took my cue from my hosts, stopped work and stayed in the longhouse as much as we could. In attending to Batang Ai (land, waterways and atmospheres), more-than-humans and spirit agencies, I respect and acknowledge both our 'co-constitution and the active role that Country plays in shaping what we know who we are and what we do' (Bawaka Country, 2016). I began to understand that the landscape is rendered visible and shaped through the community's practices and remembered through its stories. This in turn, helped me *listen, with care*, to these stories and practices as I tried to understand the agency of place and more-than-humans through their eyes and actions.

It was through this kin study methodology, including spending more time with my closest interlocutor, Apai, that it had more influence in shaping my research themes, understanding and further analysis. I took my lead from the teachings of my Bidayuh father and also, Bawaka Country's (2016) articulation of a methodology and ethics for 'co-becoming' with Country in a reciprocal and accountable way. In turn, I follow Todd's (2017) articulation for a 'kin study' in which she argues we need thoughtful and careful hyperlocal ethnographies to engage thoughtfully and reciprocally with the environment bodies (land,

waterways, atmospheres) and more-than-humans (and spirits etc.) that we produce in scholarship on environmental issues.



Figure 16: Taking care of a baby palm civet.

While I consider myself Bidayuh-Filipino and also native to Sarawak, I feel rather uncomfortable with calling myself a ‘native geographer’ because the label obscures the multiplex of identit(ies) that I carry as I cross different terrains, both literally and metaphorically. It is within this nature, that I consider this complexity as necessary, not accidental. With Narayan (1993) and Rosaldo (1993, pp. 168–195), I acknowledge that different dimensions of myself are emphasized in different contexts and with certain groups of people, and thus have ‘multiple subjectivities with many cross-cutting identifications’. In other words, identities are much more complex than their seemingly simple labels. I also follow similar frustrations as a ‘native fieldworker’ as Romero (2016) where it is assumed that fieldwork would be

'easy' but in fact, it was often harder and more emotionally challenging. Situating myself as a 'native' was a matter-of-fact for many of the people of the communities I had conducted research with, as they knew of my father and my family background. This enabled me to have relatively easier access to more intimate dimensions of my interlocutor's lives because I was already familiar with their lives, language and culture than say, a researcher not originally from Sarawak. My interlocutors also saw me as someone local with more access to resources and opportunities and could speak English fluently. At times, this advantage worked against me and in one case, petty jealousies were developed over the access to resources I had, that if a foreign researcher would probably not have to go through because it was taken for granted that these advantages for a foreigner was inevitable.

While Narayan was speaking specifically about native anthropologists vs non-native anthropologists, the ethnographic nature of my fieldwork holds true for the following:

"(...) what we must focus our attention on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts: are they viewed as mere fodder for professionally self-serving statements about a generalized Other, or are they accepted as subjects with voices, views, and dilemmas- people to whom we are bonded through ties of reciprocity and who may even be critical of our professional enterprise?" (Narayan, 1993, p. 672).

Therefore, to write and reflect upon fieldwork is to write in the presence of our interlocutors, and to be responsible with our continuing relations (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013). With this in mind, a kin study ethnographic approach to field research allows for more engaged and realistic participant and casual observation of the interactions within and between the different groups of people (Iban villagers, tourist guides, conservationists). With this approach, comparison between

apparently separate realms may be made, and links between policy and practice, conservation and local practices and protocols, can be explored.

Table 1: Itinerary of research methods carried out.

WHEN	METHOD	DETAIL
June 2015 – March 2016	Participant Observation @ rice-fields in Batang Ai, at Nanga S. and Nanga J.	Observed rituals prior to rice-planting, planted rice according to gender role & hung out during the entire process.
June 2015 – March 2016	Participant Observation @ tourism walks, temuda (farmed lands) and longhouse at Nanga S., Nanga J. and Rumah M.	I followed on tourist walks to look for wild orang utans, assisted in planting, weeding and maintaining the various umai (gardens).
June 2015 – March 2016	40 Semi-structured Interviews With villagers and tourist guides at Nanga S., Nanga J. and Rumah M.	32 community members; 8 tourist guides.
June 2016 – August 2016	5 Semi-structured Interviews With local conservationists, tourist guides, and activists in Kuching, Sarawak.	2 conservationists; 1 Indigenous activist. 2 tourist guides.
June 2015 – March 2016	More-than-human ethnography With land, waterways, atmospheres, orang utans and other more-than-humans.	‘Deep hanging-out’ as much as possible, paying proper respect to the hyper-local context of cultural protocols, codes and stories.

4.6 Analysis

Writing is a form of analysis in itself. It renders the world visible, it is a 'method of discovery, a method of interpretation and a method of analysis' (Richardson & Lockridge, 2004, p. 1).

Data were analysed qualitatively using data coding into themes and sub-themes. During my first year of literature, policy and other documents review, I initially used NViVO 10 to map broad themes of my research but as the immensely rich data from my fieldwork, including hand-written maps, photographs, ethnographic notes and continuous reflection emerged over time, this led me to consolidating and mapping dominant categories and concepts on paper (Table 2). After my fieldwork, I later coded ethnographic material and interviews, historical documents, policy documents, reports and field notes into emergent themes, patterns and sub-themes that have informed the arguments made throughout the thesis. I continually read relevant literature and referred to them or compared where appropriate during data analysis. I consulted with a local academic expert who is familiar with my fieldwork and the issues at play, with my emerging findings to ensure that my empirical data was sound. I also had further discussions with my main interlocutor, Apai, who came to visit me in Kuching during my caregiver period of 2016-2017. However, any mistakes I may have made in analysing my material are solely mine. This was/is an on-going iterative process throughout the years of 2015-2019, where I continuously reflected upon the research data and questions, and the fieldwork.

Table 2: The five steps in the concept mapping process, as adapted from Trochim (1993)

Name of Process	Description
1. Preparation	I prepared my empirical data into themes and subthemes.
2. Generation	Through a creative, free-flowing process using hand-written methods, I generated a simple brainstorming of large set of themes related to thesis focus.
3. Structuring	Based on informal discussions with Apai, my main interlocutor, and with a Sarawak-based academic (anonymized), I later created an unstructured sorting and then, rated each theme on the dimension of relevance to thesis focus. Some themes were discarded as such due to lack of data (e.g. a gendered perspective) and other themes were emphasized (e.g. see, empirical papers).
4. Interpretation	Through repetition of re-reading field-notes, reading of literature and documentary materials and further reflection, I gained more familiarization of the themes chosen and therefore was able to attach more meaningful substantive relevance to the data gathered.
5. Utilization	I began to sketch out my empirical papers, based on the specific readings of the themes generated.

4.7 Reflections on methodological limitations and the journey

Twenty months of ethnographic fieldwork in Sarawak were undertaken, of which ten months were spent in three Iban communities, including interviews, participant observation and archival document investigations. There are limitations to the study including the possibility of more biased samples through chain-referral sampling. It is possible that some important factors were overlooked, while additional research into other areas would have brought identified factors into further consideration. Here, I reflect on three areas of my methodological

limitations. I identified the following areas in my methodological approach that could be improved in further research.

Less on the orang utan, more on the orang (person). It proved difficult to combine ecological methods (as per my initial interest) and therefore conduct fieldwork in the deeper forests (where the orang utans are likely to dwell) on my own, as my hosts were not keen on letting me go unsupervised beyond the village boundaries. I had to balance respect and relations with my hosts, whilst also fieldwork gathering. However, I do take into consideration that, research IS part of Indigenous life (Wilson, 2008). Instead, during the times where I was in Kuching, Sarawak, I paid several visits to the orang utan rehabilitation centre in Semenggok, where I observed once-captive orang utans during mealtimes, and at rest (Figure 17).



Figure 17: Observing a mother orang utan and her baby eating durian at Semenggok Wildlife Centre, Kuching, Sarawak.

I did consider an option of paying for my hosts' time to accompany me to the forests but this proved to be tricky as it meant shifting the balance from 'adopted daughter' to 'researcher/boss'. Since I had wanted to do things differently from my conservation fieldwork days, I opted not to have paid fieldworkers where my interlocutors would be reminded of my conservation past as well. However, I also take in consideration the power imbalances of me as a 'guest'/visiting researcher vs 'adoptive daughter' that certainly came into play, regardless of the domestic duties I had been given. However, since I am interested to learning more about human – orang utan relations, it made sense to spend more time with my hosts, and other interlocutors as I had to first learn what these relations mean, through the Iban eyes rather than learning about the orang utan, through the conventional ecological methods or through a westernized perspective.

Whilst I conducted a total of 45 semi-structured interviews and the information gathered helped shaped my overall themes, I admit that the data gathered contributed less compared to the deeper insights I gained through constant interaction and conversations with my adoptive family, particular my adoptive parents. In hindsight, I probably should have not spent so much time on these interviews and perhaps focused solely on my ethnographic approach, however the experience also proved to be useful in understanding that the best methods/insights for my research were through kin study ethnographic methods. Nevertheless, the combination of methods contributed to my overall thesis, in terms of both themes, subthemes and more deeper insights.

Disregarding gender can entrench normative perspectives in research. I therefore consider the gendered bias of my papers where the voices of the male interlocutors were more prominent than of the female interlocutors. It was not

intentional and while part of my ethnographical methodology was also to spend as much time with the women as possible, it is also revealing (mostly to myself) that what had emerged from my final analysis were more of the voices of the men, and of male stories. I did have specific female perspectives and analyses that paid attention to material and structural inequalities within conservation and tourism actions yet these were not presented in the final thesis but could be the basis of future work (e.g. decolonial feminist research in conservation). While I am cognizant with the feminist political ecology (FPE) framework (e.g. Elmhirst, 2011; D. E. Rocheleau, 1995; D. Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, & Wangari, 2013), I wanted to explore what a decolonial and kin study approach would look like, where I centered Indigenous peoples, both interlocutors and academics, care(ful) thinking with Indigenous communities, landscapes and more-than-humans relations.

Whilst my intention was to pay attention to marginalized Indigenous experiences and voices, I also interviewed fewer conservationists than had planned. My field schedule for interviews were derailed during my family crisis, and as well, I was not in full mental nor emotional capacity after my father's death, and my mother's cancer diagnosis, to interview my former colleagues on what could be a potentially touchy subject for them (or rather for me to interview them). I tried to compensate this lack by reading my documentary materials, including related local conservation websites and social media, and recounting my own working conservation experiences, both in written form and memory, as I felt this as well helped display the conservationist mind-set.

Massey (2005) reminds us of the different spatialities of knowledge production, where knowledges are always situated knowledges (Haraway, 1991). Therefore, I also discuss what is not meant to be considered a 'limitation' per se, but

that much of my original fieldwork and analysis period was greatly affected by the death of my parents, and my in-between care-giver work for my mother. This made it very difficult at times to revisit field-notes during my bereavement because I had felt guilty with greatly bonding with my adoptive parents in the field. This however made me consider the politics of care, particularly from a gendered perspective and whilst doing academic work. While I had support from my institution and sponsors, there were also implicit expectations for me to move on as soon as possible, as my parents' deaths were a 'fact of life' and to submit my thesis on a pre-arranged deadline lest there would be material consequences. These were very difficult feelings to go through, and changed the direction of my research where it became more kin study-influenced. These feelings also shaped my first paper (Chapter 3), where I felt compelled to share stories from my father, and perhaps more of the other male perspectives as a result, as he was crucial to setting the direction of trying to do more decolonial work. Similarly to Kim Tallbear (2014) who cites her mother, Leanne Tallbear as one of her first theorists that helped her come to understanding as Indigenous peoples as theorists, I feel the same way about my parents, Dr Patau Rubis and Teresita Godoy Rubis who taught me more by *doing* rather than explicit saying. My father was one of my early theorists in understanding decolonial work for our community and native communities beyond as I watched his life-long work with Bidayuh and other Dayak rural communities. Up to her dying breath, my mother had taught me to recognize the importance of interdependence with each other and therefore, in doing so, understanding that relations with other people, land and more-than-humans is not a choice if we want to survive. While setting this 'limitation' scene in place, I hope there are further insights on why this thesis developed the way it did.

In this chapter, I have summed up the research context, methods and literature that inform the material analysed in this thesis. This work is rooted in ethnographic understandings of human-orang utan relations in a decolonial political ecology framework, and as a result, I have drawn on the relevant literature and ethnographic methods to inform my analysis. These relations and subsequent analysis will be explored in detail in the following chapters (papers).

In understanding how orang utans and people have been simultaneously impacted by and workings of conservation as it seeks to control and manage Indigenous peoples on their customary lands, Chapters 5-7 looks at three broad themes: Remembering, Concealing and Naming. My empirical chapters/papers look at how Ibans have interacted with conservation practices in complex ways, opening up new ways of engagement and pluralising conservation discourse. Specifically, they do the following, Chapter 5 looks at ways of remembering of contested landscapes of orang utan conservation, Chapter 6 examines how protocols of evasion and concealment are important parts of defending more-than-human worlds from dispossessory intrusions, including those of conservation, and Chapter 7 turns to the topic of politics of naming the orang utan. Together, these three empirical chapters/papers articulate the multiple ways human-orang utan relations are realized within the power relations of conservation work. These findings provide a theoretical and decolonial grounding of understanding the different ways of Indigenous Iban presencing through human-orang utan relations, and provide a way forward in developing a decolonial political ecology of orang utan conservation.

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Prelude to Chapter 5: Remembering

§

In this paper, I bring in ideas of remembering and contra-remembering by different peoples, as one of the ways that speak of continuance and thriving of Indigenous presence(s) in response to conservation forces and actions. My findings include an articulation of a type of decolonial remembering, 'contra-remembering' that speaks of Indigenous presencing on lands.

This paper was presented in the Association of Asian Studies (AAS) conference, in Washington D.C. that was held on March 22-25, 2018. The AAS kindly provided full funding so that I may present in person. I was invited to co-host the panel on memory and rememberings, and to present with Dr. Noah Theriault and Dr. Rosa Cordillera Castillo and our discussant, Dr. Anne Y. Guillou who all provided supportive feedback on this paper.

While it was the first empirical chapter/paper I had written for my thesis, it was also the last paper to be submitted, having been submitted to the journal of *Cultural Geographies* for their consideration.

This was the first empirical chapter/paper I had written for my DPhil research and I had decided to start this paper with my father's words/story that he kindly shared with me before he passed. The reasoning is as following (as written in the paper):

“Remembering can be a powerful political—and decolonial—act. The stories of my Bidayuh ancestors, like those of many other Indigenous peoples, highlight both the complexity of colonial history, and the agency of Indigenous communities in navigating those complexities. I therefore *begin this article by remembering my father’s and my interlocutors’ stories, to (re)claim spaces, sovereignty and knowledge.*”

In other words, my father’s and interlocutor’s rememberings are also theory. These rememberings are no less part of the imaginary as literature review, and other frameworks that I also present in this paper.

A Political Ecology of Remembering for Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo.

Abstract:

Remembering can be a powerful political decolonial act. Remembering can also be an act of survivance and refusal. Through the framework of political ecology of *remembering*, I reflect on the different types of remembering, including ‘contra-remembering’ in relation to native customary domains that are also orang utan conservation landscapes in Sarawak, Malaysia Borneo. I suggest contra-rememberings are one of the ways that speaks towards continuance and thriving of Indigenous presence(s) over and against conservation forces and actions on native lands. I propose how contra-remembering with Indigenous interlocutors/theorists may lead to decolonising political ecology.

June Mary Rubis^{a*}

^aEnvironmental Change Institute, School of Geography and Environment, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom.

E-mail: jrubis@gmail.com

Keywords: remembering; conservation; Indigeneity; survivance; Sarawak

CHAPTER 5

A Political Ecology of Remembering for Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo.

5.1 Introduction: De-centering the White Rajah in the room.

I once asked my father, “*Tell me something interesting about our family*²⁹.”

Obligingly, he told a tale of our great-great-great-great grandfather and uncles who decided one day that they would stop paying hefty taxes to the Sultan of Brunei. The burden of the increasing taxes was taking its toll, and the villagers were left wondering whether the next harvest would be enough to feed their families, and pay off a distant Sultan whom none of them had ever met. And so, they invited the tax collectors to the village on the pretence of making payment. They ushered the tax collectors, all 21 of them, into the baruk (a wooden circular hut of ceremonies) perched on slim logs. Ambushed, the leading tax collector had his head cut off, and his associates were thrown off the cliff.

“We had enough of the oppression,” my father said.

²⁹ This short narrative was initially published as part of the author’s column on September 10th, 2012, in the currently defunct Malaysian online news-site The Malaysian Insider, which was blocked by the country’s Internet regulatory body on the grounds of national security in early 2016. The website was subsequently shut down by its owners, citing major financial losses.

Unfortunately, the oppression didn't stop there. Revenge on behalf of the 21 dead tax collectors arrived when a couple of women from the village were kidnapped for ransom. The village was furious. They sent off some of their best warriors to rescue the women. During their search, the warriors came across a white man. No one from the village had ever seen a white man before.

Fascinated with this strange white man, the warriors asked him to help them overthrow this greedy Sultan, and become their King -- their White Rajah. The man listened with compassion and regretfully told the warriors that, while he sympathised, he didn't feel that he was the right person to unite all the warring tribes and usurp the Sultan. But he could return to Singapore, and see if anyone else might be interested in becoming the White Rajah of Sarawak.

"And that is how James Brooke ended up here. That geologist went around Singapore asking for help on our behalf, and James Brooke accepted. You know the rest of the story lah."

"But what happened to the missing women?"

"Oh they eventually found them, killed the kidnapers and everyone returned back to the village. Happy ending!"

"But it's not very empowering that we asked a white man to save us. Why not one of us to become the Rajah instead?"

"Haiyah, this is the story as told to me by your great-granduncle. How would I know? I wasn't there. You are always asking too many questions."

Remembering can be a powerful political—and decolonial—act. The stories of my Bidayuh ancestors, like those of many other Indigenous peoples, highlight both the complexity of colonial history, and the agency of Indigenous communities in navigating those complexities. I therefore begin this article by remembering my

father's and my interlocutors' stories, to (re)claim spaces, sovereignty and knowledge.

Remembering can also be strategic, to invoke a past that serves as a reminder that the state could do better in conserving lands, more-than-humans and protecting native customary rights. Through remembering, Indigenous agency and sovereignty are kept alive, and continually refreshed in our minds, bodies and landscapes. While there could be different interpretations to these stories, the act of remembering keeps these stories alive for the present and future generations.

This remembering takes place in native customary domains that are also orang utan conservation landscapes in Sarawak, Malaysia Borneo. In examining the different types of remembering, including contra-remembering, I reflect on the framing around the current discourse regarding orang utan conservation in Sarawak, how the framing work in the context of relations with native lands and how Indigenous Ibans may resist this framing in contra-remembering ways.

This article builds upon the decolonial themes of Indigenous survivance and refusal (Vizenor, 1999; Simpson, 2014), focusing on the linkages within the conservation and control thesis of political ecology (Peluso, 1992; Agrawal *et al.*, 1997; Dove, 1995; Neumann, 1997; Sivaramakrisnan, 1999; Zimmerer, 2000; Jeffrey & Vira, 2001; Li 2007 & 2014; Robbins, 2011; Tsing, 2005; West 2006). Political ecology has a long history of engagement with conservation, and the governance of conservation is changing through new forms of resource ownership and control, systems, strategies and new actors. Within the conservation and control thesis of political ecology, local producers have lost control of their natural resources and landscapes through implementation of efforts by the state and global interests to preserve sustainability or nature (Robbins, 2011). In the process, local systems of livelihood, production and socio- political organizations

are dismantled. Further, 'where local production practices have historically been productive and relatively benign, they have been characterized as unsustainable by state authorities or other players in the struggle to control resources' (*ibid.*, 178). For this paper, I consider the fundamental theoretical propositions of political ecology including the hegemonic governmentality of conservation (Foucault, 1991), wilderness as a form of nature that has no human effects, institutional systems that include traditional resource management and current protected areas for conservation are ecologically and socially problematic and insufficient.

I particularly draw on Anishinaabe scholar Vizenor's (1993) work on Indigenous survivance that refers to the active thriving of Indigenous presence, rather than a mere reaction or a survivable name, over the changing colonial forces. He adds, 'native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy' (Vizenor 1999:2). Indigenous peoples persist, and sometimes they push back and refuse. I am also inspired by Mohawk scholar, Audra Simpson's (2014) deliberation of Indigenous refusal as a necessary response towards on-going colonization. Part of the refusal includes moving away from anthropological and ethnological literature on Indigenous communities as no longer a go-to domain of defining the Indigenous political life, and the 'construction and definition of Indigeneity itself' (Simpson, 2014:33). Here, in this article, I further explore acts of refusal and survivance extending from the colonial era towards the present, in response to complex pressures, including conservation interests, towards native customary lands.

This article proceeds in four sections. Firstly, I present collective memories from different Iban and Bidayuh (collectively known as Dayak) communities based

on my ethnographic research, and my own shared history. I also tend to my positionality as a scholar with Bidayuh heritage, and my own rememberings.

Secondly, I explore the broader context of these memories from compiled genealogies or *tusut*, going back twenty-five generations, oral and academic literature and empirical data, of which some memories are what I term, 'contra-remembering', where remembering is to resist. Thirdly, I demonstrate connections between landscapes and collective memories. Building on political ecology literature, I note how conservation landscapes have never been just sites of doom, but also reflect inspiring periods of resilience and success (Osterhoudt, 2016). I argue that our need to remember and re-articulate the past in a way that depicts our agency and resistance is part of our survivance (Vizenor, 1999). While I do not fully address the marginalisation of Dayak women's resistance and organizing in this article, I acknowledge their current invisibilities in our political and social histories. In the final section, I suggest a framework for a political ecology of remembering that builds on decolonial theory and Indigenous scholarship.

5.2 The Dream about the Nabau

Apai told me many stories during the months I stayed with him and his family. Some of the stories were designed to keep me happy³⁰. Similar story telling was also conducted for conservationists, researchers and tourists who sometimes stayed in Apai's longhouse. These stories are discussed in a forthcoming article, *Concealing Protocols* (Rubis and Theriault, 2018). However, as the months went by, and the tourists and their guides had left, Apai began to recount more personal

³⁰ I was initially known to the Batang Ai communities about ten years ago (2006-2007) as a conservationist, conducting orang utan fieldwork in their territories.

family narratives of head hunting by his ancestors, who clashed with other communities, for the right to remain on the lands. I was familiar with the themes of these stories, as shared with me by my father, a Bidayuh from Krokong, Bau. In Apai's stories, the terrifying Ukit lived on tree-tops, and flew like birds to get from tree to tree, instead of climbing trunks of trees. The best plan of attack was to cut down their home trees, before cutting off their heads. Yet the story that struck to me the most, was the story about the Nabau.

Atok Apai (Apai's great-grandfather) once had a dream of the Nabau; a giant water serpent, that told him that it would help him defeat his enemies who were sent by Brooke, to retaliate against Atok's community's refusal to pay taxes and to acknowledge the White Rajah as their ruler. "I would poison the Batang Ai lake", it had said, in support of Atok's refusal, "and make the surrounding jungles so inhospitable and tiring, that when the enemies finally arrive at the lake, they would be so parched and desperate. After drinking the water, the enemies will vomit and perish." And so, as predicted in the dream, that was what had happened. Atok's people were safe from the poisoned waters, and were able to continue bathing and using the lake without any repercussions.

5.3 Reflexivity & methodology

I build on a remembering that was shared with me by Apai, one of my interlocutors from my research, whom I had gotten closest to, and with his community. He told me the dream as handed down by his family, during a rainy afternoon when we were sitting around in the longhouse, with work in the rice-fields interrupted. It had struck me then how the Nabau was woven rather surreptitiously into the stories shared with me from other interlocutors from

different Iban communities. My article begins with a remembering from my father, who was a co-theorist for this research, along with a teaching on how to better my methods/responsibilities when working with Indigenous communities, including my own. This teaching is explained further in the following section.

The Nabau comes to life in the Batang Ai landscapes through these stories and also in the places it still supposedly dwells, perhaps more intimately than the orang utan that is often focussed in the stories shared with tourists, other researchers, including myself, and forestry officials. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for my DPhil research, in three Iban communities in Batang Ai, Sarawak, Malaysia for about eight months, between the years 2015-2016. When my father unexpectedly died, I was very much in great despair for not only had we lost our father, he was also our keeper of our stories, knowledge and traditions. Unlike many of our close relatives still living in our ancestral village, my dad had one foot in the village, and one foot in the 'modern world'. He bore great communal responsibility as well for being the second qualified Bidayuh medical doctor in Sarawak. As a child growing up in the 1980s in Kuching, a small urban center of mostly Chinese, Malay and Eurasian townsfolk, and with a prominent father, I felt strong pressure from the urban society to prove that I was 'different/more developed' than my rural kin. It wasn't so much of shame for ignoring my Bidayuh roots but rather a matter of unconscious survival of fitting in with the rest of my classmates. Only when I grew older, moved away for further studies and returned home, I began to grow a better appreciation of my Bidayuh heritage. Raised with an urban mind-set and direct inquisitiveness, I had many questions for my father.

My father was impatient with the ways I had tried to unsuccessfully connect back to my Bidayuh culture. I thought back of the many times I was chastened for asking too many direct questions about our culture and heritage. He

had said bluntly to me once or twice, that I was rude for asking direct or too many questions. This scolding made me reflect on the methodology used for ethnographic fieldwork with rural Indigenous communities.

Conventional ethnography methodology and ethics guidelines dictate that we ought to present interview questions for a departmental ethics review prior to commencing fieldwork. Yet, I found it was less of my direct questioning (which had provoked unwanted, stilted responses from my interlocutors, including trying to give me answers that they think I would be happy with), and more of my willingness to be absorbed completely and with as little as judgment as possible, into the way of life in the longhouse, that I had learnt so much more than I had initially imagined for my research framework.

Thus, after my father's death, I was driven to uncover and reflect on my identity as a person with Bidayuh and Filipino heritage, conducting fieldwork with previously rival Iban communities in her home state, and how the field space is vast and complex. I stayed in Sarawak, in my hometown of Kuching, to provide company and support for my mother for a year. The Iban family I was closest to during my research sustained our connections through phone messages and occasional visits to Kuching. As such, I consider my own embodied experience as a scholar born and raised in Sarawak, and also as a local conservationist with extended field experience in Batang Ai, as part of my ethnographic research and field space. In total, I conducted 20 months of ethnographic research in Sarawak, working closely on these topics, including returning to my father's and ancestor's lands in Bau for supplementary interviews, attending Indigenous land rights and conservation workshops in Kuching, talking to Indigenous activists and particularly reflecting on my identity as a Bidayuh. In this section, I highlight the methodological tensions and elaborate on my past connections to Batang Ai, and the local Iban communities. In

doing so, I explore acts of refusal and survivance extending from the colonial era towards the present, in response to complex pressures, including conservation interests, towards native customary lands.

The aforementioned story from my father had kept playing in my mind since his death, especially when I read through my field-notes from Batang Ai, and recalled similar long conversations with my 'adoptive father', Apai³¹ (cf. 'reflexive approach', Alvesson and Skolberg, 2004; Cresswell, 2003). Like my father, Apai told me many stories, and some of these stories take form in dreams. For those born and raised in Sarawak, discussing dreams, including dreams of our fore(parents), is not considered an unusual activity and helps us make sense of our current reality while recounting our past. In remembering these collective memories, I began to make connections with how we, as Dayaks, have always responded with agency towards complex pressures around land rights and sovereignty.

5.3.1 Journeying back: On revisiting my memories.

I arrived in Batang Ai with a fresh intent to (re)learn what I knew of the Iban, and of the orang utan landscapes that have captivated the interest of people beyond Sarawak. Over a decade ago, I was working for an international NGO, and had conducted orang utan nest count surveys for over two years in the field. My intent then was specific and narrow, that is, to count the nests and observe the habitats. My biological sciences training did not prepare me to try to understand the landscapes from a local person's perspective, or to appreciate their/our knowledge beyond a field assistant's value. I was taught instead to observe

³¹ Apai means 'father' in Iban, and is a form of respect for Iban male elders. Indai is the female equivalent for Iban female elders, or 'mother'.

'objectively', and I therefore missed many opportunities to truly learn and understand the struggles and decisions that rural Iban communities have to make.

Of all the people I had talked and interacted with, Apai was the person who took most interest in my research, and he took it upon himself to provide me a thorough education of what it means to be Iban. I became his 'adoptive daughter', which meant whenever I was not working in the farm, I had to take upon the gender role of washing his clothes, cleaning up in the kitchen, and serving drinks to male visitors, including tourist guides, despite some of my initial inner resistance. While my father was also Dayak (Bidayuh) and from a village in rural Sarawak, he had never raised his children in gender roles. However, as time passed, I understood that these roles were significant and important to the Iban community, to convey respect and responsibility for being adopted into the community. My adoptive parents would have never asked or assumed the same responsibilities from visiting tourist guides or female guests. I understood that it was also an honour to be truly considered as part of the family by doing daily chores as expected from one of their daughters.

This obligation continued on when I returned to Kuching to care for my mother and was expected to keep in touch with my adoptive parents, by informing them of my activities. From my adoptive parents' perspective, I had a lot to learn as a daughter, but they had also voiced their appreciation a few times that I was not 'snobbish' and that I did everything that they asked of me, willingly. In turn, my ethnographic responsibility was to make sense out of what I saw, and was told, and to recount their stories with as much care and respect as possible (Wolf, 1992). Relational accountability that requires reciprocal and respectful relationships within the communities where I am conducting research is an important aspect of ethical Indigenous research (Wilson, 2008:40).

Ethnographic research has been rightfully criticized as a form of knowledge extraction and domination (Said, 1978, Wolf, 1992, Smith, 2013). As a Dayak Bidayuh scholar who was born and raised in an ancestral yet urban environment and with my current connections to a western institution of higher learning, I try to be mindful of how my privilege affects the fieldwork that I do. It is my family connection, as the daughter of a prominent Dayak that affords me some ease, familiarity and respect with the Iban communities in Sarawak, but also places me in a more considered position. While I aimed to have more counterparts and co-theorists within the communities I had worked with, rather than 'other-ing the subjects' (Lassiter, 2005; Marcus, 1998), I was still cognizant that I simultaneously hold dual identities with varying privileges as a Bidayuh researcher from a prestigious university. I was 'one of us', but also separate with being identified as an urbanite, and being Bidayuh. Smith (2013) further describes the complex set of 'insider' dynamics that Indigenous researchers have to work through, where assumed advantages also belie hidden challenges, and higher expectations and communal responsibilities.

I could never leave the 'field', for I am as much a part of the field as my interlocutors are. Reflecting on my own identity as a Bidayuh is part of the research. I am reminded of this whenever I am in a western academic setting and am questioned about my views of home akin to a travelling informant. For the Indigenous scholar, there appears to be no separation of studying Indigenous communities and from being studied ourselves. But perhaps by taking rein and remembering our collective memories, Dayak scholars could begin to re-imagine possible futures beyond what has been documented in literature and taken as truth.

The following section guides and shapes the discussion on refusal and survivance, through remembering. I offer a contextual analysis on the taxation on the Dayak population in Sarawak during the pre-Independence era, while highlighting the physical taxation on the population by the Brunei Sultan and Brooke dynasty that relates to the previous stories. Many Dayaks had resisted to pay taxes to the Sultan of Brunei and also refused to recognize his successor, James Brooke, as legitimate ruler of Sarawak. In doing so, the resisting Dayaks were constantly raided by other Dayaks (the 'government' Dayaks) who had aligned with James Brooke, under his orders.

5.4 Taxing the Dayaks: Centering Indigenous refusal and survivance.

The Bidayuh and Ibans had shared similar frictions with the Brunei tax collectors. In Iban oral literature spanning about two to four generations before the arrival of James Brooke in Sarawak, and that continues on until the present, the defiance against the tax collectors of the Sultan of Brunei are well-documented. The complex pattern of involvement between Ibans, local Malays, and the 'distant, weak, but still prestigious Sultanate' is described by Iban scholar, Benedict Sandin³² in his book on 'The Sea Dayaks of Borneo: Before White Rajah Rule' (Sandin, 1967: 60).

Prior to Brooke's tenure, natural resources, in the form of rice harvest, were extracted, as pupu tahun (or yearly tax) from the Dayaks, and also other local communities, on the authority of the Sultan of Brunei. The tax collectors were Malay chiefs who were also suspected of collecting for their own wealth. The local

³² Sandin particularly spoke about Iban works published by 'English authors' and it was his desire to present an 'Iban side to the story which has not yet been fully told' (Sandin, 1967:60).

communities were taxed annually regardless of a poor harvest, and there was growing resentment towards a Sultan who relied on prestige, and Malay chiefs to do his bidding.

The tax collectors would collect the padi or rice tax in a special rattan basket called mungut, which in theory would hold one pasu (jar) of padi, the yearly amount required from each Dayak family. However, the mungut was flexible enough and was constructed to hold more than required jar of padi. Angered by this attempt to cheat, the Dayak leaders, notably Luta of Entanak and Ugat of Paku, as described in tusut, frequently slashed the mungut with their parangs (Sandin, 1967). The misuse of the mungut had carried on into the Brooke era as well. As described in my dad's story, sometimes this anger towards the attempted cheating would result in the bloody demise of the tax collectors. These rebellious activities were reported to the Brunei authorities as a form of 'misconduct', and thus there were acts of retaliations towards the recalcitrant Dayaks.

My father's story was not about an impetuous act of rebellion, decided upon a whim, but rather spoke of an act of careful consideration of a declining harvest and a hungry population. They could no longer provide enough rice for the hungry Malay tax-collectors and for the Sultan, while feeding their own families at the same time. Exposing the cheating tax-collectors was a collective act of refusal, and my ancestors felt they also had to put an end to the cheating tax-collectors. After facing retaliation by forces aligned with the Sultan of Brunei, the next step was to replace him with the Sultan of their choosing.

While the idea of embracing a 'white saviour' to displace a distant Sultan did not sit well for me, my father's story reminded me of the agency and bravery of my

ancestors. The Dayaks³³ had refused one (self-imposed) ruler for a strange other, and hopefully someone that they had greater political mileage on. Vizenor (1999) reminds us that Indigenous survivance stories are renunciations of tragedy and victimry, and such narratives are employed as a means of continuation.

This survivance story contrasts greatly with the mainstream narrative that the Sultan of Brunei had asked James Brooke for help and that Brooke decided to assist out of pity for the Dayak population³⁴. That is to say, the mainstream narrative presents the Dayaks as negligible in their effect or importance to the narrative other than asking for help or causing rebellions against the ruling elite. Others have pointed out less altruistic reasons of why James Brooke decided to take over Sarawak, namely, to extend and support British control of trade routes (Tarling 1982; Walker 2002). Further accounts also point out that the handover of Sarawak was not as benign as popularly imagined, that James Brooke 'wrestled the governorship of the Sarawak River district ('Sarawak Proper') from Brunei in 1841' (Cramb, 2007: 114). In my father's story, the person replacing the Sultan of Brunei didn't matter as much as the agency and acts of refusal by our ancestors. Together with Apai's story, this 'remembering' demonstrates that continued, overlapping resistance towards a succession of foreign rulers is an act of survivance and a way of life that nourishes Indigenous ways of knowing (Vizenor, 1999). Dayaks have not left, but instead have persisted and thrived in Sarawak until present day, while past reigning dynasties, have all but lost political influence.

³³ Not all Dayaks were welcoming of the White Rajah rule however, as depicted in Apai's story.

³⁴ I have observed many such re-tellings by tourist guides to European tourists in Batang Ai; presumably to also flatter tourists as that was the outcome.

The following section further discusses how dominant remembering through anthropological literature disguises the extent of colonial violence towards the Dayaks, particularly through the selective usage of terms to describe the so-called plundering. As such, the Nabau dream as told by Apai, could be described as part of an Indigenous refusal (Simpson, 2014) to contest dominant narratives and to provide an alternate remembering that holds true for Ibans.

5.5 Raids, expeditions and the Nabau dream.

Indigenous decolonial scholarship increasingly shed light on normative attempts to depict a linear and stable account of colonial conquest, settlement and civilization. Here, I draw upon European accounts, which is another (dominant) form of remembering or as Vizenor (1999, pp. 52) terms, the ‘literature of dominance, narratives of discoveries, translations, cultural studies, and prescribed names of time, place and person’, of the expeditions and raids during the Brooke era to provide a cursory overview of bias towards acts of resistance from Ibans. I turn to the refusal of the Ulu Ai³⁵ Ibans towards Brooke’s Sarawak to stop ‘raids’³⁶ and pay door taxes (see Pringle, 1970; Wadley, 2004). When examined through a decolonial geographical reading, European renderings of expeditions and raids in Sarawak are thus revealed as tales of romantic conquests for white British colonials.

The terms ‘expedition’ and ‘raids’ are used interchangeably in the anthropological literature of Sarawak; although both described very similar

³⁵ Ulu Ai’ covers a wide landscape in southern-eastern Sarawak, that includes Batang Ai.

³⁶ Quote marks my own and henceforth in rest of article, to depict bias against attacks by the Brooke-ruling forces, vs those who opposed Brooke.

activities such as plundering and burning down longhouses, slashing rice fields and occasionally taking heads. The former usually refers to raids conducted by the Sarawak government namely, under the rule of the Brooke dynasty. Therefore, expeditions are justified upon moral and ethical grounds of colonial boundary marking, while 'raids' are not. Yet in 1843, two years after Brooke had occupied the governorship of Sarawak, with the help of British marines, Iban and Malay forces, Brooke attacked and occupied fortified Iban territories, 'plundered and burned surrounding longhouses, and extracted a promise of submission' driving the Ibans further into the Rejang (Boyle 1865: 291-313; Pringle 1970: 74-74; Walker 2002: 70-74 in Cramb, 2007: 114). Brooke's expeditions were as violent as the raids that the resisting Ibans were accused of.

Since 1868, there were many expeditions against the resisting Ulu Ai' Ibans, who under Iban leader Ngumbang, refused to pay taxes. Similarly, at the nearby Dutch-controlled border, the Ulu Ai Ibans were also under siege by the Dutch-aligned forces. These expeditions would claim the lives of 10,000 to 12,000 men who were taken from said-pacificied areas of Sarawak -- the 9th March 1886 raid against the Ulu Ai Ibans is well documented in European literature as the Kedang Expedition (Wadley, 2004). Sixteen years later, the Brooke-aligned forces of 'government' Ibans, consisting of about 12000 people assembled in 815 boats, conducted another raid against the Ulu Ai Ibans. However, thousands were taken ill from a cholera outbreak, and as many as a thousand Ibans may have died (Baring-Gould and Bampfylde, 1989 [1909]: 388-389; Pringle, 1970: 225-6 in Wadley, 2004).

5.6 Rememberings on native refusal for logged lands.

For many, for whom Indigenous resistance towards the White Rajahs have been mostly relegated as footnotes, if any, in Malaysian national textbooks, tourism texts, and mostly wiped out of public consciousness, the above narrative may seem like impractical remembering. What does it have to do with the current difficult dilemmas facing conservation of native lands and more-than-humans? Yet, if we are to think deeply about place and relations to land and place, we must also think deeply about previous colonization and land-based power relationships between Indigenous and local populations and the colonizer, and how these are the foundation of dominant epistemological conservation thinking that is reproduced in post-colonial times. In other words, we must think about Native survivance and other forms of placed-based resistance to erasure, including refusal, that allow one to survive and maintain presence and relations in places that counter dominant cultural narratives. Here, survivance can refer to also remembering other histories of being and knowing.

From these dominant European rememberings/accounts, I now return to Apai's remembering of the Nabau that had helped his ancestors keep not just their land-based territories, but also their bodies of water. "*Jangan ingat sendiri saja,*" Apai reminded me, after recounting his story, as handed down from his grandfathers.

Don't just think about yourself. You have to think about the next generation, inheriting the lands. Everywhere else is full, I am told, that there are no more spaces to be buried, except back in your ancestral lands. "Where will his grandchildren go? How will they live?" -- these were his worries that he shared with me. As such, by remembering this story, Apai then brought me back to the

present day, where I had arrived in a time where the community (consisting mostly of elders) was fighting against loggers who had snuck in several times with their logging equipment, and were logging what was left of the customary native primary forests: the communities' pulau galau. This was my first (re)introduction to the landscapes of Batang Ai, through Apai's guidance. En route to their territories, on a speeding longboat from the dam site³⁷, Apai stopped the engine, and pointed out to a far distance: of a faint jarring brown strip amongst the green hills. "They took our trees," he said in Iban. Later, he took me to a hill where we could see many kilometres away, of logged hill-tops. "We could hear the chainsaws from a far distance," he added in Iban, "but we were too late to stop them."

About a year before I had arrived, the elders armed with parangs and old shotguns, went on a half-day hike through the hills, and had attempted to confront the loggers who had then fled upon first sight. With the help of a younger community member who had a cellphone, they took photos of the felled trees and logging equipment as part of their evidence, and their triumphant (brief) reclamation of their lands (Figure 18). Despite many reports to the local police station, and the state forest department, Apai lived with some fear that the loggers would retaliate and was cautious whenever he had to go to the nearest township to obtain supplies. This act of continued resistance against outsiders attempting to encroach on their territories reflects inspiring strength and local protection of territories, yet these were not the stories that are recounted to tourists. Perhaps it is because stories of rebelling against the White Rajah probably do not fit into the perceived tropical romance created for tourists. These poses of silence are never natural.

³⁷ Part of Batang Ai was converted into a concrete-face rock-fill hydroelectric power dam site in 1985, and had displaced about 3000 people from 26 longhouses since.

A local reporter had taken interest in the resistance, and it was written up in the local media. Apai showed me the carefully clipped, laminated pieces with pride (Figure 19). However despite the vast remote distance and access-difficulty, these forests remain vulnerable for exploitation by the most determined loggers.



Figure 18: Printed photos from a camera-phone of the elders reclaiming lands from illegal loggers.

Apai explained why he fights hard to secure his community's territories, for about eight generations at least have lived on these very lands that I am visiting. The hope was that his grandchildren would inherit and continue to connect with the lands, just as he and his forefathers did, with grace from the Nabau -- lands that are cultivated with rice, and other smallholder farms, lands that remain wild, and lands that were laid to waste by loggers.



Figure 19: Apai’s laminated press article, highlighting the illegal logging on their native customary lands.

It had struck me with Apai’s remembering of the Nabau story, that there was no sense of shame or regret associated with fighting against the Brooke army. If the Brookes were ‘well- loved’ by the local population in Sarawak as many would claim, they were just as much resisted and refused legitimacy in their claims to rule Iban and other territories³⁸. The wider spiritual and political conjunctures of the Nabau assisting the Ibans were part of the symbolic significance of the refusal.

Survivance through acts of remembering continues until present day. Today, in all three Batang Ai communities that I visited, the Nabau in various ways still exists in the stories told, and also in rocky outcrops of particular sections of the river. During my days of a conservation field-worker, I was singularly obsessed with orang utans, forever scanning the treetops for their nests, even when I was no longer doing nest count surveys. I would scan for nests as we were drifting down the river in a longboat, heading back to camp. This time around, I allowed myself

³⁸ There are three well-known major rebellions (Rentap in 1853; Liu Shan Bang in 1857; Syarif Masahor in 1860) against the Brooke administration.

to be open to all senses, and to be guided with the conversations. In the silence of drifting down the river, my interlocutors proffered in an almost reverent tone: *This is where the Nabau lives, this is where the Nabau fish, this is where our ancestors first saw the Nabau.* It is my feeling that the Nabau is often mentioned more respectfully by my Iban interlocutors than, say, the orang utan. These rememberings also demonstrate how place and space are intimately connected to history and ideas of identity (Basso, 1996; Nazarea, 2006). But also, place, according to Indigenous worldviews, have agency and are relational (Larsen & Johnson, 2017). These landscapes are rich with stories of resistance, persistence and triumph. Seeing the land through the eyes of an ex-conservationist, and of someone beginning to unravel the complexities of what it means to be Bidayuh in a contemporary era, I began to remember Batang Ai as more than just an orang utan landscape that we had to save from the people living on the lands. Place is not meant to be an object of study (Daigle, 2016) or to take action upon. I had to relearn place responsibilities and obligations and stay connected with place, while acknowledging the differential relations and duties this entails (Bawaka Country, 2018). Previously rigid concepts and narratives about the landscapes and biodiversity were being pushed out, not unlike how my ancestors pushed off cheating tax-collectors of the baruk. I could hear and see place. These stories of rebellion in turn, are heard and seen not in cultural separation from the communities and place that these stories belong to.

In the next section, I tend to the different dynamics of remembering, which sometimes lead to contra-remembering, particularly in normative narratives. I also point to the strategic and selective use of remembering the Brooke legacy by Indigenous land rights activists. The following section therefore discusses the

political impact of the different types of remembering in relation to land – not just decolonial remembering but the different rememberings by different people.

5.7 Contra-remembering the Brookes: Landscape, Resilience, and Memory.

Within the conservation and control thesis of political ecology, local and Indigenous peoples have been deprived access to lands and other natural resources, and have lost the ability to conserve species and areas through their customary laws and ways. Further, where local practices have historically been productive and relatively benign, such practices have been characterized as unsustainable by the state, and other parties, in the conflict to control resources (Biersack, 2006; Robbins, 2011; Wolf, 1972). In contrast, colonial-era land management practices are often remembered as positive interventions. Here, I tend to the political ecology strands of such contra-remembering. Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us that colonisation has been reinforced by the theft of land and place, and with it, the underpinning idea that colonials were better land managers. In Sarawak, there appears to be a historical nostalgia for the Brooke era, where it is perceived that the Brookes were better caretakers for native customary rights, compared to the current state government. Part of this nostalgic revival includes a Hollywood movie production of James Brooke, with the help of a descendant and current heir of the Brooke family³⁹. A recent Guardian article⁴⁰ also highlights a quote from an Iban land rights activist:

³⁹ See <http://www.star2.com/entertainment/movies/movie-news/2017/07/06/white-rajah-malaysias-first-hollywood-epic-film/>

⁴⁰ See

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/mar/24/in-malaysia-how-protecting-native-forests-cost-an-activist-his-life>

“Many people in the longhouses say they yearn for the days of the white rajahs, who established village boundaries that included most of the areas that communities claim today as their traditional land. Many have ancient pictures of the Brookes on their walls. The British colonial authorities recognised the Dayak land rights,” said Nicholas Mujah, a former senior civil servant who now gives evidence in court for communities making land claims, emphasising the long-standing nature of their customary land rights. But after independence, the new government began to claim that all forestland belonged to the state.”

This idea that the Brookes had cared more for customary land rights and for forests, compared to post-colonial rule, clashes with the historical fact that European-inherited land legislations such as assumption of state proprietorship in land, the requirement to utilise land to justify continuing tenure, and the misinterpretation of unoccupied or unutilised land as ‘idle’ or ‘waste’ land, was introduced in Sarawak in the beginning of the Brooke period and continued into British colonial times between 1945 and 1963. Throughout the Brooke period, misunderstandings and prejudice against shifting cultivation and communal longhouse tenure, influenced confusing and contradictory approaches to land law and administration in Sarawak (Cramb, 2007). Similarly, following British colonial examples in Malaya, land development by migrants were encouraged through a 1876 proclamation for grants of land for 99 years at a ‘nominal rent’ to Chinese pepper and gambier planters (Porter 1967: 38-39 in Cramb, 2007: 128). These and other land legislations slowly eroded native customary rights whereupon based on the assumption of state proprietorship of all land, that natives themselves were considered as squatters on their own lands. This perception of holders of native customary rights has carried into present day. After independence, recognition of customary access has been increasingly restricted, with rights and entitlements

being decided upon by the state. While there is much well-deserved critique on post-colonial state development in Sarawak, as pointed out by Malaysian academic, Fadzilah Majid Cooke, the Brooke land legislation and law legacy resulted in ‘serious repercussions in local access and native customary management regimes, and this still has not been questioned today’ (Cooke, 2006: 27). It is important to note that colonisation is also understood as an on-going structure (Wolfe, 2006). For example, one would ask, why is it easier to criticize post-colonial development, but not question the roots of how native customary rights became slowly eroded in Sarawak? Why do some Dayaks look upon colonial rulers with an apparent rosy tinge of nostalgia? While understanding that colonisation continues in present-day, it is also vital to acknowledge Indigenous ways of survivances (Vizenor, 1994). This added layer of complexity suggests subtle Indigenous refusal of what it means to live in this contemporary era.

5.8 Contra-remembering the Brooke legacy

Contra-remembering is a decolonial political act and suggest agency in distinct, non-confrontational ways. Post- independence, some Indigenous activists may bring up the Brooke era more favourably than is justified. However, understanding the way some Dayaks collectively remember the past requires looking beyond the stereotype of poor oppressed Dayaks needing an outside saviour, and reading ambiguity and complexity in different strategies and motivations.

Indigenous activists may invoke Brooke in a positive light but only to counteract the state’s development plans on native customary lands. This contra-remembering is not to ask for a Brooke descendant to return and rule over

Sarawak once more, but rather a call to remind Dayak politicians and elite of their failed collective responsibility to look after their less- advantaged kindred and native customary lands (Mujah, pers. comms., 2016). Contra- remembering the Brooke legacy therefore could be seen as a strategy to invoke shame onto local Dayak/Malaysian politicians for neglecting native customary rights. This tactic may resemble a more subtle strategy of refusal (as articulated in different formations by Li 1999; Scott 2008; Simpson 2014). In particular, Simpson's work on Kahnawà:ke Mohawk refusals as both stance and theory of the political, reveals acts of concealment and refusal as legitimate decolonial responses to colonial processes (Simpson, 2014). In other words, refusal is the revenge of the consent (McGranahan, 2016). Similarly, Cepek's (2011, 2016) work on outward acts of consensus and cooperation concealing the persistence of critical consciousness and internal debate is useful to this work. Where the Brooke nostalgia has been useful to tourism and as a state political countermeasure to remind the federal government of our unique and separate history, contra-remembering the Brooke legacy could be seen as part of a complex strategy to keep the native customary rights debate wrenched open.

There is a danger of non-Indigenous Asians and/or Westerners (mis)reading the contra-remembering of the Brooke legacy as an invitation to step in, and become self-appointed leaders in native customary rights campaigns or to speak for Sarawak natives in international platforms, thus further endangering the land rights debate, and the Dayak identity to remain simplistic and reductive, tied closely to rural lifestyles and landscapes in threat of development or state conservation. The idea of Indigenous identity that is fixed in imaginaries of rural land as territory must be disrupted. Is it possible to hold both this contra-

remembering while remembering the efforts and victories of resisting Dayaks?
The remembering of my father's and Apai's stories is hence an attempt to remind ourselves of resistance and current survivance of Dayaks today.

5.9 Towards a framework of political ecology of remembering.

As a way of attending to the specificities of Indigenous approaches to conservation practices, I turn to decolonizing methods. More specifically, analysing how Indigenous stories of survivance and refusal connect back, relate to conservation landscapes or place is a *political ecology of remembering* approach. Place as an analytical and methodological location, challenges coloniality and its present-day manifestations. Contra-remembering as method and practice present a particular frame for attending to Indigenous peoples engagement with conservation practices. For instance, in the context of Borneo (and therefore, Sarawak), customary rights are contested and rural communities are depicted as threats to biodiversity (Clearly, 2008; Colchester, 1993; Eghenter *et al.*, 2003(a); Eghenter *et al.*, 2003(b); Eghenter & Labo, 2003; Eghenter, 2006; Peluso, 1992). Further, Scott's (1990; 2008) work on resistance influenced the extent to which local people, despite marginalisation, are recognized as playing an important role in the success of conservation policies (Agrawal & Ostrom, 2006). I build on this work by considering a decolonial remembering approach.

Within this decolonial framing, I consider Osterhould's (2016) political ecology of memory framework. The theoretical intervention that I offer is a re-imagination of remembering, or contra-remembering, as opposed to the general idea of memory. Indigenous pain and failure to uphold static romantic identities of the Indigenous past are often noted in the conservation discourse (Berkes, 2012;

Brantlinger, 2003; Brockington *et al.* 2012). While many of these narratives are rooted in reality, and contribute to the political ecology framework, these painful histories do not fully constitute what it means to be Indigenous in the contemporary era. Indigenous peoples are vulnerable to not just the dispossession of lands, but also of dispossession of narratives/stories, particularly the remembering of survivance and political consciousness.

What does this mean in terms of conservation practices? When Indigenous people are dispossessed of their stories of agency, colonial refusal, and political strategies, they are locked into narratives of victimry, which further denies them access to conserve lands and biodiversity. My working understanding of remembering emerges primarily from Indigenous scholars' notion of storytelling. Stories are how Indigenous peoples define and redefine their/our sovereignty, spaces, cultures and knowledge. Storytelling (through collective memories) reclaims 'epistemic ground that was erased by colonialism' and also 'lays a framework and foundation for the resurgence of Indigenous sovereignty and the reclamation of material ground' (Sium and Ritkes, 2013; p. III). Remembering stories of survivance and colonial refusal brings the history of colonialism and its present-day consequences back into the discourse of Indigenous customary rights and conservation, as well disrupting how we structure the present.

What further imaginative possibilities are for a future that goes beyond occupying a framework that continues to patronize rural Dayak communities, whether to 'save conservation landscapes' or to develop rural landscapes? How do we recognize and respect that Dayaks ourselves change, adapt, acquire new skills and desires, and yearn to return home to the land? In examining Indigenous oral narratives as methodologies for decolonization, Baldy (2015:18) suggests that, 'Indigenous oral narratives were developed as living histories and were

understood not only as documents of the past, but also living philosophies of the present and future.' Million further argues, '[orally based communal knowledge] systems are theory, since they posit a proposition and a paradigm on how the world works... Story is Indigenous theory' (Million, 2014: 35).

Similarly, I suggest tending to the remembering of stories of survivance and refusal as part of the ethnographic methodology, would uncover further hidden power relations and the multiple strategies and aspirations that Indigenous peoples undertake. Yet this attending to remembering is not meant to be a 'discovery narrative' (see Rubis & Theriault, 2018; Todd, 2019). This methodological approach is a practice in listening for, and feeling for the lesser heard, at-times misunderstood stories. Rearticulating these stories speaks back to the politics around land development and conservation today. The Iban farmers in Batang Ai continually battle with competing interests, including of conservation, ecotourism and logging, of their lands. They have to constantly negotiate with, cope with and welcome, with seemingly open arms, more powerful players, such as forestry personnel, ecotourism guides, tourists, conservationists and researchers that often drop by. Li (2014), Nadasdy (2003; 2007), Ribot & Peluso (2003), West (2006) and many others note the many inequalities embedded in power relations and cultural differences that impede effective co-management in conservation landscapes in Borneo and elsewhere. I build on this work by rethinking remembering, or contra-remembering, as part of a decolonial political ecology approach. As such, Apai and other community members, and Indigenous activists either hide their protocols (Rubis and Theriault, 2018), tend to narratives of contra-remembering, and at times, refuse in outright defiance or through other subtle strategies (Li 1999; Scott 1990; Simpson 2014).

I offer the following questions that ought to be considered when designing conservation frameworks: how may remembering Indigenous stories of survivance and refusal offer alternative approaches to the study of conservation landscapes? How might remembering impact the ability of local policy-makers to craft more effective and people-friendly conservation governance policies? How do we begin to understand and respect the different approaches and strategies Indigenous communities and individuals/activists may take, that they cannot be the perfect representation of Indigenous identity, and that this 'imperfection' should not be used to justify imposed policies or programmes designed without their consent or input? In attending to place, we need to stay within the perplexity of co-existence and take up such challenges in place-based, ethical ways (Tallbear, 2014).

Therefore, when thinking through decolonization that is processual and relational, and a political ecology of remembering, where Indigenous peoples' survivance and agency is centered, we can begin to re-imagine more collaborative forms of conservation that meaningfully accounts for local Indigenous knowledge, and ways of nurturing land and relationships.

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Prelude to Chapter 6: Concealing

§

Following Chapter 5, I build on the ideas of contra-remembering and more collaborative forms of conservation by articulating how protocols of evasion and concealment are important parts of defending more-than-humans worlds from dispossessory intrusions, including those of conservation. I describe a particular ethical approach and understanding of hidden Indigenous strategies within human-orang utan relations in the context of conservation activities.

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I met my co-author, Dr. Noah Theriault of Carnegie Mellon University in a invite-only research retreat held in Girton College, Cambridge in 2016, and organized by Dr. Audra Mitchell of CIGI Chair in Global Governance and Ethics and Associate Professor at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada. It was at this retreat that Dr. Theriault and I decided to co-author a paper together based on our field experiences, for a special issue collection called, *Living Protocols*. He has provided a letter (Appendix 3), detailing his and my contributions for the paper.

CHAPTER 6

Concealing protocols: Conservation, Indigenous survivance, and the dilemmas of visibility

June Mary Rubis^{a*} and Noah Theriault^b

^a *Environmental Change Institute, School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, UK;* ^b *Department of History, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA, USA*

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Abstract:

In an effort to recast themselves as proponents of human rights, transnational conservation organizations increasingly look to Indigenous communities as sources of labour, knowledge, and legitimacy. In many cases, the resulting relationships are fraught with stark power imbalances and premised on flawed understandings of Indigenous practices. As a result, even the most ‘people-centered’ conservation interventions too often serve to accelerate the enclosure, commodification, and dispossession of Indigenous lands. In this article, we reflect on our respective collaborations with Indigenous communities in Sarawak, Malaysia, and Palawan, Philippines, who have contended with biodiversity conservation projects led by transnational NGOs. We have noticed that our collaborators navigate the projects’ expectations by selectively performing, concealing, and obscuring important aspects of their lives. They do so, in part, in an effort to manage the NGOs, government agencies, and other actors vying for their cooperation. But more importantly, we argue, this is a way to defend their lands, livelihoods, and ecosystems from dispossession pressures, including those exerted by conservation. As such, we theorize, these acts constitute a form of what Vizenor calls ‘survivance’ and raise important questions about the role of scholars and activists in rendering Indigenous lifeworlds (in)visible to conservation organizations and other institutions of neocolonial power.

Keywords: conservation; indigeneity; survivance; visibility; concealment; Southeast Asia

6.1 Introduction

Environmental conservation projects often draw heavily on the knowledge and labour of Indigenous communities (Barbour & Schelesinger, 2012; Cepek 2011; Doane 2012; Haenn et al. 2014; Münster, 2016; Sodikoff 2012; West 2006). While some of this takes the form of manual labour, much of it involves research and consultation, including that which investigates the lives of the communities themselves. Whether the aim is to 'integrate' conservation science with Indigenous practices (Aswani & Hamilton, 2004; Becker & Ghimire, 2003; Premauer and Berkes, 2015), to identify and preserve 'traditional ecological knowledge' (Ens et al., 2016; Tang and Gavin, 2016), or simply to 'use' Indigenous knowledge in service to conservation goals (Drew, 2005; Ziembicki et al., 2013), field research on and with Indigenous communities is increasingly central to the work of conservation. But has this newfound interest in Indigenous knowledge and cooperation brought an end to the dispossessionary effects of 'fortress conservation' (Brockington, 2002)? According to critical analyses from around the world, including our own, the short answer to this question is 'no.' In practice, many conservation interventions, particularly those led by government agencies and transnational NGOs, continue to conflict with and even disrupt Indigenous knowledges, livelihoods, and ecologies. And, as a result, even the most progressively minded projects too often work to normalize and propel the enclosure, commodification, and dispossession of Indigenous lands (see Benjaminsen and Bryceson, 2012; Chernela, 2005; Dressler, 2009; Rubis, 2018; Theriault, 2017; and West, 2006, 2016).

While such outcomes are ultimately rooted in the logics and practices of conservation interventions themselves (see Nadasdy, 2003), Indigenous persons are by no means passive bystanders to these encounters. This article explores how, as communities contend with conservation-related interventions on their lands, they selectively conceal and obscure important aspects of their lives in an effort to manage their relationships with the NGOs, government agencies, and other actors involved. We ask what these acts of concealment and evasion mean in relation to larger struggles around dispossession and environmental degradation.

Reflecting on our collaborations with communities who face overlapping interventions by extractive industries, government agencies, and transnational conservation NGOs, we theorize that these acts represent more than the 'weapons of the weak' (Scott, 1985) or the 'unruly subjects' (Welker, 2012) found in Marxist and poststructuralist accounts. To be sure, these acts are a way to defend some measure of autonomy while navigating stark power imbalances and seeking access to desired resources (e.g., funding, political alliances, and livelihood opportunities). We contend, however, that they also constitute world-making practices that aim to defend more-than-human relationships from dispossessory intrusions, including those of conservationists.

Following Escobar (2016), we use the term 'world-making' to signal the ontological and cosmological stakes of the practices in question. While we do not wish to suggest that different societies live in different 'worlds' (Ramos, 2012), we wish to acknowledge the fact that societies differ in terms of the ontological and cosmological principles that emerge from and shape their relations with themselves, with others, and with their surroundings (Carrier & West, 2009). These are not just 'cultural differences,' but rather different ways of co-producing the

world in relation with other beings, lands, waters, and other entities. We further hope to eschew the homogenizing implications of attributing a particular 'ontology' or 'cosmology' to any group or society by instead emphasizing the embodied, dynamic, and at times contested nature of the practices we are discussing.

In this sense, we are describing a form of what Anishinaabe author Gerald Vizenor calls 'survivance' -- manifestations of Indigenous world-making that are 'more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry' (Vizenor, 1998, p. 15; cf. Povinelli, 2011). When Indigenous communities selectively conceal aspects of their lifeworlds from conservation organizations and the many other actors who seek their knowledge and cooperation (including scholars), they are doing more than resisting elite domination within an ontologically or cosmologically homogenous social order. Rather, they are defending one more-than-human social order against the ontological, cosmological, and political-economic designs of another. We call the acts in question 'concealing protocols' in a nod to Indigenous scholars whose work challenges the erasure of Indigenous cosmological and legal systems within Western/settler accounts of colonization (Burrows, 2010; Coulthard, 2014; Jackson, 2007; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Napoleon, 2013; Simpson, 2014; Tauli-Corpuz and Cariño, 2004; Todd, 2016). Simply put, these are 'protocols' because the relations they govern are not between different sets of 'values' or even different 'cultures' but between different social orders, legal systems, and cosmologies (Baldy, 2015; Watts, 2013).

This argument also has important implications for our own praxis. June has worked with Iban and other Indigenous communities in Sarawak, a state in Malaysian Borneo, for about twelve years, originally as a conservation biologist who

surveyed orang utan nests for an international NGO and now as a critical geographer who studies such conservation interventions from a more-than-human perspective. She is Bidayuh, and her ancestral lands are in western Borneo, adjacent to those of the Iban. Noah is a white American sociocultural anthropologist who has worked with Indigenous and settler communities on Palawan, an island in the southwestern Philippines, since his first visit there in 2006. His primary collaborators are Indigenous Palawan communities living in the southwestern part of the island. Although our personal and professional backgrounds are different, we both rely chiefly on ethnographic and ethnohistorical methods rather than quantitative ones, and we are both committed to making our research accountable to the interests of the communities who host us.

As activists and scholars, we have been conditioned to think of institutional 'visibility' as a form of empowerment for socio-politically 'invisible' populations and therefore also a necessary part of accountable research. From this perspective, one important way to challenge misguided conservation policies would be to document and make visible that which they misapprehend or distort. But we have come to question this notion as a result of our respective research engagements with Indigenous communities in Sarawak and Palawan. Does the will to make visible, even among critical scholars and activists, unconsciously reproduce the impulse that drives the instrumentalizing documentation of 'traditional ecological knowledge' or the one that drives the 'discovery,' documentation, and securitization of new and threatened species (Lowe, 2004; A. Mitchell, 2016)?

With these concerns in mind, we have come together to interrogate the assumption that documentation and institutional visibility are inevitable prerequisites to protecting biodiversity or defending Indigenous land rights. We

wonder whether and how we can serve not just to document or render visible, but also to defend space for the survivance and resurgence of Indigenous world-making practices. How, in other words, can we best work to challenge harmful misconceptions while respecting protocols of concealment and evasion? We do not pretend to answer these questions in any definitive way. But we do hope to inspire critical reflection on the limits of visibility as a means of supporting Indigenous survivance and of defending more-than-human assemblages from dispossessory forces. In this way, we join fellow contributors to this special issue on 'Living Protocols' in a larger, 'more-than-research' effort to explore 'how research protocols can be (re)generated in ways that emphasise context and relationships, that bind and nourish more-than-human worlds, and that embed ethical obligations' (Bawaka Country et al., 2018).

6.2 Conservation as dispossession, concealment as survivance

6.2.1 The Political Economy of Conservation

In many parts of the world, institutions working in the name of environmental conservation have long served as instruments of (neo)colonial dispossession (Adams & Mulligan, 2003; Brockington, 2002; Grandia, 2012; Grove, 2017; Fairhead et al., 2012; Neumann, 1998; Sodikoff, 2012; Spence, 1999; West et al., 2006; West, 2016).⁴¹ While these outcomes are not limited to any single institutional form or context--ranging from 'fortress conservation at sea' (De Santo et al., 2012) to 'community-based conservation' on land (Benjaminsen and Bryceson, 2012)--our analysis here is concerned primarily with one particular instantiation: transnational conservation NGOs, hereafter TCOs.

⁴¹ We acknowledge that Indigenous communities have themselves developed explicit conservation ethics and projects in response to environmental degradation and dispossession and that the issues we highlight may not apply to those efforts. See, for example, Cepek (2008) and Hoover (2017).

Prefigured by the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, and other organizations founded in the late nineteenth century, TCOs arose in the latter part of the twentieth century amid growing concerns both about threats to 'charismatic megafauna' (think pandas, cetaceans, giant tortoises) and, as the concept took hold, about the loss of 'biodiversity' in general. Including the likes of WWF, Conservation International, and the Nature Conservancy, TCOs are characterized by their headquarters in the global North, their dedication to technoscientific approaches, their collaboration with corporations and financial institutions, and their frequent interventions in the global South (Brockington & Scholfield, 2010; Holmes, 2011; Sullivan, 2013). Their rise both reflects and motivates the commodification of biodiversity as an object of touristic, philanthropic, and media consumption, and it has helped fuel a dramatic expansion of private and public conservation enclosures around the world (Igoe, 2010; Igoe et al., 2010).

Faced with pressure from human-rights activists and a broader move toward prior consent and consultation, TCOs have in recent years sought to recast themselves as supporters of Indigenous rights by extolling the ecological benefits of secure 'land tenure' and adopting policies that call for 'co-management' and 'partnership' (see, for example, Conservation International, 2010; Sobrevila, 2008; WWF, 2008). Even as conservation practitioners remain divided over the efficacy of 'human-centered' approaches (Fletcher, 2012; Martin et al., 2016; Marvier and Karieva, 2014), TCOs have maintained a relatively strong rhetorical commitment to cooperating with Indigenous communities (see, e.g., Conservation International, n.d.; TNC, n.d.).

In practice, many actual TCO-led interventions remain fraught with inequalities and continue to abet broader processes of bureaucratization,

marketization, and dispossession (Brockington et al., 2008; Büscher and Fletcher, 2015; West, 2016). Some continue to rely on coercive, even militarized enforcement practices, particularly in authoritarian contexts (Massé and Lunstrum, 2016; Tauli-Corpuz, 2016; Vidal, 2016). But even in ostensibly more liberal contexts, where 'co-management' and 'community-based' approaches are the norm, a robust body of work suggests that conservation interventions often come at the expense of Indigenous peoples' land rights and livelihoods, if not through direct displacement then through attempts to impose territorial enclosures, labour regimes, and world-making practices that favor bureaucratic power, proletarianization, and objectification of the environment (see, e.g., Brockington et al., 2008; Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012; Doane, 2012; Dressler & Guieb, 2015; Hanson, 2007; Minter et al., 2014; Heatherington, 2010; Sodikoff, 2012; Theriault, 2017; West, 2006, 2016). These effects are not unique to TCO-led projects in the global South, but also result from conservation efforts where state agencies are more squarely at the helm (see, e.g., Nadasdy, 2003; Gombay, 2014, 2015; Youdelis, 2016)..

Although inflected by contextual variables -- as, for example, in cases of racialized settler occupation -- these outcomes generally reflect the late-capitalist relations of production that drive global financial movements, including those that fund the work of TCOs (Brockington et al., 2008; Igoe et al., 2010). Describing what they call 'accumulation by conservation,' Büscher and Fletcher write that 'conservation should be seen as one strategy by which capitalism seeks to monetise natural resources, preserving them as 'natural capital' for so-called non-consumptive use rather than extracting resources for industrial processing' (2015, p. 8; see also Corson, 2011; Kelly, 2011).

But this is not just a story of global economics -- it is also one of global politics. In conjunction with financial institutions like the World Bank and development agencies like USAID, well-resourced TCOs are also important players in governance, wielding significant influence over conservation policies in many parts of the global South (Brockington et al., 2008). As a result, TCOs are often deeply implicated in processes of postcolonial state formation and territorialization (Corson, 2011). This was certainly true for both of the cases we describe below: TCOs were the prime movers in proposing and implementing the conservation enclosures in question, but in no way were they insulated from government agencies, extractive industries, and their various agendas.

6.2.2 Conservation and ‘environmentality’

If TCO-led projects are deeply implicated in capitalist expansion through ‘accumulation by conservation’ (Büscher and Fletcher, 2015), they are also implicated in processes of subject formation, that is, in efforts to produce particular kinds of governable persons and collectives (Fletcher, 2010). Drawing on poststructuralist theory, scholars have associated many TCO-led interventions with ‘environmentality’ -- a environmental form of what Michel Foucault called governmentality, by which he meant the discourses, institutions, and regulatory technologies that work to optimize population-level outcomes by inculcating economic rationality in individual, self-regulating subjects (Foucault, 1991). Notwithstanding the important distinction between ‘disciplinary’ and ‘neoliberal’ environmentality (see Fletcher, 2010), it suffices here to say that many TCO interventions are premised on the notion that Indigenous communities are ‘natural partners’ of conservation or can be made so through some combination of

incentives, education, and disciplinary techniques (surveillance, punishment, education, etc.).

This overly simplistic assumption echoes the ones that have long animated colonial projects: that Indigenous peoples live in harmony with (or at the mercy of) their surroundings or that their backward livelihood practices are an ecological menace. In our own research, we have both noticed that conservation policies tend to combine these tropes into what at first blush appears to be a more nuanced perspective: Indigenous peoples have had successful 'adaptations' to their environments, but these practices are now disappearing and in need of revitalization or replacement.

This is, of course, a misconception. Indigenous communities in Palawan and Sarawak are not disappearing, and their world-making practices remain vital (albeit not free from dispossessory and assimilative pressures). Yet when this misconception is embedded in TCO policy, it becomes the basis for field research and project implementation -- as, for example, when a TCO-led project conducted 'extensive consultations' with Indigenous communities in southern Palawan in order to forge 'conservation agreements' that 'incentivize community protection activities' and 'transform communities from resources users into responsible and sustainable resource managers.' As with the 'ethnographic turn' in international development (Li, 2011; see also Escobar, 1995), such interventions work to reduce complex lived realities into technical problems that can be solved through technologies of government (education, discipline, contracts, etc.) while avoiding any real confrontation with the systemic (capitalist) drivers of unequal distribution, dispossession, and ecological degradation (Li, 2007; see also Fletcher, 2012).

These narratives are not mere ideas with varying levels of accuracy, but *discourses* that shape the work of powerful institutions and thus have material consequences (Fabian, 1983; T. Mitchell, 2002; Said, 1978). Just as biodiversity is ‘securitized’ -- that is, ‘framed as acutely and existentially threatened, and the threat to [its] existence is rendered so urgent as to bypass political debate’ (A. Mitchell, 2016, p. 25) -- conservation discourses interpellate Indigenous communities as ‘natural partners’ who simply need the right incentives or remedial measures. TCOs thus recast as technical what are in fact intensely political interventions into Indigenous lands and lifeworlds.

This does not mean, however, that these discourses readily succeed in finding or producing the subjects they envision. Nor, for that matter, are the commodifying, dispossessionary effects of conservation an inevitable *fait accompli*. In practice, things are far more complex, and countervailing forces are always in play. One set of such forces are the government agencies and NGOs with which TCOs interact and at times compete. While fragmented or ‘neoliberalized’ state power can at times create favorable conditions for TCO interventions, it also exposes them to political machinations and conflicting elite interests that can alter or thwart their projects (see, e.g., Brockington et al., 2010; Brosius, 2003; Dressler et al., 2010; Igoe et al., 2010; and Li, 2011). Further, as Michael Cepek (2011) in particular has made clear, the communities facing TCO-led interventions do not lose their critical consciousness, aspirations, or capacity for resistance. Even in the face of coercive measures and the technologies of ‘environmentality,’ peoples’ capacity for critical, creative, and potentially subversive action means that conservation’s effects are neither predetermined nor all-encompassing (see, e.g., Theriault, in press; West, 2006). This, we hope, will be clear in the stories we share below.

6.2.3 Survivance amid dispossession

What, then, does all of this mean for the argument we outlined above? These realities create profound dilemmas for Indigenous communities as they contend with overlapping interventions by conservation organizations, government agencies, and extractive industries. Even in cases of ‘human-centered’ or ‘participatory’ conservation, the resulting relationships are fraught with stark power imbalances and premised on flawed understandings of Indigenous environmental practices. In order to derive benefits from these interventions, such as livelihood support or allies in struggles against extractive industries (and even these carry political risks -- see Fletcher, 2012; Brosius, 2003), Indigenous communities must cooperate to some degree. This often means participating at least perfunctorily in ecological and social research, educational programs, livelihood trainings, and so on, all of which involve making choices about how to present oneself and one’s community. As foreshadowed above, some of these choices involve performing to official expectations. But the question for us is how to understand the selective acts of concealment and evasion that take place in this context: what do these acts mean -- and what do they *do* -- in relation to broader processes of dispossession and subjectification?

At first blush, these acts are a form of what James Scott (1985) calls ‘weapons of the weak’: quiet acts of resistance that cumulatively prevent the total dominance or hegemony of the ruling class. Likewise, in a poststructuralist vein, we are describing what Marina Welker (2012) calls ‘unruly subjects’: people whose critical consciousness and agency defy elite efforts to turn them into ‘autonomous, responsabilized neoliberal subjects’ (p. 401). As suggested above, these are respectively the prevailing Marxist and poststructuralist frameworks for

understanding these kinds of social dynamics. But as we also suggested above, we think there is more to this story.

What we hope to add to the conversation is a provocation on how these 'protocols of concealment' constitute a form of survivance. In particular, we draw on Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who have stressed the importance of refusal and evasion in Indigenous peoples' engagements with colonial actors and institutions. Indigenous 'survivance,' first described by Vizenor, refers to 'an active sense of presence over historical absence, deracination and oblivion' (Vizenor, 2009, p. 1). Survivance stories, for example, go beyond recurrent thematic motifs of silencing, domination, absence, tragedy; they also speak of the continuance and thriving of Indigenous presence(s) over and against powerful forces of assimilation and dispossession.

Crucially, survivance depends not just on acts of presencing but also on acts of deception, evasion, and refusal. We are inspired here by the centrality of trickster stories in Vizenor's theory of survivance (Vizenor, 1993, 2009) and by Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson's discussion of refusal as an existentially necessary response to colonial occupation (Simpson, 2014). We also take on Cepek's point that outward acts of consensus and cooperation can conceal the persistence of critical consciousness and ontological uncertainty among members of Indigenous communities (Cepek, 2011, 2016).

These seemingly paradoxical layerings of presencing and concealment, cooperation and refusal, visibility and invisibility--what Matthew Amster (2008) calls the 'social optics of space'--are, in fact, mutually constitutive. As Audra Mitchell argues in her contribution to this volume, these acts are not just 'a refusal to participate in one's own elimination and that of one's relations, but [...] also an

insistence on the ongoing presence and flourishing of these beings and the worlds they nurture.'

So what does all of this mean for Indigenous communities facing conservation intervention? How specifically might acts of concealment and evasion constitute a form of survivance in that context? And how can we respect and support these acts rather than just document and render visible these communities' lives? In what follows, we consider these questions in relation to the research engagements we described above, our voices diverging as we each share and reflect on our own firsthand experiences with protocols of concealment.

6.3 June's reflection: orang utans break taboos, too⁴²

My engagement with the Batang Ai-Lanjak-Entimau complex and the Iban communities who have been living in the complex for at least 400 years, began in the year 2003 and lasted for a period of four years. The complex is considered ecologically important by the international conservation community because it contains the only population of orang utans (*Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus*) remaining in Sarawak. I had been tasked with commencing the first long-term wild orang utan nest count study in Sarawak, under the direction of an international conservation NGO. I conducted nest count surveys in two adjoining protected areas, Batang Ai National Park and Lanjak-Entimau Wildlife Sanctuary, with a team of local Iban men

⁴² My reflection is based on the four years that I spent working as a conservation researcher (2003-2007) and on twenty months of ethnographic research for my doctorate beginning in July 2015, of which ten months were spent in three separate Iban communities in the Batang Ai-Lanjak-Entimau complex, located in southwest Sarawak. During my time in Batang Ai, I conducted a total of 45 semi-structured interviews, through an iterative process. Interviews were conducted with both male and female adult participants who were active in land and farming activities. I also observed activities and rituals related to the forests and community life, and took part in the intensive rice-planting process in order to learn the physical skills required for planting rice, including the cognitive, emotional and spiritual aspects. It prepared and sensitized me to the embodied practice of rice-planting and also provided different ways of engaging with Iban worldviews. As noted below, some of the 'data' in this section come from journals I kept during my time as a conservation researcher, and others come from my doctoral-research interviews and fieldnotes.

as my field assistants. The irony was not wasted on me, that I, a young Bidayuh woman with what was then only a year's fieldwork experience, was leading a team of men who knew the forests better than I did. I was part of a long-standing wildlife conservation tradition that favoured a Western university education over local knowledge and expertise. I was able to write field reports in English, generate statistical reports based on our methodology, and communicate with Western donors. This privilege also shaped my participation in trans-national orang utan conservation workshops, where I was questioned skeptically by some Western male expats, who had assumed--perhaps because of my gender, my local identity, and preference not to don field clothes in the city--that I did not do any fieldwork but rather collated information from field assistants.

Little did they know that I had often trekked across hilly terrains and rivers with my Iban colleagues and camped by the river's edge for weeks at a time, with only a canvas sheet for protection, to count orang utan nests. The skepticism I encountered among other researchers extended to my Iban male colleagues from the different longhouses of Batang Ai, who doubted my physical, mental, and emotional capacity to live for days to weeks in the jungle. Over time, they appreciated that I was always in the field with them, counting orang utan nests together. Yet at the end of my fieldwork, I did not pursue writing scientific articles, other than field reports to my NGO, donors and to the government agency. As a result, little to no international credit has been attributed to my work beyond some recognition in the Malaysian press. This was brought to my attention when an American scholar, who was writing about orang utan conservation research in Sarawak, was very surprised to hear about my years of work in the field. My work today is, therefore, part of an attempt to reclaim my story, not just for myself, but

for other Indigenous women who have been written off, ignored, and silenced in many different ways, for our quiet interventions to protect lifeforms and landscapes in our lands.

What I hope to share here is that, despite our best intentions, we are sometimes party to interventions that hinder, or obscure, local community protocols and values.

6.3.1 Discovery of a dead orang utan, shot to death

During my nest-counting stint, my team and I had come across a dead orang utan corpse that was visibly shot. I had reported the corpse to the park management and other relevant authorities. I also informed my NGO about the sad discovery and recalled the stories that locals had been telling us about their close connection to orang utans. These stories are not unfamiliar to those working in Batang Ai, for they are often told to the delight of tourists who come to Batang Ai for an 'authentic experience.' These stories invoke a Darwinian aesthetic, where orang utans are the ancestors to the Ibans and, therefore, Ibans have a responsibility to take care of orang utans. The stories are also maternal, noting that the orang utan taught Ibans how to give birth in a safe manner by eating a particular ginger plant. The details may vary according to the story-teller, but the message is implicit: Ibans are responsible for orang utans and are their human caretakers in a world where forests are vanishing and hunters roam.

Nothing really stays well-hidden in a rural community whose members keep an eye on the people on their land. A story started to emerge from my fieldworkers, who heard it whispered to them, that it was a young man from the nearby community who had brought a local hunter from town to hunt.

My NGO employer and I puzzled over the contradiction between the stories told and this sad act of killing, assisted by a local Iban. My employer ultimately deduced that perhaps cultural values were being lost in the community, that young men no longer cared about the stories or the connection of the orang utan to their people. It was decided that education workshops needed to be conducted in the longhouses, to remind the communities of their stories, 'restore cultural values,' and encourage them to act as (unpaid) guardians to orang utans.

My conscience lay heavy. I worried about this paternalistic move to 'educate' rural communities, when it appeared that the sport hunters from town were the real problem.

6.3.2 No one's responsibility, everybody's blame

To kill an orang utan is strictly prohibited in Sarawak, punishable with a fine of 30,000 ringgit (about \$7000 USD) and two years of jail (Sarawak Wildlife Protection Ordinance, 1988). The local communities in Batang Ai are well-informed of the wildlife laws, particularly since many have kin who have worked as manual labour for the national park. I was also reminded by an Iban elder living in one of the Batang Ai communities that, before the national park was created, the local communities enforced the comings and goings of 'outsiders' to their rivers:

'Before, we had the [traditional communal] authority to stop outsiders from coming in and fishing and hunting our wildlife,' he explained. 'But now, they have taken our hunting grounds to create this national park, and moved us closer to the dam settlement. They tell us that this land now belongs to the state government to save the orang utans, and it no longer belongs to us. But they scold us when

outsiders come to hunt. They want us to enforce their new laws for them, without pay.'⁴³

Over ten years later, during my PhD fieldwork, the same lament is heard on Apai M's⁴⁴ lips⁴⁵: 'Kasihannya kerana semua suda habis di sana' [Pity those whose land and resources have depleted]. But he adds in Iban, 'there is no longer *adat* [customary law]. Outsiders no longer ask for permission. They come in to hunt and fish as much as they like.'⁴⁶

Given such remarks, one can understand why my employers believed that it would be productive to 'educate' the local Iban. Cultural loss by Sarawak's Indigenous communities is not a new concept in the state government's biodiversity management plans. 'A Master Plan for Wildlife in Sarawak,' which was published by the Sarawak Forestry Department but ghost-written by a Western expat from an international conservation NGO, suggests that rural communities no longer reflect their own 'traditional' values and that it is now up to state authorities and NGOs to assist them back into conservation-friendly ways.

6.3.3 The untold story: Orang utans break protocols, too

For Apai M., he says orang utans have their responsibility, along with the Ibans⁴⁷. Orang utans who raid their kumai (gardens) for example, are 'bad orang utans' and have contravened the unwritten contract between their ancestors and

⁴³ I documented this conversation in my journal in September 2004. Batang Ai was flooded in the 1980s to create a hydro-dam.

⁴⁴ Apai means 'father' in Iban, and refers to my adoptive Iban father and interlocutor, during my DPhil field research in 2015-2017.

⁴⁵ I documented this conversation in my field notes on 16 December 2015.

⁴⁶ *Adat* refers to the cultural values, norms, customs, institutions, and customary laws commonly practised by many Indigenous and local communities in Southeast Asia. For more detailed information on the Iban *adat* for example, please refer to Sandin's 'Iban *adat* and augury' (1980).

⁴⁷ My conversations with Apai M. and Inai were documented on 21 December 2015.

orang utans. Therefore, it is acceptable to shoot an orang utan who is eating your hard-won crops or moving to attack you.

'Why didn't you tell this to the conservation NGO people who come to the village, advising the community not to shoot orang utans?' I asked. 'They wouldn't understand,' he says, 'they want to hear more positive stories of Ibans and orang utans.' 'And they would get mad,' he and Inai asserted, in different conversations. They know these are not the stories that conservation workers and tourists seek. Instead, he obligingly tells them a story of an orang utan who sought revenge after it was killed.

Conservation seems to require a slippery translation of Indigenous cultural protocols, to fit a certain narrative and way of controlling the local population: that tradition has been lost and that communities need to re-learn it through intervention by outsiders concerned for a particular species. Yet in this case, it ignores the Iban perspective that orang utans also have agency and are just as responsible in maintaining the careful balance between farmed landscapes and the forests where they are supposed to belong.

6.3.4 Ghani's story: The discovery of an orang utan skull, kept hidden

Ghani⁴⁸ is somewhat proud to show off his latest acquisition--the skull of an orang utan who had died five months earlier--and somewhat nervous about keeping it in his longhouse⁴⁹. He made a point to lead me to the back of the longhouse, to show me the orang utan skull that was kept hidden. He was also careful to say that if the wrong impression was made about him keeping the skull, he would be caught and prosecuted under the Sarawak Wildlife Law. He said that he had informed a

⁴⁸ Name changed to protect the individual.

⁴⁹ I recorded this interview in my field notes on 2 November 2015.

government section head and a conservationist about the skull, and both had declined to keep it. He explained how he came into possession of the skull, that the ape had hung around the longhouse area, was tolerated by the community, and had later died of old age.

I was struck by how fearful he was of being blamed, even if only in malicious rumours, for the death of the orang utan. And thus he seemed eager to preempt any rumours by showing the skull to anyone who may have any connections with the conservation NGO or the government department.

If there were any measurable outcomes of the conservation education programme, it definitely seemed to inspire fear and paranoia of being persecuted for the death of an orang utan. In the three communities that I worked with, people were keen to let me know that they were very aware of the consequences of hunting orang utans, and being caught for it. 'It is also very bad for tourism,' many would concur. I am unsure of whether the programme 'restore[s] cultural values' that deter wildlife 'poaching,' for I saw wildlife meat being sold openly in the longhouses and at the main pier (In Sarawak, it is illegal to sell or buy wildlife meat, whether the species is protected or unprotected.). The idea of restoring a community to an imagined past, that is to 'restore [a particular set of] cultural values,' seems rather anachronistic. Like myself, a 'modern' Indigenous woman from Kuching, the communities of rural Ulu Ai are firmly in the present, facing very real present-day anxieties and challenges, and with larger political forces at play. For example, there is enormous pressure to create economic productivity with native lands. To keep the land 'idle' in the eyes of policymakers and industry players risks having the land taken and transformed into something else, such as a plantation or even a 'protected area.' In the latter, hunting rights, along with customary practices and

self-determination, are erased and restricted in order to save one charismatic species.

Despite the blame it implies, the demands it places on their labor, and ignorance it projects of their cultural protocols, Iban communities of Batang Ai have nevertheless turned conservation to their advantage, as an opportunity to work as harmoniously as possible with all agencies, to ensure that their homelands remain more or less under their management and care. The lands around their longhouses are tilled for rice and other crops, and whatever land is not cultivated, is collectively regarded as orang utan land. They welcome short-stay tourists and conservationists alike to their lands, with the characteristic Iban hospitality to guests. The orang utan also bears responsibility in maintaining the Iban way of life, by its continuing presence. It is enough to know that orang utans exist and are somewhere hidden in the forests, just as some Iban cultural protocols persist, and remain hidden to those who choose not to see.

6.4 Noah's reflection: in/visibility as a form of power⁵⁰

On 27 April 1521, Ferdinand Magellan died on Mactan, an island in what would later become the central Philippines. He was killed in battle while attempting to subjugate a local chieftain, Lapu-Lapu, who had refused to pay tribute and convert to Christianity. Long suppressed from collective memory by colonial rulers,

⁵⁰ My reflection derives from just under twenty months of fieldwork in the Philippines (November 2010–January 2012; May–August 2012; June–July 2014; July 2015; July 2016), which itself built on ten months of preliminary research between 2006 and 2008. Of most relevance to this article are the nearly eight months I spent living in a hamlet within the boundaries of the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape, preceded by four months of intensive ethnographic and archival research into the MMPL's management and punctuated by visits to the provincial capital for meetings and interviews with bureaucrats, activists, and business people whose work connected either to the MMPL or to environmental politics in southern Palawan. In the hamlet context, my most important research method was participant observation, documented in the form of jottings and fieldnotes and supplemented by semi-structured interviews and a systematic survey of thirty-nine households.

this event is today remembered as a watershed moment in Philippine national history – a foundational act of resistance to colonial occupation.

My first visit to Palawan was in 2006, but I, Noah, did not officially begin fieldwork for my doctoral thesis until 2010. At that time, I was familiar with the Magellan story but had never considered it directly relevant to my work. Magellan's surviving crew had traveled onward and visited Palawan, but even so, I thought, the island remained largely beyond the reach of colonial powers through the early part of the twentieth century. And, more to the point, I never expected this particular story to be of much concern to the Indigenous Palawan communities who were hosting me. Their territories were in the southern half of the island whose name they share, a remote region widely if problematically referred to as 'the Philippines' last frontier.' Why should this foundational moment of national(ist) history matter in a place so peripheral to the centers of (post)colonial power?

I'll never forget the first time I heard a Palawan version of the Magellan/Lapu-Lapu story.⁵¹ I had asked Upu Isu⁵², an elder who would become my adoptive 'grandfather' and frequent collaborator, if he remembered the Palawan story of cosmogenesis. What did the ancestors say about the origins of the world, I asked. Instead of recounting one of the stories I had read in ethnographic accounts of Palawan 'mythology,' Upu Isu mumbled something about Magellan and Lapu-Lapu. I was confused and asked him to elaborate. In so many words, he explained that long ago Palawan was invisible to outsiders, leaving the island's inhabitants to enjoy its vast wealth undisturbed. Then one day a man named Magellan joined up with a man named Lapu-Lapu, and the two of them traveled from the Visayas to Palawan in search of gold. Using sorcery, they rendered the island visible, fought to

⁵¹ Isu first told me this story on 3 July 2012, at which point I paraphrased it in my field notes.

⁵² This is a pseudonym, as are all personal names used in this section.

the death over its wealth, and thus set in motion a sequence of dispossessory foreign interventions that continues to the present.

I went on to hear versions of this story from several different Palawan men and women. Each time it embarrassed me to think how uncritically I had internalized the presentist narrative of Palawan as 'the last frontier,' impervious to colonization and only recently subject to foreign desires. For my interlocutors, Palawan had long been in colonial sights, and contemporary processes of state formation, such as their recent incorporation into a conservation enclosure, were a direct extension of events that began long ago. The Sulu, Spanish, Japanese, Americans – all had come looking for 'gold' in the past, and the current Philippine government was no different. Of course Magellan, a European 'explorer,' teamed up with Lapu-Lapu, a Visayan chief. Of course they used sorcery to render the island visible and capture its wealth. This is, in essence, the same thing outsiders have done ever since.

6.4.1 The magic of invisibility

One afternoon, while I was visiting my 'uncle' and frequent collaborator, Maman Lido, we were discussing the potential dangers one might encounter on the land and how one might turn to magic (*kependayan*) of various types for protection. One of the dangers that came up was dealing with government officials, particularly those who monitor and regulate Palawan livelihood practices. We were sitting within the boundaries of what was then a relatively new conservation enclosure—the Mt. Mantalingahan Protected Landscape (MMPL)—which had intensified official scrutiny of Palawan swidden, hunting, and other practices.⁵³ Maman Lido knew that

⁵³ Swidden or *uma* in Palawan is a practice of shifting agriculture wherein plots of land are cleared, burned, planted, and harvested in an annual cycle that follows the monsoons. Indigenous or 'integral' swidden (Conklin 1957), such as that long practiced by Palawan communities,

I had been anxious about securing research permits from the MMPL's Management Board and gingerly handed me an herbal amulet to protect me from them. He reminded me that all of Palawan used to be invisible, before outsiders rendered it otherwise, and suggested that government conservation measures were yet another attempt to take (*mengisi*) Palawan land and resources.⁵⁴

'They say swidden is forbidden,' he lamented, 'but they are the ones cutting down all the trees.' Reinforced with an accusatory gesture toward the settler-dominated lowlands, his pronouns intentionally conflated government officials with Filipino settlers from other regions. He instructed me to carry the amulet around with me 'so that you won't be seen by the DENR' (the DENR is Department of Environment and Natural Resources, which enforces the MMPL and other policies that some Palawan consider disadvantageous). As far as I know, the amulet did not subsequently 'protect' me from the DENR, but that is probably because I actively sought to engage with DENR personnel as colleagues and research participants. Even so, Maman Lido's instructions were not metaphorical. If I had wanted the protection of invisibility, he meant for me to have it.

Of course Maman Lido is not alone in conceiving of invisibility as a form of power – think of Plato's Ring of Gyges, J.K. Rowling's invisibility cloak, or the numerous other narrative traditions in which magically induced invisibility conveys the ability to evade, apprehend, or deceive. More remarkable, for me at least, was

involves low population densities, extensive (as opposed to intensive) land use, and long fallow periods during which the forest is able to regenerate (Macdonald, 2007). While swidden remains a vital practice in the lives of Palawan and other Indigenous communities in the region, its viability is threatened by migrant settlement, agricultural intensification, discriminatory state policies, and conservation enclosure (Dressler and Pulhin, 2010).

⁵⁴ This exchange took place on 6 August 2011. The quotes are reconstructed from my jottings and fieldnotes. This was not the only time Lido gave me an amulet to protect me from malevolent forces, nor was it the only time he railed against land clearance by settlers or the prohibition of swidden.

the emphasis that he and other Palawan placed on collective *visibility* as an instrument of their dispossession. This, too, is no revelation, what with the centrality of 'discovery,' surveillance, and research to colonizing projects past and present. Still, I think it is worth pausing to consider what visibility means in a time when the 'discovery' of new species and the documentation of Indigenous practices are so often purported to afford some measure of protection from existential threats.

In short, visibility is a dilemma. For Palawan and many other Indigenous Peoples, it is a necessary and inevitable part of dealing with external actors and institutions, and it can yield benefits, such as land titles, resource permits, alliances against common opponents, etc. But it is also the epistemological and ontological precondition of colonization and dispossession.

6.4.2 The dilemmas of visibility

Conservation interventions like the MMPL have proliferated in Palawan since the 1990s. Not coincidentally, the conservation push has accompanied both a frenzy of extractive industries (especially tourism, mining, and monocrop plantations) and a new slate of laws intended to recognize Indigenous territories and protect Indigenous rights. For Palawan, research is one of the many consequences of these entangled processes. That is, Palawan have increasingly found themselves subject to research conducted by government agencies, NGOs, corporations, and, yes, scholars foreign and domestic. In my experience both as a researcher and as an observer of other researchers, I have noted that Palawan are quite savvy when it comes to anticipating the motives of researchers and engaging accordingly. Some refuse to cooperate with researchers altogether and/or actively avoid them, and this is especially true if they perceive a hidden agenda or interest.

But many cooperate while remaining critical and discreet around matters that could provoke more intensive intervention into their lives.

This interplay of cooperation and concealment was especially noticeable surrounding Palawan livelihood practices. Many researchers investigate Palawan livelihoods as a prelude to some kind of livelihood support project, and even though many Palawan are skeptical of such projects' long-term outcomes, many actively work to derive benefits in the short term. Hence one of my Palawan aunts would encourage her sisters(-in-law) to cooperate with the latest government survey, lest they miss out on conditional cash transfers, free coconut seedlings, or whatever benefit might be in the offing, even as she remained suspicious of officials' intentions.

In these encounters, Palawan are almost inevitably asked about their past and present livelihood practices, and this question requires them to engage, self-consciously or not, with dominant narratives about these matters. Swidden, in particular, is a sensitive topic since it has long been stigmatized and policed by the state. Today many conservation officials and environmental activists believe that Palawan have either abandoned the practice of swidden in old-growth forest or have never engaged in it (because of ritual taboos around the felling of large trees). And virtually everyone seems to believe that Palawan are losing or abandoning their 'traditions' and therefore in need of 'alternative livelihoods' and/or 'cultural preservation' (see Harry, 2011, and Harry & Kanehe, 2005, for Indigenous perspectives on how 'cultural preservation' can constitute a form of biocolonialism).

When asked by outsiders, many Palawan respond in a way that conforms with these narratives. In my own experience, it is indeed the case that most Palawan today only cut new swiddens in *bengley* (secondary growth) or in *tering*

gebaqan (relatively mature secondary growth), but rarely if ever in *gebaq* (old growth). And it is likewise true that certain cosmological-cum-legal protocols in many cases restrict the clearing of large, mature trees. But these statements obscure vital realities, including the fact that many Palawan still recognize the benefits of including old growth in the swidden cycle (longer fallows, fewer weeds, better soils). Nor do these statements capture the lived reality of swidden as a vital part of Palawan lifeworlds, wherein 'the forest' is a storied mosaic of relations far more complex than a categorical distinction between 'secondary' and 'old' growth. These storied relations are the substance of what conservationists hope to leverage as 'Indigenous ecological knowledge' and of what Indigenous-rights laws purport to protect as 'cultural heritage.' Yet these relations are also precisely what conservation enclosures and bureaucratic lands-claims procedures tend to disrupt. Thus it is no surprise that Palawan men and women would feel compelled to perform in accordance with dominant narratives and to conceal important aspects of their lives.

6.4.3 'Knowing how to interview'

One of my 'aunts,' Minan Pulaw, explained to me that it is necessary to answer researchers' questions in ways that avoid 'hurting [officials'] eyes' or subjecting *taw't daya* to further scrutiny. *Taw't daya* or 'upstream people,' in this case, refers lovingly to Pulaw's kinfolk higher in the mountains, where, she suggests, people have less experience managing researchers and other outsiders--they don't 'know how to interview.' Where she lives, in the foothills, officials can monitor Palawan swidden fields and products, she explained, something they cannot do so easily in the mountains. As a result, officials believe that *taw't daya* are 'bad,' that they just keep cutting swiddens in old-growth forest, even though *taw't daya*

maintain 'our true customs [*keedatan kay banar*].'⁵⁵ The customs to which she was referring are the dynamic ones that have, in collaboration with myriad other-than-human beings, produced the landscape that conservationists now so urgently hope to protect. She clearly felt it wise to try and protect those relations from further intervention by representing them in ways that selectively conformed with and challenged outsider expectations.

Minan Pulaw's approach to the dilemma of visibility has helped to shape my own representational practices. In 2015, for example, I helped to draft an informational pamphlet intended to inform government and NGO personnel about Palawan swidden practices. The aim was to dispel common misconceptions about the ecological effects of swidden and promote awareness of laws protecting Indigenous practices like swidden from prohibition. This is precisely the sort of thing that my Palawan collaborators have asked me to do with the knowledge they have shared with me, and so my first impulse was to enthusiastically contribute in any way I could to this admirable effort.

But then I thought back on what Maman Lido and Minan Pulaw had taught me and wondered whether the pamphlet might backfire. Could this well-intentioned document simply invite further scrutiny and intervention? After consulting with trusted collaborators, I decided that the most likely outcome was that the pamphlet would have no appreciable effect—that it would simply be glanced at and filed away—but that its potential benefits outweighed its potential risks. So I helped, trying in every way I could think of to shape the language and imagery so that it would uphold a protocol of selective concealment. What this meant was helping to articulate and illustrate the continuing, vital cosmological,

⁵⁵ This conversation took place on 20 July 2012.

economic, and social significance of swidden for Palawan's Indigenous communities without dwelling on realities that might 'hurt the eyes' of the pamphlet's audience. Indigenous communities in the Philippines have a legally protected right to their 'traditional' livelihood pursuits, including swidden, but in practice the bias against swidden remains strong among conservation officials, as does the desire to surveil and curtail it. All the more reason, I thought, to stress swidden's compatibility with conservation and to obscure a bit its enactment as a powerful, often defiant form of survivance.

6.5 Conclusion

We have offered these stories as starting points for reflecting on some of the dilemmas that Indigenous communities must grapple with when negotiating conservation interventions on their lands. In spite of our very different personal and professional backgrounds, we have brought our stories together because we believe they point to larger issues that are too often overlooked when individual places or 'cases' are considered on their own.

Like others who have studied these dilemmas, we have observed the profound contradictions and ambivalences that shape relations between transnational conservation organizations and Indigenous communities. These organizations too often objectify Indigenous traditions as resources for conservation but avoid confronting the political-economic drivers of dispossession, deforestation, and landscape transformation. We agree that this 'anti-political' approach to conservation can serve to undermine meaningful collaboration, reinforce broader dispossessory processes, and disrupt the very ecological

assemblages that conservationists wish to protect (Li, 2011; see also Ferguson 1994).

Here, however, we have sought to draw attention to the survivance of Indigenous world-making practices amid overlapping interventions by extractive industries and conservation. More specifically, we have aimed to show how acts of evasion and concealment help defend space for those practices. Unlike narratives that emphasize unidirectional imposition of external interests or an imminent erasure of Indigenous lifeways, we have sought to highlight how Indigenous persons work through their own ambivalences and assert their own interests as they contend with competing designs on their lands and subjectivities.

Our Palawan and Iban collaborators have compelling reasons for selectively performing narratives of cultural decline and for concealing or obscuring important aspects of their relations with their surroundings. This interplay of engagement and concealment is, in part, about mitigating the dispossessory effects of conservation itself -- as, for example, when vital hunting or farming practices are understated or concealed in order to avoid attracting more intensive surveillance and restriction. But it is also an alternative to outright resistance or refusal -- a way to leverage the resources of conservation organizations (e.g., funding and contacts) in hopes of enhancing local livelihood prospects and challenging the encroachments of other extractive industries (e.g., mining, logging, monocrop plantations). As we discussed above, prevailing frameworks point us to conceive of these acts as 'weapons of the weak' in the hands of 'unruly subjects,' an apt framing that indeed helps to contest the oft-presumed inevitability of dispossession and subjectification.

In our assessment, however, there is more at stake than these frameworks let on. For this reason, our analysis turned to the concept of survivance, which we

feel better expresses both the creativity and the gravity of our collaborators' responses to conservation as an institution of neocolonial power (Vizenor 1993, 1998, 2009). We are not talking about their resistance to or subversion of conservation within an ontologically or cosmologically homogenous social order. Rather, in each case, we are talking about the response of one more-than-human social order to the ontological, cosmological, and political-economic designs of another.

Conservation interventions of the sort we have studied purport to save 'biodiversity' from threats of degradation and extinction while working to instrumentalize Indigenous 'traditions' in service to that goal. But these interventions do not account for the role that they themselves play in the projection of neocolonial state power and capitalist relations of production -- the very forces that pose existential threats to the ecological assemblages that conservationists hope to protect. Nor do conservation organizations answer for the ontological or cosmological implications of their work, which involves intervening in and often disrupting the more-than-human social relations that constitute said assemblages. Faced with these realities, our Iban and Palawan collaborators' acts of engagement, concealment, and evasion do more than extract marginal concessions from conservation organizations and more than complicate their own subjectification. In our assessment, these acts constitute a form of survivance--an agentive, creative assertion of an Indigenous social order--that is achieved, in part, through concealment from the institutions of neocolonial power.

What, finally, does this mean for our own praxis? Like many activists and scholars, we usually think of social 'visibility' as a form of empowerment. But our Iban and Palawan collaborators have challenged us to reconsider this notion. This

challenge, which we strive to embrace, is not really a matter of respecting confidential or secret knowledge or, for that matter, of following ethical protocols for the management of sensitive 'data,' although both are imperative. Instead, it is a challenge to understand and respect the ways in which Indigenous survivance is enacted through selective (in)visibility (Simpson, 2014). We recognize that our research, no matter how collaborative or ethical we strive to make it, is implicated in the forces that render beings and landscapes visible, that is to say, epistemologically and ontologically accessible for intervention. As Tim Leduc argues in his contribution to this volume, facing this reality is part of the 'hard initiatory work of coming to the 'truth' of colonial ancestries' (Leduc, this volume). And if this is true for our work, then it is all the more so for research conducted as part of conservation or development projects that instrumentalize Indigenous knowledges as resources to be leveraged or preserved. Under these circumstances, defending space for Indigenous survivance requires not just collaborative research, but also collaborative concealment.

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Prelude to Chapter 7: Naming

§

From collaborative concealment and contra-remembering, I now turn to the ideas of relationality and co-becoming (eg. Suchet-Pearson, Wright, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Country, 2013) that extend beyond the conservation species. After laying the ground in previous chapters (Chapters 3 – 6) on what a decolonial political ecology would entail, I now introduce how the Ibans understand the orang utan, or rather the maias, as they call the animal. I suggest knowing and naming the maias as a decolonizing epistemology. The maias in effect, is larger than its embodied or genetic idea -- knowing the maias through the Iban ways, helps reaffirm social practices and connections to place, including old forests that may no longer exist.

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The Orang Utan is Not an Indigenous Name: Knowing and Naming the Maias as a Decolonizing Epistemology.

June Mary Rubis^{a*}

^aEnvironmental Change Institute, School of Geography and Environment, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom.

E-mail: jrubis@gmail.com

June Mary Rubis is a PhD candidate with the Environmental Change Institute (ECI), School of Geography & Environment, University of Oxford. Born and raised in Sarawak, she was a former conservation biologist in Borneo. She is a Yayasan Khazanah scholar. Her fieldwork has been funded by ECI and Oriel College, Oxford.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-001-5734-0469>

Twitter: @junerubis

CHAPTER 7

The Orang Utan is Not an Indigenous Name: Knowing and Naming the Maias as a Decolonizing Epistemology.

Abstract:

Much of wildlife conservation literature and practices rely on euro-western nomenclature and legacies of empire. The political, philosophical and social assumptions embedded in conservation frameworks, however seemingly invisible, encode top-down behaviour and governance in conservation practice. From the standpoint of contemporary conservation, Indigenous communities do not have recognizable processes of classifying nature and as such, their conservation strategies are made invisible within certain frames. Within this framework, the western mode of classifying nature has become recognized as the sole way to understand, and therefore conserve nature. If Indigenous knowledge is acknowledged within contemporary conservation, it is often from a paradigm that focusses on ecological-scientific knowledge, rather than the complex inter-species relationships that Indigenous communities have with nature. As such, Indigenous communities have often been problematized as a barrier or problem towards conservation, due to a seeming lack of care for species of conservation interest.

In this article, drawing on a *kin* study of maias conservation in Sarawak, I explore the power dynamics and tensions emerging within practice and discourses of conservation from imperial legacies of naming. In particular, I focus upon the struggles and negotiations in which conservation actors understand the orang utan, as they are commonly known in an international space, that overshadow the Iban ways of naming and knowing the orang utan as maias. Finally, I discuss the Iban classifications/names and relations with nature that affect different understandings of conservation.

Keywords: taxonomy, conservation, Indigenous, decolonization

7.1 Introduction

In this article, I explore the power dynamics and tensions emerging within practice and discourses of conservation by focusing upon the struggles and negotiations in which conservation actors, Indigenous Ibans and tourist guides name and understand the maias. From the Latin *pongo* (an anthropoid ape) and

pygmaeus (short or reduced stature), the maias are known as *Pongo pygmaeus* in the scientific world, or more commonly, as the “orang utan”. For many familiar with the Indo-Malay region, it is often assumed that “orang utan” is a term that locals use to know and name the great ape. It is after all derived from the Malay words, orang (for person), and -utan (or hutan) for forests, or “person of the forests”. However, as the maias is also found in regions where Iban people have lived and thrived for at least 400 years, the Ibans have their own terms to identify and acknowledge the maias.

The non-Indigenous origin of the term “orang utan” is little known outside the maias (or mawas) habitats of Sumatra and Borneo. In Sarawak, the orang utan is known as the maias in many variants that depend on its characteristics. In Sumatra and other parts of Borneo, the orang utan is known as the mawas. There is no literary record of the Malay-speaking peoples using the term “orang utan” or one of its variants to refer to the ape before the middle of the 19th century (Cribb *et al.*, 2014). The first recorded Malay⁵⁶ use of a term resembling “orang utan” to describe the ape identifies the word as a Western term (*ibid.*). The Hikayat Abdullah, a major literary work written in the 1840s by Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, a Malaccan-born munshi⁵⁷ of Singapore, recounts that ‘the Ruler of Sambas sent Mr Raffles a present of two apes of the kind which the English call orang utan’ (*ibid.*: 12). The description of the ‘orang utan’ meaning ‘person of the forest’ suggests a vision of a creature living in constant harmony in the wilderness, away from the other ‘orang’ (humans) that represent an external and disruptive force. This is evident in the diaries of Alfred Russel Wallace and William Hornaday who travelled to Sarawak during the

⁵⁶ Malay was adopted as the lingua franca of the region, and communication in the Malay language between the English and the Malays, especially after British colonization of the partial Indo-Malaya region, became important.

⁵⁷ Persian word originally used for ‘writer’ or ‘secretary’.

colonial era and described their hunting exploits in killing maias in the name of science, with the help of local guides. This paper therefore discusses how such imperial legacy in naming informs contemporary conservation practices in Sarawak.

(Re)naming wildlife or nature brings forth new power dynamics and tensions around how we prioritize certain conservation strategies based on imperial understandings of nature while dismissing Indigenous and local communities' knowledges and relationships with nature. In *Decolonizing Nature*, Adams (2003) describes how colonial ideologies "cast a long shadow in thinking about conservation, and in many instances, they have been built into the structure of established institutions" (ibid; 17). Thus, in emphasizing the Indigenous knowing of the orang utan as maias, this paper aims to (re)center Indigenous knowledges, relationships and stories as per Baldy's (2015) work on "(re)storying Indigenous storyscapes", as to reclaim relations with land and more-than-human beings. In particular, I examine power dynamics and tensions emerging within practice and discourses of conservation focusing on how British imperial legacy clashes with attempts at reclaiming Indigenous knowledge about nature and how this contributes to current debates within political ecology and critical geography & Indigenous studies (Tuhiwai, 1999; Adams, 2003; Watson & Huntington, 2008; Tallbear, 2011; Sundberg, 2014; Whyte, 2016 among others) about better ways of engagements that privilege Indigenous knowledges and ways of relating with nature.

Through thoughtful engagement with people, non-human beings and land, this kin study (Todd, 2017) takes place in the wild maias landscapes of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo where the major part of the Batang Ai and Lanjak-Entimau complex (about 193 sq km) is protected under the Sarawak National Parks and Nature Reserves Ordinance. Nearly 30 Iban communities have lived in the area for

over 400 years. Today, this complex is considered ecologically important by the conservation community because it contains the only wild population of maias (*Pongo pygmaeus pygmaeus*) remaining in the Malaysian Borneo state of Sarawak. While tending to my positionality as a former professional conservationist, I explore different understandings of the maias by conservationists who help shape institutional responses to conserve the maias in Sarawak. I also consider the ways tourist guides negotiate the complexities of Iban relations with place and maias. I then turn to my Iban interlocutors' ways of knowing and relating to the orang utan that allow for understanding of ways of relational care. In drawing attention to how Ibans relate and name maias, I suggest that knowing the maias through the Iban ways, helps reaffirming social practices and connections to place, and shifts us towards re-establishing relationships between nature and humans that continue to be disrupted through the making of empire and its legacies.

7.2 The Politics of Naming and Classifying Nature

(Re)naming becomes crucial as we explore the long-term consequences of euro-western or imperial practices of (re)naming that, become dominant, dismiss or misconstrue Indigenous and local knowledge. (Re)naming wildlife or nature that have been abstracted from their relations is therefore essential in reclaiming Indigenous agency and ways of relating and belonging to land.

The laying claim over naming of a blue tarantula species in Sarawak illustrates the imperial conquest of nature through intimate acts of naming. According to a 2019 article published in *Science Magazine*, British arachnologists classified the spider as a new species and (re)named it *Birupes simoroxigorum*, incorporating names of the children of three European collectors who had provided

the specimens (Law, 2019). (Re)naming the Sarawakian blue tarantula with the European collector's children's names represents a long-standing, accepted imperial practice of laying claim disguised through the seemingly neutral practice of scientific convention of naming: the Linnaean biological classification convention that identifies, groups and names organisms via a standardized system. In privileging a euro-western science logic⁵⁸ that is dominantly understood as neutral and objective, this naming tribute epistemically displaces wildlife away from its habitat origins and relations with the local and Indigenous populations. In the blue tarantula example, the European collectors who allegedly obtained the specimens through familiar means of looting in the name of science, inserted themselves, through usage of their children's names, into the on-going cultural history of the spider, while dislodging the local/Indigenous naming and understanding of the spider in relation to the humans who live in the same habitat. It is who has the access and means to (re)name and publish first that becomes the pioneer of the scientific gold-rush to classify and possess new species⁵⁹.

It is in the context of relationships of care and to make kin (Haraway, 2016; TallBear 2016) that the politics of naming could perhaps be best understood. For example, Povinelli (1995) examines the ways in which Indigenous relations to non-human beings, knowledge and praxis are reduced by euro-western dominance over universal knowledge, and dismissed as mere belief. Belyuen Aboriginal ontologies and cosmologies were found to be difficult to reconcile within colonial paradigms and logics, and thus regarded as irrelevant to the rule

⁵⁸ Silvia Federici (2018) describes how the rise of capitalism and associated witch hunts in 17th century Europe changed Europeans' relationship with animals, from animals being deemed responsible beings to non-sentient machines, following Descartes's theory (Federici, 2018: 22).

⁵⁹ For discussion for contemporary work on citation politics, see Sara Ahmed (2013, 2014).

of western colonial logics (Povinelli, 1995). Indigenous knowledge proponents further argue for recognition of different *systems* of knowledges and epistemologies, of the plurality of multiple Indigenous worlds (Blaser, 2009). If we understood that science is in fact multicultural (Harding, 2006), all forms of systematic empirical inquiry could perhaps be adapted to particular social and natural environments and to particular locations within these environments.

(Re)naming of nature is part of a much broader process of taming/disciplining nature that erased Indigenous knowledge and replaced it with western knowledge that responds to the white man's fantasy of discovering nature. In her influential book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) describes how "naming" is part of a colonizing methodology, where "renaming the land was probably as powerful ideologically as changing the land." (Tuhiwai S., 1999: 51). Subramaniam (2014) questions the idea of a unitary narrative of "western science" as part of the mythology of science: a "linear, progressive story of knowledge produced exclusively in the global North" and asserts that science instead has "appropriated, embraced and accumulated knowledge throughout the complex histories of colonialism, trade and empire" (ibid, 156). Knowledge production within conservation science thus involves epistemic violence (cf. Spivak, 1988). If Indigenous knowledge (or TEK: traditional ecological knowledge) is acknowledged within contemporary conservation, it is often from a paradigm that overly romanticizes Indigenous knowledge and expects Indigenous communities to remain unchanged over time despite the changing landscapes due to socio-economic pressures on traditional lands. This static view has been criticized by many (see Brosius, 1999; Ellen & Harris, 2000; Li, 1999) and attempts at implementing local and Indigenous knowledge for conservation have been misguided at best (Agrawal, 2002; Escobar, 1998). Typically, Indigenous knowledge

has been made abstract, rendered as mere “data” from its original context, and either ignored or re-configured to fit the contemporary conservation framework. The politics and governmentality of incorporating TEK or Indigenous knowledge into policy thus marginalise Indigenous people and their perspectives on how their knowledge should be applied (Nadasdy, 1999).

Being more aware of these practices of renaming and knowledge production leads to counter-practices that attempt to re-establish kin relations in place of empire’s naming practice. As such, it is with epistemological politics in mind, along with decolonizing Indigenous scholarship (eg. Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Todd, 2016; Tuhiwai S., 1999; Wilson, 2008 etc.) and others whose work is deeply-rooted in kinship and Country/place (eg. Bawaka Country *including Wright et al.*, 2016) that I attempt to (re)center Indigenous knowledges and thought in my work.

In engaging with Indigenous knowledges and thought through naming, I build on the notions of ‘Indigenous place-thought’ (Watts, 2013), ‘watershed level thinking’ (Todd, 2016) and “co-becoming in a relational world” (Bawaka Country *including Wright et al.*, 2016). Indigenous knowledges are not just “stories” or “myths” and do not stand separately from legal orders, customary protocols and of belonging *with* place (Watts, 2013; Todd, 2016). Through acknowledging and engaging with ontological and epistemic diversity with care, we avoid culling ‘relevant’ ideas from Indigenous knowledges, while ignoring those that do not fit into universal scientific concepts (eg. Anthropocene) nor those that do not conform to the ideas of ‘ecological nobility’. Hunt (2014) further cautions against adhering to the Indigenous/Western binary thought that excludes Indigenous knowledges from science and theorization.

Tuhiwai Smith offers a countering decolonizing methodology to “rename the world using original Indigenous names” (Tuhiwai S., 1999: 157), and to “retain as much control over meanings as possible. By ‘naming the world’, people name their realities. For communities, there are realities which can only be found in the Indigenous language; the concepts which are self-evident in the Indigenous language can never be captured by another language” (ibid: 158). There is “power in a name -- there is the right to self, respect of knowledge and acknowledgement of existence in a name (Baldy, 2015: 11). One way to reclaim relations and belonging to place and more-than-human beings, is to center Indigenous naming, knowledges and stories. In attending to these expressions of naming and relating, I signal the potential for a more relational ethics of care in orang utan conservation that pays attention to the contextual, spatial and temporal. By focusing on the specific level of how Iban ontology and power relations are situated, I contribute to the development of the theories of the politics of nature classification and political ecology by using a decolonizing Indigenous lens. In the next section, I will turn to the description of this kin study.

7.3 A Kin Study on Maias Naming.

Todd (2017) proposes the notion of a ‘kin study’ in place of the ‘case study’ as to engage more thoughtfully and reciprocally with land, non-human beings and people, especially during an environmental crisis. It is with similar intentions that had shaped my research. Even though I had this explicit attention on maias, I did not solely focus on the maias but instead trusted the emergent process of attentive engagement with my human interlocutors, place and maias. I considered my own existing embodied knowledge of the same landscape, where I had formerly worked

as a conservation biologist for an international conservation organization in the mid-2000s and my overall 12-years working experience as a conservationist in Borneo.

Much of my reflections for this paper is derived from my previous experience as a conservationist with Bidayuh⁶⁰ heritage, and my concern with how we continue to treat Indigenous knowledges and ontologies as inferior in matters of science and more importantly, of relational ethical care and belonging in Sarawak. In other words, I want to think more about how I have been a participant in, and subject to sites of social struggle within the control thesis of conservation, and how they have shaped my experience and of the rural communities' that I have worked closely with.

The Ulu Ai or Batang Ai Ibans had arrived in Sarawak over 400 years ago from West Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo (Apai, 2014, *pers. comms.*). They refer to themselves as the first Iban group to have settled in Sarawak, attesting for hundred of years long relationships with the land and more-than-humans.

This research took place in the Iban customary territories of the Batang Ai/Ulu Ai complex, located in southwest Sarawak, Malaysia Borneo (Figure 1). A high proportion of the Batang Ai forested landscapes is old secondary forest due to previous clearing for shifting cultivation over the years. Interspersed in this matrix, are smaller areas of abandoned rubber gardens. Throughout the complex, the terrain is very steep with an altitude range of 100 to 760m. The complex has various points of access through several rivers by outboard-powered longboats. The closest rural towns for the several entry points are about 300km distance by road from Kuching, the capital city of Sarawak.

⁶⁰ The Bidayuh is a collective name for several Indigenous groups found in southwestern Sarawak, Malaysia and West Kalimantan, Indonesia.

Since the gazetting of the complex, seven communities in Batang Ai and 35 communities in Lubok Antu have restricted privileges to hunt, fish and gather jungle produce in the area. Activities in the park are limited to farming of previously cultivated areas and gathering of forest goods. In return, the Iban communities “benefit” from employment in the park, and have formed their own cooperatives to provide transport, accommodation and guiding for visitors.

This article analyzes data gathered during a 20-month period of 2014-2016, in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, of which ten months were spent in three Iban communities in the southwestern tip of the Batang Ai complex. Within this research period, I conducted semi-structured interviews, participated in activities and rituals related to forests, and went through an intensive rice-planting process where I learnt the physical skills required for planting rice, alongside the cognitive, emotional and spiritual aspects. It prepared and sensitized me to the embodied process of rice-planting and also provided relational ways of engaging with Iban worldviews. I also participated in maia ecotourism walks and had many conversations with my interlocutors while rice-planting, working in the farms and in the longhouse. It was mostly through these conversations and forest walks that I learned more about the maia according to Iban world-views. I was ‘adopted’ by an Iban family in all but one of the communities that I stayed in. Particularly, I aimed to form lasting reciprocal and respectful relationships within the communities where I was conducting research. Interviews were carried out in both Malay and Iban languages. Whenever I was in Kuching, I participated in related talks, workshops and consultations when invited and read official documents pertaining to Batang Ai whenever possible.

The following sections examine the ways of naming and relating to maia, first by conservationists and tourist guides. The latter (tourist guides) negotiate

more of the complexities of their own Indigenous backgrounds by sharing their personal understandings of how Ibans navigate through conservation expectations and the reality of life as rice-farmers in shrinking farmlands. Finally, I consider the ways of knowing and relating to maias by my Iban interlocutors who have their own nomenclature with the maias.

7.4 Conservationists, Tourist-guides and Maias Identification

Through selected accounts, I attempt to elaborate multiple positions to illustrate different frameworks of identifying the maias. As such, it is the core of my intervention to look at knowledge production in relation to imperial formations and traces accordingly, and attend to the complexity of imperial legacies through nature classification. However, I do not claim all conservation practitioners or tourist guides speak with the same voice (cf. Spivak, 1988).

7.4.1 Identify to Protect

Trained by classic western tradition where nature is in opposition with reason (see Federici, 2018), conservationists generally define the maias within a discursively constructed divide that separates humans and nature, revealing a relationship of control and domination.

Ibans had categorized the maias long before Western or Malaysian biologists had arrived in Batang Ai. I had learnt this categorization early on in my days of conservation fieldwork in the mid-2000s but it had no place in the research frameworks we were taught to use. This section describes how some Malaysian conservationists (and sometimes tourist guides) favour a classic Eurocentric

understanding of cause and effect between human and wildlife beyond Iban ontology and relations with reciprocal more-than-human kin.

This section highlights different perspectives on who matters most on the land, who is often held responsible for when a maias is killed, and how maias are identified from a scientific NGO perspective to be *protected*. These perspectives are rooted in the wider processes of imperial knowledge production through which the maias is understood through naming as orang utan, or “person of the forest”, and are in constant conflict with Ibans.

In my interviews with conservationists, they emphasized their work on environmental education campaigns that they run with seven Batang Ai longhouse communities where primary school children were targeted. These awareness campaigns included western-influenced plays with theatre prop firearm and an orang utan mascot. The main objective is to ‘educate’ the rural Iban communities on the protected status of the maias and the landscape, and to ‘remind’ the Ibans of their stories of the maias. The central assumption garnered by the interviews, that Ibans seem to forget their ancestral stories and related prohibitions on killing maias strongly suggests that this idea in fact is imposed from a different set of authority, i.e. through conservation actors, rather than a nuanced expression of Iban adat (see Rubis & Theriault, 2019).

Similarly, the remaining population of maias in the Batang Ai complex has been attributed to the maintenance of local hunting taboos by conservationists (Horowitz, 1998). The conservationists further explained that “no-hunting zones” were created in sites, following the Iban land classification of pulau (“islands” or sacred groves) where traditionally, the pulau is the Iban equivalent of the protected area. The conservation NGO is in a sense, creating new protected areas that border the Batang Ai national park and Lanjak-Entimau wildlife sanctuary that currently

host the only wild orang utan population in Sarawak -- not necessarily through laws and legislations but rather, co-opting Iban land terminology such as the pulau for conservation actions.

These new extensions were referred to as the “orang utan conservation areas”. The NGO, following relevant Sarawak government agencies, encourages Iban communities to self-patrol their own community members and to report anyone, including their family members, selling wildlife meat, to the authorities. These maias conservation efforts in Batang Ai appear to be a nuanced appropriating act of state territorialisation (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995) or a subtle “green grab”. The conservation NGO is focused on creating more protected areas within the Batang Ai complex, and utilizing Iban traditional land management frameworks that could help maintain these reserves. The conservationists also cited the “empty forest” concept⁶¹ (Redford, 1992) to relate their concerns for an ecosystem with no large mammals (i.e. the orang utan) that is otherwise intact. To these conservationists, the maias is their utmost priority to protect, and the reason why they maintain a presence in Batang Ai.

The lack of income was cited by the interviewee as a reason for hunting by the conservationists, and that the sale of wildlife could be offset by transforming would-be hunters into community patrollers. One conservationist further explained their motives, “Indigenous conservation needs a carrot and a stick. Communities want development⁶² and when the right conditions exist, conservation could then be facilitated. For example, the enlightened ones understand the negative impact of

⁶¹ Kent Redford coined the phrase, “empty forest” in a paper published in the *BioScience* to refer to an ecosystem that is void of large mammals. The defaunation of large mammals are either by direct or indirect means, including habitat destruction and hunting.

⁶² Development in this case, refers to wider access to economic markets, better-equipped public facilities such as schools, and material accumulation.

planting oil palm on their lands” (Chai⁶³, 2015, *pers. comms.*). The rational order of conservation practice relies on the assumption that education campaigns would “correct people’s ways.”

Humans are not seen as part of a healthy ecosystem and their actions need to be constantly monitored or managed. (Re)centering Indigenous naming of the maias as practice of being-with rather than managing-of, places the maias in different relations with humans and this produces different understandings of conservation practices.

7.4.1.1 Implementation of Conservation Logic & Naming

In the mid-1990s, the American NGO, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the Sarawak Forest Department wrote the *Master Plan for Wildlife in Sarawak*, to provide a plan of action for the state management of totally protected areas, national parks and wildlife. The document states that the “most difficult area of conservation education is reconciling the needs and aspirations of rural communities living in and around totally protected areas.” (Wildlife Conservation Society and Sarawak Forest Department, 1996: 204). It further describes the use of restricted rights to hunt and gather forest resources by the Batang Ai communities as “unsustainable” and that “the number of enforcement staff in totally protected areas will inevitably be low compared to the number of rural people nearby” (ibid. p: 204). It concluded that, “enforcement is impossible unless the rural people support the idea of protected areas and derive benefits from it” (ibid. p:204). The document further advocates conservation education in Sarawak rural areas, as to “work with rural people toward understanding the value of wildlife and forests, including to their own lives; the concept of sustainable use etc.” (ibid. p:204). Within

⁶³ Anonymized.

the context of conservation education, it reflects not just practices of disciplining unruly rural populations but also critical attempts to decolonise knowledge (cf. Freire, 1970).

The current awareness campaign in Batang Ai continues these institutional aims through their work and focuses on individuals' attitude to and engagement in wildlife hunting practices as the root cause of human threats to orang utan conservation. As such, a key feature of the sustaining practices of wildlife hunting as an intrinsic part of Iban culture and male-bonding is neglected.

"The pressures [in the Batang Ai complex] are huge", the conservationists further explain, "there is illegal logging, land conversion into plantation, the lack of park and enforcement staff in the government agencies, where there are not enough patrols to guard the area. For example, there have been three fully-paid staff⁶⁴ for Batang Ai park about two years ago." (Chai, 2015, *pers. comms.*).

There is a particular logic used by conservationists to view Ibans and other Indigenous peoples who continue to live in rural areas, as landowners who have lost their way, or do not have sufficient knowledge to manage natural resources in present day for the benefit of conservation. To many conservationists, Ibans and other rural Indigenous and local populations continue to threaten wildlife species with their practices and social life.

Through conservation logic and naming, Iban people, land and more-than-human beings have become abstracted from their relations, and turned into resources or complaints. The maias have been categorized into what needs to be protected, totally protected and why they should be conserved, and thus further disembodied from place and relations with humans.

⁶⁴ The rest of the park staff are paid as daily labourers (and therefore not acknowledged as full-time staff) and are based at the park headquarters at the edge of the national park.

I now turn to tourist guides who often also deploy a similar framework of identifying maias to protect, but in a multiplicity of ways that do not necessarily enforce a view of Ibans as separate from the environment. To the clients, the local tourist guides call the maias, “orang utan” following the conventional conservation practice and the guides tend to favour the conventional conservation framework. In doing so, I attempt to highlight the different, and sometimes contradictory, positioned voices that identify the maias.

7.4.2 Identify to Protect: On shifting identities and Indigenous complexities

Tourist guides of Batang Ai deploy different and contradictory frameworks, sometimes for strategic reasons to shield the communities from perceived bias. The guides deploy different frameworks to assert Iban inter-connectedness on these lands and other non-human species. They narrate faithfully the conservationists’ moralistic spin on the story of how maias taught Ibans how to give birth safely and therefore the Ibans are the moral custodians of the ape (Rubis & Theriault, 2019). They also demonstrate by living with the communities and walking through their farmlands and forests, that Ibans have their trials and challenges to maintain a rural farmer’s life and social ways.

During my research period, I followed tourist guides on their guided tours of the Ulu Ai forests whenever feasible. The tourist guides of Ulu Ai were often of ethnic Bidayuh or Iban origin⁶⁵ and lived in Kuching or its outskirts. Together with the tourists, they would travel down to Batang Ai and relied on the communities’ willingness to host tourists. The main expectation of these walks is to spot a wild maias although the guides were very careful to provide a disclaimer that spotting a

⁶⁵ Some of the guides were also of ethnic Chinese or Malay origin but they are in the minority of the guides that I have encountered and spent longer time with.

wild maias involves a great deal of luck. The limited sightings meant that the guides had to provide a comprehensive tour of the Ulu Ai landscape that went beyond the embodied presence of the maias. This tour included narrating stories of Ibans caring for the maias, explaining the rice cycle cultivation and longhouse life, and sharing a general knowledge of plants often sighted on these walks. Any plants of interest, especially if they were edible, of some economic use or with distinguishing characteristics, are pointed out. For example, the prevalent fern species in continuously cultivated lands, the *Nephrolepis cordifolia* or “fishbone fern” as it is described to the tourists, is often pointed out because of the easily recognizable fronds. For the Ibans, this fern serves as an indicator that the soils have become relatively nutrient-poor and hard to re-cultivate for new crops.

Each tourist guide had their own particular style in narrating the greater context of the landscape, and complex inter-species relationships through stories. Humour played a big role in smoothing a strenuous walk along the hills. The guides also relied on the community members as assistant guides, to walk them through the trails and point out bird or other animal calls. For longer trips in the forests, the assistant guides also acted as porters, carrying the tourists’ backpacks, food and equipment.

The focus of a single-species tour is therefore dismantled by the guides and tourists gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the complex interspecies relationships in Batang Ai regardless of whether they have spotted a maias or not. With the repetitive storytelling of land, people and other species throughout the walks and in the longhouse, the tourists learn that Iban communities are an integral component within “orang utan landscapes”. The guides would also weave their Indigenous life-stories, into the multi-layered, complex re-tellings, demonstrating that there are ethical reasonings while living on the land and with non-humans.

The guides further explain the Iban relationship to the forests, using the “supermarket” metaphor. Bayang, a local Iban guide, explains to tourists during a forest walk, using a provocative metaphor as to bridge a possible cultural gap: “The forests are our supermarkets. We go in and all we need is a parang⁶⁶, and we get what we need. The parang is like our credit card” (Bayang, 2015, *pers. comms.*). In conversations with my Bidayuh father who also used a similar metaphor to describe forest relations and use, I understand Bayang’s explanation as demonstrating how Ibans will obtain what they require from the land, through learned skills and handed-down knowledge to ensure their own survival and prosperity. However in a different conversation, another guide had remarked, “Before we fed the cities, now the cities feed the rural areas. Before the community provided fresh eggs [to the tourists], now there are no more farms (Denis, 2015, *pers. comms.*). This comment was part of a larger conversation that underlies present-day anxieties of insecure land tenure. Diminishing economic and agricultural benefits have led to the shrinkage of new farmland areas and increased attention onto forested lands for *maias* (both for tourists and conservation actors). Similarly, some elders of the community have lamented the loss of ecological knowledge through generations in their conversations with me:

“I am in my sixties, and I tend to forget what is good to harvest in the forests. I have to bring them back to the elders -- only they contain the knowledge now. There are only four elders left in S., and one of them tends to forget so much himself, that he has become a child. The young people, they really don’t know anything about the forests, they just want to become tourist guides. But I think they may be interested to learn. When tourists ask them, “what is this”, the young people have no

⁶⁶ local machete.

idea too. Sometimes the good ones come home with a plant specimen and ask the elders for help in identifying the plant.” (YY, 2014, *pers. comms.*)

These stories along with the “forests as a supermarket metaphor”, demonstrate how the Iban cultural survival are dependent on the forests’ well-being and the interconnections between other non-human species, while also defending the Ibans from being framed as unthinking environmental destroyers. There is reason within the seemingly destructive actions taken (eg. yearly hill-burning to open up new areas to plant rice). The guides would also elaborate on the rituals and protocols of Iban land management and depending on the guides’ familiarity of the Iban culture themselves, the challenges Ibans face in maintaining native customary traditions in present day. On one hand, it appears that the tourist guides appropriate and reproduce the morality of particular stories of Ibans and maias, but through embracing the shifting relationality and complexity of being a fellow native still close to land and community, they also contribute the work of discourse in the lived expressions of Indigeneity. It is therefore, through these active, mobile and relational stories that the orang utan is known.

7.5 Iban and Maias Identification

7.5.1 Identity to Place

Through the richness of Iban naming practices for the maias, we begin to understand the creature as more specific and in place.

When I started surveying for orang utan nests in Batang Ai in the mid-2000s, my fieldworkers made it very clear that I had to learn the different types of maias that I would encounter in the forests. “Orang utans”, I was informed, “is what

tourists call them, but here, we call them maias. So what type of maias did you see?” Yet, local knowledge and Iban naming of the maias are not regarded as crucial knowledge to the conservation practice. As local fieldworkers, we are reminded by our conservation bosses that Indigenous knowledges, while interesting, are not so relevant to conservation planning. As such, during my time as a conservationist, I was encouraged to focus on our surveys. I did however utilize my fieldworkers’ insights of the landscape and maias to help plan for their nest count surveys.

Bordering the Batang Ai national park are Iban customary territories called Ulu Ai. The territory is particularly known for more maias sightings than the protected area of Batang Ai. These local insights from the communities helped direct maias nest count surveys in the area. My interlocutors from Ulu Ai offer similar reasons for this phenomenon, including that maias follow the mast fruiting season and their population distribution is also influenced by the type of trees planted by Ibans. For example, in a longhouse area named after the jambu (rose apple⁶⁷) that were planted by their forefathers, maias would be observed in present-day during the fruiting season to feast on the ripe jambu. The Ulu Ai communities continue the way of life of their ancestors by shaping the landscape with annual fires, later planting rice, rubber, as well as new fruit tree species that attract maias.

Apai was one of my main interlocutors during the study, his name meaning ‘Father’ in Iban. Apai further described the following categorization of the maias into four distinct categories: 1) maias kesak (kesak, referring to the small red fire ants); or the small red orang utan; 2) maias rambai, (“long hair”); 3) maias gambi;

⁶⁷ also known as the *Syzygium jambos*, and it originates in Southeast Asia, and occurs widely elsewhere, having been introduced as an ornamental or fruit tree.

("cheekpads"); 4) and maias chapan; ("large body"). Maias kesak usually roam in the pengerang (kumai); the secondary forests, and is the maias that is often spotted.

The other maias are found in primary forests, known as the hutan besai or "kampung besai" (big village). According to my interlocutors in Menyang Tais, seeing any maias other than maias kesak is very rare. The forests in close distance to the longhouse, have been community-logged or cleared several times already for the purposes of rice-planting. Maias chapan, maias rambai, maias gambi, are thus expected to be found in primary forests. However, according to Apai, the old forests these days are disappearing due to illegal logging around the edges of the protected areas. The old trees may not be there anymore but the Ibans still keep them alive by remembering them through distinctive maias naming, and referring the trees collectively as the "big village" (ie. kampung besai). As with the *gurrutu* in Bawaka Country, naming the maias to place, brings attention to "relational spatial production through multiple dimensions, attending to the materialities and temporalities that can sometimes be washed away in contemporary space and place." (Bawaka Country *including Wright et al.*, 2016: 466).

Ibans do not categorise and name maias to control, but rather to understand maias in their place. I suggest that it is also the constant shaping of the lands, the planting of the jambu trees, and burning of hills, that the maias also know the Ibans and co-become with Ibans, trees and place through relational care (cf. Bawaka Country *including Wright et al.*, 2016). In the following section, I expand on these ideas of relational connections that extend beyond the maias itself.

7.5.2 Identify to Connect: Reciprocity & co-learning between humans & non-human species.

For the Ibans of Batang Ai, the maias have been part of their world through interrelations and interdependency for much longer. According to Apai, there are several stories that convey the interspecies relationality of the Batang Ai Ibans and the maias. One of their main stories relates how several hundred of years ago, Iban women of his ancestors' communities were struggling to give birth safely. The communities had migrated in search of new lands to live on and were unfamiliar with the territories. Several Ibans on a scouting expedition came across a pregnant maias eating a particular ginger plant. They returned to the village with this new piece of information. They sought the plant and prepared it for the women in the community who were pregnant. The concoction had helped ease their birthing pains. Since then, the Ibans have credited the maias for this particular plant knowledge. Indai, Apai's wife, reminds me that up to today, the women in the community who have moved away from the longhouse for marriage or work still request the ginger plant. "We boil the plant and they drink it like tea" (Indai, *pers. comms.*, 2015).

This story and its variants, have captured the conservationists' and tourist guides' attention, who then seek to dismantle it from its epistemological origins and reconfigure the story into a moralistic fable. We are informed that because of this very special connection with maias, Ibans therefore have a moral obligation towards the orang utan. Particularly for conservation, this idea of moral obligation works in terms of regulating self-enforcement within communities. An education campaign for example, that focuses on the law and consequences of killing an maias, while simultaneously "reminding" the communities of their obligation to the orang utan, implies greater conservation responsibility (and therefore, consequences)

held by the communities themselves. Within the euro-western frameworks of conservation, where humans are collectively homogenized and colonial structures disregarded, the idea of more-than-human species reliance upon humans for survival persists.

For Apai and many other interlocutors, however, the maias birth story along with the customary taboo against killing of maias (and other wildlife species), is part of reciprocal customary adat that fixes interspecies connections to land and place. There is no (human) divine authority over non-human species, nature and place. Maias, pythons and other more-than-human beings alike hold responsibilities, as do Ibans, while living on the same lands. Maias are also expected to uphold their obligation not to destroy the farmers' livelihoods nor harm Ibans themselves. "We do not shoot to kill, but we shoot to scare the maias, and any other wildlife, away from our fruiting trees" (Apai, *pers. comms.*, 2016). In challenging our own previous notions of centering humans, we can begin to appreciate the agency of the maias that underpins Iban understanding of the universe.

Apai explains further the meaning of taboos or pantang that extends beyond maias, and as such identifies maias as part of a broader interspecies relationality to place. Apai has a pantang (taboo) on consuming python meat that is handed down in his family, from an ancestral dreaming of how the giant snake, the Nabau, saved his people (cf. Rubis and Theriault, 2019). Similarly, Apai has a pantang against eating gibbons and maias. However, he can only pass down this taboo of eating these species, to his immediate family. He cannot forbid other people in the longhouse to not eat certain wildlife, as they do not have the shared responsibility inherited from his immediate ancestors.

Similarly, the prohibition includes killing an animal wantonly. As Apai explained, there must be good reason to kill a customary-prohibited wildlife. For the

past couple of weeks, Apai was trying to stop whoever was attacking the chickens in the village. One night, Apai heard the dogs barking and the chickens squawking, and took off with his shotgun. He was able to shoot and kill a python that was caught in the coop. Since the python had gone against the agreement in eating his chickens, Apai explained, he was obliged to kill it. However, because he and his immediate family had a taboo against eating the python, he shared the meat with the rest of the longhouse community.

The stories shared with me by Apai inform me of what he sees as the proper ways to be in this world, and to maintain good relations and belonging, including with more-than-human species. There is a danger however to take stories from their emplaced context and critique Ibans for not fulfilling their end of the agreement. This limited and extractive engagement with these stories misses the potential for a fuller interspecies relationship and reinforces problematic relationships. I also do not intend to argue that these protocols are observed in constant harmony nor to paint an idyllic picture of inter-species relations. My interlocutors often convey their complex and urgent realities with specific events in local social relations, and with the broader institutions interested in their land practices and social lives.

It is in the context of relationships of care and to make kin (Haraway, 2016; TallBear 2016) that the politics of naming could perhaps be best understood. By attending to these relations, we also attend to a responsiveness to how we attend or care (Bawaka Country *including Wright et al.*, 2016) beyond the imperial modes of constructed “care”.

I therefore argue it is necessary to consider how we approach Indigenous naming, knowledges and stories in conservation work and also in our citational practices. It is these ideas of knowing the maias beyond “to protect” but rather *to*

connect, in place that maintains orang utan-human relations as more than an abstract(-ed) species with conservation value. In other words, we must know the maias beyond its mostly charismatic and conservation value, and carefully think through its embodied co-relations with place and Ibans or other Indigenous peoples living in the same lands.

7.6 Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the power dynamics and tensions emerging within practice and discourses of maias conservation in Sarawak where euro-western imperial nomenclature legacies have impacted and continue to influence maias conservation practices. I focus on the struggles and negotiations in which conservationists (and sometimes tourist guides) consider the maias in ways that overshadow the Iban ways of naming and knowing the maias. However, the decisions of Ibans when they (re)tell or withhold their histories and stories should be a part on how these stories are engaged with (Rubis and Theriault, 2019). These decisions are part of a more ethical approach and understanding of hidden Indigenous strategies that contribute to better forms of conservation and research. I examine certain practices and discourses of conservation that dismiss Iban ways of naming and knowing, and as such obscure the broader cosmological visions of nature, non-human species and humans. This is underscored by the ways conservation actors use Iban knowledge to survey reserves and to create new reserves and monitoring practices to curtail or discipline Iban social ways. This is a limited and ultimately extractive engagement that misses the potential for a fuller relationship and reinforces problematic relationships with Iban people and with the maias.

The euro-western mode of classifying nature has become overstated and a recognized way of understanding, and therefore conserving nature. This is not to imply however that everything would be fixed if conservationists just employed an Iban naming system. The political, philosophical and social assumptions embedded in conservation frameworks, however seemingly invisible, continue to encode particular behaviours and actions in praxis. This paradigm must shift from utilizing Indigenous knowledge for ecological-scientific purposes to understanding the complex inter-species relations with Indigenous communities and nature that are strained by historical and current pressures on native customary lands. Allowing for the emergence of relations that have been misunderstood and hidden, opens the possibility of envisaging ways in which knowledge, practices and society can be transformed.

I also describe how tourist guides and their “messy” stories help challenge normative conservation ideas about how Ibans or people are ultimate nature destroyers that need to be managed, through their everyday stories. Wright *et al.* (2012: 57) explains the multiplicity of (re)story-telling: “stories are multilayered, complex and interwoven in and through time and space; without clear beginnings or ends they are constantly told and retold”. Thus through the re-shaping of “conservation stories” with interweaving of their own Indigenous life-stories, tourist guides guide their listeners to recognize that it is not only explicitly conservation stories that are important, but also the Iban’s collective right to live on their ancestors’ lands.

Finally, I discuss the Iban classifications/names and co-relations with maias, other non-human beings and nature that affect different understandings of conservation. In doing so, I contribute to the ideas of relationality and co-becoming (eg. Bawaka Country *et al.*, 2013) that extend beyond the conservation species. The

maias in effect, is larger than its embodied or genetic idea -- knowing the maias through the Iban ways, helps reaffirm social practices and connections to place, including old forests that may no longer exist. I hope that this discussion will lead to conversations on how we can focus on sustaining current nature-human relations and acknowledging all relations with humans, non-human species and place. With this in mind, I ask how do we also return to more enduring relations that have been dislocated from place and other species. As such, taking our cue from Indigenous communities and scholars, perhaps we should think of conservation not just for non-human species, but also for kin relations. Hopefully such efforts will serve to expand the scope of politics of nature classification and the broader theory of political ecology in the context of decolonizing conservation.

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CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

Apai and I are in a leaky longboat heading to the longhouse across the wide lake that was created when the Batang Ai dam was built (Figure 20). My task is to bail out the water with an old plastic container as Apai maneuvers the boat. The water doesn't stop leaking in and I start to feel a little nervous as we still have a long while to go before we reach our destination. The lake was vast and deep, and while I could swim, I am not a strong enough swimmer to feel particularly confident. Apai must have sensed my nervousness, as he started on a story of the hills where he fended off illegal loggers with a handful of elders, armed with old shotguns. I think about that journey and Apai's pragmatism as I write the final chapter of this thesis.



Figure 20: Crossing the Batang Ai lake.

Despite some limitations of the study and mistakes made, I have continued to remain attentive to Indigenous epistemologies in all of its discontinuous iterations (e.g. stories) and unexpected disseminations (e.g. during a leaky boat journey) to understand human-orang utan relations. Yet to me, the way forward hinges not so much knowing what these epistemologies are, but rather what we plan to do with it (with careful respect and permission).

As I had illustrated in **Chapter 4**, the challenge is not really a matter of respecting confidential or secret knowledge or of following ethical protocols for the management of sensitive 'data' although both are imperative. But rather, to recognize that my research, no matter how collaborative or ethical I strive to make it, is still implicated in the forces that render beings (including more-than-humans) and landscapes visible, that is to say, epistemologically and ontologically accessible for intervention. With this in mind, I mark a closure and summarize the main findings in this thesis. In light of decolonial praxis I try to hold for myself and the challenges provided onto me by my Iban interlocutors, that I do not provide answers particularly for conservation interventions that may hinder rural Iban communities further but rather to help provide a way forward in conservation relationships foregrounded in decolonisation.

At the onset of this thesis, I aimed to provide a nuanced decolonial understanding of how Indigenous Iban communities enact, articulate and mobilise strategies in different ways to navigate their day-to-day lives in native customary domains that are also orang utan conservation landscapes in Sarawak, and how these modes of thought and action may contribute to particular mainstream conservation narratives, politics and power relations, from a political ecology perspective. Within these parameters, I reflected on the framing around the current discourse regarding orang utan conservation in Sarawak, how the framing works

and how Indigenous peoples may resist the framing in diverse ways. The way these areas of debate are interpreted affects policy and conservation intervention relating to the management and conservation of orang utans and its habitat. In particular, I demonstrated the continuance of human-orang utan relations by Indigenous Iban communities through subtle resistance or refusal, contra-remembering and other methods, and suggested other pluralities that contribute to conservation, over prevailing dominant narratives that mostly assume a linear pathway to conserve forest and more-than-human species. Indigenous perspectives on more-than-human relations provide social geographies with additional complex ways to understand such relations within both Indigenous populations and wider ones. This thesis recognizes that Indigenous relations *is* more-than-human relations and further, necessitates fresh inquiry into specific politics and strategies of concealment that rural Indigenous communities may employ in response to conservation actions.

My thesis articulates the multiple ways human-orang utan relations are realized within the power relations of conservation work. The following findings provide a theoretical and decolonial grounding of understanding the different ways of Indigenous Iban presencing, and provide a way forward in developing a decolonial political ecology of orang utan conservation.

In **Chapters 3 and 4**, I presented a critical discussion of the epistemological basis of ethnographic work. Discussing up-front my position as a ‘native geographer’, I expound on the local context of the Indigeneity vs the Local, and how we may gain an ethnographic understanding of human-orang utan relations within a decolonial political ecology framework.

Remembering. *In Chapter 5, my findings include an articulation of a type of decolonial remembering, ‘contra-remembering’ that speaks of Indigenous presencing*

on lands. The chapter commenced with a story shared with me by my father, a co-theorist, as part of my decolonial praxis to put Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies as equal importance to literature review.

In considering Vizenor's (1999) 'survivance' and Osterhoudt's (2016) 'political ecology of memory' frameworks, I offer a particular strand of remembering as part of human-orang utan (landscape) relations as opposed to the general idea of memory. Indigenous peoples are not just vulnerable to dispossession of lands but also dispossession of narratives/stories and relations with more-than-humans, particularly the remembering of their survivance and political consciousness. I argue that when Indigenous peoples are dispossessed of stories of agency, colonial refusal and political strategies, they are locked into unidirectional narratives of victimry that further denies them access to reclaim relations with native customary territories and biodiversity, and thus are locked into contemporary, limiting ways to conserve. This chapter offered a possibility of envisioning a decolonial political ecology approach in understanding Indigenous relations with lands, more-than-humans through memory (contra-remembering) and in the process, open up new understandings of human-environment or human and more-than-human relationships in the context of conservation.

Concealing. *In Chapter 6, my findings include a particular ethical approach and understanding of hidden Indigenous strategies.* With my co-author, Noah Theriault, we explored how protocols of evasion and concealment are important parts of defending more-than-human worlds from dispossessory intrusions, including those of conservation. Our Palawan and Iban collaborators have compelling reasons for selectively performing narratives of cultural decline and for concealing or obscuring important aspects of their relations with their surroundings. This interplay of engagement and concealment is, in part, about mitigating the dispossessory effects

of conservation itself – as, for example, when vital hunting or farming practices are understated or concealed in order to avoid attracting more intensive surveillance and restriction. But it is also an alternative to outright resistance or refusal – a way to leverage the resources of conservation organizations (e.g. funding and contacts) in hopes of enhancing local livelihood. It is a challenge to understand and respect the ways in which Indigenous survivance is enacted through selective (in)visibility (Simpson, 2007). Our collaborators therefore have challenged us to reconsider social ‘visibility’ as a form of empowerment. As such, as concerned researchers, *we argue that defending space for Indigenous survivance requires not just collaborative research but also collaborative concealment.*

Naming. In Chapter 7, I turned to the topic of politics of naming the orang utan. In this chapter, I have explored the power dynamics and tensions emerging within practice and discourses of maias conservation in Sarawak where Euro-western imperial nomenclature legacies have impacted and continue to influence maias conservation practices. I focus on the struggles and negotiations in which conservationists (and sometimes tourist guides) consider the maias in ways that overshadow the Iban ways of naming and knowing the maias. However, the decisions of Ibans when they (re)tell or withhold their histories and stories should be a part on how these stories are engaged with (Rubis and Theriault, 2019). I analysed three types of identifications (of naming and knowing) of the orang utan (or maias) such as: 1) identify to protect; 2) identify to connect; 3) identify to place. I discussed the Iban classifications/names and co-relations with maias, other non-human beings and nature that affect different understandings of conservation. In doing so, I contribute to the ideas of relationality and co-becoming (eg. Suchet-Pearson, Wright, Lloyd, Burarrwanga, & Country, 2013) that extend beyond the conservation species. *My findings include that the maias in effect, is larger than its*

embodied or genetic idea -- knowing the maias through the Iban ways, helps reaffirm social practices and connections to place, including old forests that may no longer exist.

The political, philosophical and social assumptions embedded in conservation frameworks, however seemingly invisible, continue to encode particular behaviours and actions in praxis. I have demonstrated how state conservation documents presume a lack of understanding or conservation ethics in rural Indigenous communities in contrast to the human-orang utan relations actively enacted on by Iban communities in Batang Ai. This paradigm must shift from utilizing Indigenous knowledge for ecological-scientific purposes to understanding the complex inter-species relations with Indigenous communities and nature that are strained by historical and current pressures on native customary lands. Allowing for the emergence of relations that have been misunderstood and hidden, opens the possibility of envisaging ways in which knowledge, practices and society can be transformed.

8.1 Moving forward

Through empirical research and grounded argument, this thesis contributes constructively to political ecology and conservation discourses through an Indigenous decolonial turn, and makes contributions to developing a decolonial political ecology of human-orang utan relations. I argue that human-orang utan relations provide plurality of ways to rethink conservation engagement, where orang utans and people are simultaneously impacted by and workings of conservation as it seeks to control and manage Indigenous peoples and their relations with lands and more-than-humans. Ibans have actively interacted with conservation practices in complex and pluralistic ways, opening up potential new

ways of engagement in the conservation discourse. Ibans articulate pressing issues on the ground, through remembering stories, kinship relations with land and orang utans, and naming and knowing more-than-humans that form a local epistemological order.

Conservation is a euro-western placeholder term structuring the vast number of ways Indigenous peoples have for thousands of years, conceived of their relations to more-than-humans, land and ecology. When we start to shift our understandings that are led by Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies and struggles, this act changes and revitalizes how we perceive conservation, and our corresponding relations to land, other (more marginalized) humans and more-than-humans. Many conservationists, activists and academics are struggling to articulate satisfying solutions to similar questions within the paradigms of modernization of how we may continue operate: how do we reconcile Indigenous and local epistemologies, ontologies and struggles in the face of rapid development of rural landscapes and global ascendancy of Western⁶⁸ cultural, political and economic norms while advocating for conservation of more-than-humans and landscapes as well.

As I had shared a part of my own history in Chapter 3, we can begin to understand how the processes of modernization and economic growth imposed by colonial Western powers have disrupted Indigenous and local ways of life and economies, drawn young and able people into urban centers, and created new urban elites from modern educational institutions and bureaucracies, thus threatening communal relations to land, rural communities and more-than-humans.

⁶⁸ As with many other Asian thinkers, I refer to the 'West', not necessarily in simple dichotomy with local Indigenous communities, but rather to refer to the fundamental imbalance of power, and where it sits.

All of this for what is seen as an assumed emancipatory process of ‘development’ towards a new set of relations that don’t lead to a clear destination of ecological balance and harmony. As I had put forward earlier in this thesis, the process of decolonization could perhaps be best encapsulated in the preposition ‘towards’. ‘Towards what’? This thesis has thus strived to understand and respect local Indigenous conceptions of well-being, relations, epistemologies and ontologies to counter the assumption that economic liberalism, industrialization and individual self-interest embedded in mainstream conservation praxis could be the cure-all for the manifold environmental problems we see today.

8.2 What would a decolonial political ecology look like?

Currently when we think of global environmental issues, there tends to be a crisis mode that pushes us to rush solutions. When issues become crisis-oriented, relations with the most marginalized peoples tend to be neglected or ignored. The end result leads to many rushed policies and top-down proposals for more authoritarian interventions that do not take into account, relationships with Indigenous and local rural peoples that are based on consent, trust and reciprocity. A good example is the investment-led Malaysian federal government development project called Sarawak Corridor of Renewable Energy (SCORE)⁶⁹ that claims to be for ‘inexpensive, clean, safe and renewable energy’ as to purportedly move away from agro and petroleum oil-extraction industries. However, the resulting solution is to build mega-dams on native customary lands that will continue to power polluting industries such as aluminium smelters, steel, other oil-based and oil palm-based industries. Whilst there have been well-publicized environmental campaigns

⁶⁹ See official website, <https://www.recoda.com.my/what-is-score/>.

such as SAVE Rivers⁷⁰ to stop these mega-dams, I want to gently criticize the tendency to focus on Western-led solutions (and saviours) and to romanticize the plight of rural Indigenous communities, while paying little heed to the ambiguities and uncertainties of the complex ethical entanglements between the urban Indigenous (including elite, and those governing) and the rural communities. The response however should not be creating academic work to dismiss Indigeneity in Sarawak in its various forms, including dismissing scholarly work by local academics to *understand* Indigeneity in its emplaced context, as part of a misleading attempt to understand these complicated entanglements within the context of grander theories.

Instead we should be focused on restoring and advocating for more ethical and just relationships⁷¹. And this can start by acknowledging and understanding human & more-than-human and human & land relations, while supporting historic reparations⁷² on their own terms. Political ecology points out to the ways colonial and post-colonial conservationists and naturalists treat native customary lands as a homogenous, universal concept such as 'wilderness'. Much of social science conservation work has observed the profound contradictions and ambivalences that shape relations between conservation organizations and Indigenous communities (e.g. Brockington et al., 2010; West, 2006 & 2016). This work includes observing how Indigenous traditions and knowledge are too often objectified as resources for conservation but the political-economic drivers of dispossession, deforestation and

⁷⁰ See official website, <https://saverivers.org/>.

⁷¹ Also, I think of environmental justice movements/campaigns that are very important in engaging with inequitable access to resources or disproportionate exposure to land degradation/pollution etc. based on race or class difference but are often less appealing to the general public because of the discomfort and guilt when engaging with one's privilege.

⁷² This is a call to action that many Indigenous activists and groups base their work around, and is also supported by new forms of conservation actions, including convivial conservation.

landscape transformation are often ignored.

My work here seeks to build on these insights by exploring a decolonial political ecology of human-orang utan relations, while also examining how this could be articulated through different ways that demonstrate survivance, contra-remembering and refusal. When I think what a decolonial political ecology would look in practice, I think of the following based on my findings from my thesis:

- a) Acknowledging and disclosing the complexities of 'self' in research, whilst protecting interlocutors from further anthropological-type inquiry as per politics of refusal;
- b) Recognizing the subtle, different ways and strategies that Indigenous relations with lands, atmospheres, waters, more-than-humans in their emplaced context may arise, including contra-remembering;
- c) Defending space for collaborative concealment when it comes to Indigenous survivance;
- d) Dismantling over-stated euro-western ways of naming and understanding nature, and emphasizing Indigenous ways of knowing and relating. This may include some support for Indigenous names but also recognizing that the power to (re)name comes with the power to bequeath, classify, possess without dismantling power relations and structures that render Indigenous life-worlds, and their relations with the ecological and spiritual world apart.

The scale and complexity of conservation issues requires resolution through the meaningful involvement of alternative knowledge systems, especially from Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, and provincializing Western-based knowledges.

I think of solidarity with marginalized communities as part of a decolonial practice and understanding that their lack of being heard is *not* voicelessness that we may then take upon this platform for them. This means ceding power as academics, researchers and policy-makers in relation to the specific place-based human and more-than-human presences, stories, legal orders, knowing that we may not hold the answers and being open to learn and *put into practice*, emerging decolonial relationships, that are foregrounded on Indigenous terms.

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Appendix 1

A1. Solar, Sustainability and Strategies in Sarawak.

The orang solar (“solar men”) are finally here. The longhouse community has been lit in a pleasant buzz since awaiting the arrival of the technicians (described by my adoptive parents, as “orang solar”) who would install new solar panels. The week prior, the available men in the longhouse had worked every day on building the shed that would house the solar batteries within and the solar panels above (Figure 21).



Figure 21: Apai building the solar shed (December 2015).

Apai¹ tells me that the solar batteries are arriving separately from Germany. He is so impressed with the origin of the batteries that he repeats this fact to me a couple of times. However, he worries, they might be delayed in the port, not in time for Christmas when the villagers’ adult children return for the holidays from working in the cities.

The solar panels are not the first that the village has had. The first sixteen solar panels were placed above the longhouse roof about a year ago, replacing the many village generators run on diesel (Figure 22). However, the electricity generated from the solar panels is enough for “lights and TV only”—not enough to run the iceboxes or a washing machine that sits idle in a bathroom where I bathe with a scoop and a bucket.



Figure 22: Merging the new (solar panels) and the old (longhouse wooden architecture, December 2015).

I’ve been conducting ethnographic research in this Iban village of Batang Ai that sits close to the Sarawak/Kalimantan border for about a couple of months so far. Broadly, I am interested in the different ways indigenous rural communities in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo, assert their rights over territorial domains that may lead to successful conservation of forests. It’s been full cycle returning to Batang Ai, where I had previously worked as a wildlife researcher for an international conservation NGO about ten years ago.

No longer counting *orang utan* nests in a strictly quantitative study whereby the forested landscapes are our dwellings for long periods of time and longhouse communities are a mere night's stopover to obtain local field assistants, I am returning as a DPhil student, in a comparatively "messy" ethnographic study to examine the political ecology and the differing social-cultural interpretations of conservation landscapes in Sarawak.

I struggle with many things, including learning Iban, which everyone says should be easy for me to learn because it closely resembles Malay, the national language of Malaysia. My slowness in learning the language reminds me of how knowing Malay and some Iban was good enough as a wildlife researcher conducting nest count surveys.

"Bisik medak sarang maias?" *Can you see an orang utan nest?*

"Anang guai!" *Slow down!*

"Ako lelah." *I'm tired.*

Local communities are more or less removed from the "realities" of wildlife research, unless the men (and usually, only men) are needed as field assistants or when conservation education workshops are conducted, with the assumption that indigenous rural communities are not conservationists or if they have any conservation knowledge, this has been forgotten and must be revived.

Years later, I have returned to Batang Ai, with a humbler approach and a willingness to accept my ignorance on many local issues. I no longer preach conservation when the local hunter comes by with kijang (barking deer) meat to sell. I try to understand why certain wildlife meat is preferable, why other wildlife

remains a local taboo, and why sometimes local conservation strategies fail to work. I ask a lot of questions about how they manage different parts of their land or why certain forests are kept aside instead of being converted to rice fields. I learn the Iban terms for different stages of managed forest succession and the rituals that go along with it. During the grueling month of September, when the Indonesian haze was at its peak, I planted rice with two communities, and throughout the later months, I help harvest their intermittent crops. Unlike my time as a wildlife conservationist, I now spend more time with rural women, and in doing so, I learn about their dreams, hopes, and their hidden labor.

A few days before the arrival of the solar men, I watched my adoptive father and several men cut down a tree that was over thirty years old. With the aid of a hand chainsaw, the tree fell within less than ten minutes (Figure 23). It was then sawed into planks that would be used as walls for the solar shed. From seed to mighty tree to now, wood to build a solar shed.

I felt really sad to watch how quickly the tree fell after many decades of growth. But I stayed silent. Part of the agreement for accepting the solar panel donation includes that the community would have to provide the wood and labor for the solar shed. The additional solar panels are appreciated by the community members, who have seen many of their adult children leaving for work opportunities elsewhere. “We can have cold water and keep meat that we don’t preserve from spoiling,” says Apai. “Our grandchildren [who live in the towns with their parents] are not used to our food and prefer fried chicken wings and cold drinks.”



Figure 23: Measuring the length of the trunk to build planks for the solar shed (December 2015).

Much of the rural community life is changing, as most of the younger generation have opted for non-farming jobs and town lifestyles. However, this particular community has managed to retain its customary ways and customs, weaving into what I am beginning to understand as part of its multiple strategies to maintain rights over land and forests and to entice villagers' adult children and grandchildren to eventually return home one day and help maintain intergenerational territorial rights.

Apai explains further that after a couple of decades of living without being tapped into the main electricity grid, which derives part of its energy from the Batang Ai dam,² he decided that he had enough and asked for a solution from the government agency responsible for building many dams in the state (Figure 24). He wasn't thinking of solar energy at that time, but he felt it wasn't fair that some people in the state were benefiting from the dam-generated electricity, while others, living within the dam site itself, had to rely on diesel-run generators.



Figure 24: View of the dam from the top of Apai’s community’s native customary lands (December 2015).

A year later, the government agency announced that it was donating solar panels to the community. “It’s been good so far,” Apai says. “We no longer spend about RM300 [about 50 pounds] per family per month to keep the generator going.” I keep to myself, my suspicions of the giver’s intent, particularly the timing of the second solar panel donation, so close to approaching state elections. After all, the community members clearly feel that they have benefited from this contribution. I also ask myself, would I do the same if I were in their place and seek for support wherever I could find it?

I am pleasantly surprised that despite the availability of the 24-hour electricity generated by solar energy, the community has so far maintained its relative independence from electricity. TV viewing, for example, is kept for a couple of hours during the night, after dinner. The community is close knit, and the young people and children who return home for the weekend or holidays, spend more time in the ruai,³ as their parents did when they were their age.



Figure 25: Peeling off the corn from the cob with a tool fashioned from deer bone.

I remember many of the pleasurable afternoons when there was no work to be done in the rice fields: together, sitting cross-legged in the ruai, we, three generations of women, are peeling corn kernels off by hand, from the cobs that have been dried in the hot sun the day before (Figure 25). Unfamiliar with the work, I quickly shred my thumb until it bleeds an angry red, similar to the bronzed color of the corn. Sometimes, when the noon is relentlessly hot and we have just finished our meal, we spread out on our backs on the ruai to nap until the air becomes bearable. There is an option of switching on the fan, yet people prefer to lie close to the open doors, where there is more of a breeze. I particularly enjoy the late

afternoon lazy conversations that occur on the ruai, snacking on fruit or tubers sourced from around the longhouse and the rice fields.

The month of December has brought in the coveted durian season, and we have been feasting on the creamy custard flesh every day. When our stomachs groan with the weight of durian and we can no longer eat any more, what is left is mashed into tempoyak⁴. Like sunrays converted into solar energy, durian is converted into another desired source of energy.

One evening, under the glare of the television light powered by solar, my adoptive parents prepare a monthly ritual to give thanks to the gods for their eldest son's new job in the oil and gas industry. Apai waves a chicken egg above the plate offering of seven ritual ingredients that includes rice wine. Later, he would pour the rice wine between the cracks of the wooden floor. He conducts this ritual in what appears to be in a perfunctory manner, as his eyes drift to the TV when the short ritual ends. Apai reminds me later that it is important to remember your roots, where you come from, despite how far you may have traveled. This includes what travels toward you, including the solar panels and solar batteries from Germany.

"We came from the earth, we return to the earth," says Apai, who expresses hope that his children would one day, return to the longhouse, to help protect their land and forests. "It is their pusaka,⁵" he adds.

Solar energy may have brought some convenience to the community, such as freeing up limited financial resources. However, it seems that the maintenance of traditional customs and ways is dependent on the elders who feel the need for it and thus express this need through mostly actions. The younger people then learn

from observing and may emulate their parents, while adapting to their own current needs and wishes.

The solar men have arrived, and I am roped in, as the adoptive daughter, to help prepare food for lunch. They are local men from the nearby town and easily converse in Iban with the community. They would later spend the next couple of days hammering the solar panels into place, as the community watches. As Apai has feared, the solar batteries are stuck in port and will likely be released after the New Year.

“Not in time for Christmas,” he frets, anticipating visits from his six children and eleven grandchildren. And then he smiles, “It is good to have solar [energy]; life is a little better now.”

June Rubis is a DPhil candidate in the School of Geography and Environment at the University of Oxford. Her dissertation explores the different strategies and politics of how conservation landscapes are made in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo.

All photos in this post are credited to this author.

Notes

1. Meaning “father” in Iban. Apai is my adoptive father in the community and also the longhouse headman.
 2. Batang Ai dam was completed in 1985 and displaced about 3,000 people from twenty-six longhouses (Aiken and Leigh 2015). This particular longhouse community was not displaced, as they were living further inland, close to the Indonesian-Sarawak border. The village moved closer to the dam site in the early 1990s.
 3. communal corridor
 4. preserved durian
 5. Meaning “heritage” in Iban and Malay; its origin is derived from Sanskrit
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References

Aiken, S. Robert, and Colin H. Leigh. 2015. *Dams and Indigenous Peoples in Malaysia: Development, Displacement and Resettlement*. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 97, no. 1: 69–93.

Cite as: Rubis, June. 2016. "Solar, Sustainability, and Strategies in Sarawak." EnviroSociety. 3 February. www.envirosociety.org/2016/02/solar-sustainability-and-strategies-in-sarawak.

Tags: Borneo, Conservation, ethnography, fieldwork, June Rubis, solar

Appendix 2

A2. List of questions for semi-structured interviews with individuals in longhouse communities, conservationists and tourist guides.

- A. Could you please tell me some of the conservation actions taking place around this area?
- How do you feel about these activities?
 - In what ways are these activities be useful to you/longhouse community?
 - In what ways are these activities not so useful to you/longhouse community?
 - What do you think should be done/what do you think should be protected?
- B. Could you tell me about the relations you have with the orang utan (*or conservationists/communities/tourist guides)?
- In your opinion, what are the obstacles to these relation/ships?
 - Could you please elaborate on these reasons?
 - How did these relations come about?
 - Under what circumstances, would these relations improve?
 - Have you ever noticed any other relations with groups that I may have missed, that you feel are important to discuss?
 - Can you tell me anything else?
- C. Signalling end of interview
- Are there any other topics that we have not discussed and that you would like to discuss?

A2.1 Notes

I translated the questions to Malay and Iban for Iban communities, but spoke mostly in English with the conservationists and tourist guides. *I also amended the questions depending on the individual.

Appendix 3

A4. Letter of support from co-author of Chapter 6/Paper 2.

Carnegie Mellon University

Department of History
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213

Phone: 412.268.2880
Fax: 412.268.1019

Professor Danny Dorling
Director of Graduate Studies (Research)
School of Geography and Environment
University of Oxford

23 September 2019

Dear Professor Dorling,

I, Noah Theriault (hereafter NT), can confirm that I coauthored the following paper with June Rubis (hereafter JR) and support her submitting it as part of her DPhil thesis:

Rubis, June Mary, and Noah Theriault. "Concealing Protocols: Conservation, Indigenous Survivance, and the Dilemmas of Visibility." *Social & Cultural Geography*.
DOI:10.1080/14649365.2019.1574882

The paper was originally conceived by JR, and she did a simple majority of the work. Both JR and NT contributed to the literature review, provided their respective case studies, and approved the final manuscript.

Sincerely,



Noah Theriault, PhD
Assistant Professor of Anthropology
noaht@cmu.edu
+1 608-320-3063

Appendix 4

A5. List of papers published, conferences attended, and presentations delivered

A5.1 Published paper included in this thesis

Rubis, J.M., & Theriault, N. (2018). Concealing protocols: conservation, indigenous endurance, and the dilemmas of visibility. *Social and Cultural Geography*.

A5.2 Submitted papers included in this thesis

Rubis, J. M. (submitted as part of a *Special Edition collection*). The Orang Utan is Not an Indigenous Name: Knowing and Naming the Maias as a Decolonizing Epistemology. *Journal of Cultural Studies*.

Rubis, J.M. A Political Ecology of Remembering for Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. *Cultural Geographies*.

A5.3 Other publications related to this research

Theriault, N., Leduc, T., Mitchell, A., Rubis, J. M., & Jacobs Gaehowako, N. (2019). Living protocols: remaking worlds in the face of extinction. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 1-16.

Lobo, M., & Rubis, J. (submitted). The Colonial and Other Shadow Places. *An A – Z of Shadow Places Concepts to reimagine connections in an era of climate change*.

A5.4 Other publications unrelated to this research during this DPhil period

Rubis, J. M. (2017). Ritual revitalisation as adaptation to environmental stress: skull-blessing in Bidayuh communities of Borneo. *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal*, 2(2-3), 356-375.

A5.5 Conferences, workshops attended with key-note speech, presentations and interventions related to my research, delivered during my DPhil period.

Rubis, J.M. (2017) Indigenous Customary Territories & Dams, a case-study from Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. Speaker at a roundtable of 'Justice, Welfare and the Environment' alongside Dr. Mari Mulyani, Dr John McCarthy, Dr Constance McDermott, Dr Gillian Petrokofsky. The 10th EuroSeas, Oxford University, 16-18 August 2017 (addresses the challenge faced by Indonesia and ASEAN to solve the underlying issues of forest fires and trans-boundary haze pollution).

Rubis, J.M. (2018). A Political Ecology of Remembering for Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo (co-chair and speaker), Difference, Belonging, and the Politics of

Memory at Southeast Asia's Margins panel, Association of Asian Studies conference, Washington D.C. that was held on March 22-25, 2018

Rubis, J.M. (2018). A Political Ecology of Conservation in Sarawak (invited keynote speaker), organized by Association of Tropical Biology & Conservation (ATBC) conference, Kuching, Sarawak, July 1st, 2018.

Rubis, J.M. (2018). A Political Ecology of Remembering for Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo (speaker), organized by Indigenous Knowledges panel, at NZGS/IAG conference, Auckland, New Zealand, July 11-14, 2018.

Rubis, J.M. (2018). The Orang Utan is Not an Indigenous Name: Knowing and Naming the Maias as a Decolonizing Epistemology. Empire Off-Center workshop (invited speaker), organized by Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Göttingen, Germany, November 1th 2018.

Rubis, J.M. (2018). A Political Ecology of Remembering for Dayaks of Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo (invited keynote speaker), for MA Environmental Architecture Studio Launch, Royal College of Art, London, November 8th 2018.

Rubis, J.M. and Theriault, N. (2018) (Talk given by Dr. Theriault). Concealing protocols: conservation, indigenous endurance, and the dilemmas of visibility. AAA (American Anthropological Association), Genres of Resistance: On Ethnography, Creativity, and Public Engagement, San Jose, California. November 17, 2018.

Rubis, J.M. (2018). The Orang Utan is Not an Indigenous Name: Knowing and Naming the Maias as a Decolonizing Epistemology. Conservation & Social Science workshop (private workshop; invited speaker), organized by Dr. Liana Chua, at Cambridge University, December 12th 2018.

Rubis, J.M. (2019). Indigenous perspectives on Conservation (invited speaker), Groundings: Bodies, Relations and (Academic) Disobedience, organized by Krisha J. Hernandez, University of California, Santa Cruz, and Audra Mitchell, Wilfrid Laurier University, Hamilton, New Zealand, June 27th, 2019.

Rubis, J.M. (2019). The Orang Utan is Not an Indigenous Name: Knowing and Naming the Maias as a Decolonizing Epistemology. IAG (Institute of Australian Geographers) conference panel (invited speaker), Tasmania, Australia, organized by Dr. Michele Lobo, of Deakin University, 9th July 2019.

Rubis, J.M. (2019). The Orang Utan is Not an Indigenous Name: Knowing and Naming the Maias as a Decolonizing Epistemology. RGS-IBG (Royal Geographical Society – Institute of British Geographers) conference panel, Furthering the decolonising debate: International perspectives (invited speaker), London, United Kingdom, organized by Dr. Sarah Radcliffe, of Cambridge University, 28th August, 2019.