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Enchanting the Honeybees with Magical Love Songs

An Orang Rimba Honey-Collecting Ritual in Jambi, Sumatra

In a variant of a traditional ritual practiced throughout Sumatra and Malaysia, the Orang Rimba perform magical love songs to the honeybees and the spirit of the tree whenever collecting honey. Similar to other Malay-speaking peoples, these songs create a series of imaginary scenarios in which the climber is portrayed as a young bachelor who comes to the honey tree to seduce and momentarily remove the father (spirit) and mother (queen bee) of the tree, so that he can enter their home and win the hearts of their unwed daughters, the honeybees. The magical words in these songs forge a series of personal and often intimate relationships based on hierarchy, respect, kinship, and relations of love, which come to include certain obligations amongst the parties. This includes allowing the climber to enter the honey tree and safely collect the honey without being harmed or stung by the bees.

KEYWORDS: Orang Rimba—Kubu—Malay—Sumatra—honey collecting—ritual—magic

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Throughout Sumatra and Malaysia, the word *sialong* generally refers to a wide variety of trees in which the Asian rock bee (*Apis dorseta, rapah*) build their beehives (Skeat 1900, 203). *Rapah* honeybees tend to build their nests in tall hardwoods with dense and slippery trunks and numerous parallel branches that tend to branch at heights of one hundred feet or higher to prevent them from being taken by predators such as the Malaysian sun bear. *Koompassia excelsa* are the first trees that enter the minds of people throughout the interior of Sumatra whenever breaching the topic of honey trees. They are the largest trees in the lowland dipterocarp forests of Southeast Asia and the third largest trees in the world. Their trunks can reach six feet in diameter, two hundred fifty feet in height, and in exceptional years can contain up to one hundred beehives in their branches.

Honey trees are an important aspect of the economic, social, and religious lives of peoples throughout the Malay region of the world. They are particularly important to the Orang Rimba, Malay-speaking hunter-gatherers who live throughout the rainforests of south central Sumatra.[1] This article examines an Orang Rimba honey-collecting ritual performed by the Makekal Orang Rimba in the Bukit Duableas region of Jambi. It begins with an overview of the social importance of honey trees to provide the context in which this ritual is performed. The bulk of the article includes a translation of seventeen honey-collecting songs (*tomboi*), along with a brief description of the idioms and their intent, in the order in which they are sung during a honey climb. It concludes with a discussion on the style, aspects of ritual speech, and social meaning of the honey-collecting ritual, and how it is grounded in a broader Malay tradition of beliefs and ritual practices in the region.

Orang Rimba management of *sialong* trees tends to reflect their mobility, residence patterns, and an egalitarian society in which women have a great deal of power over the management and distribution of forest resources. In this society, individual women inherit *sialong* as immovable property (*har'to nang ber'at*), allowing them to determine closely related men to collect from their trees, and control the distribution of their trees' honey. *Sialong* justify uxorilocal residence patterns, grounding women and their extended families to particular tracks of customary forests, giving them implied rights to live in and exploit the resources found within. Regardless of who owns the tree, a good deal of the honey is shared

within a camp and with the members of other camps. Along the Makekal River, a portion of the honey is also traded or sold in the surrounding Malay villages for goods such as tools, sugar, salt, and cloth. In addition to its use as clothing, cloth is an important form of wealth (or family inheritance, which is controlled by the women), and can be used to arrange marriages and pay fines in community legal hearings.

Individual ownership of *sialong* trees also affords an efficient manner of arranging collection teams, thus determining which women will have the right to distribute or share the honey from a tree, and what portion will be traded or sold in the village. It is strongly forbidden to harvest a *sialong* without the permission of its female owner. The implications can be construed as a mixture of "grand theft" (*maling bongkah*) and violating a woman and her family, and can incur a heavy fine paid in sheets of cloth. Along the Makekal River, the act of felling or killing a *sialong* tree is comparable to murder, the fine being five hundred sheets of cloth or death, the standard compensation for a human life.

Sialong trees are sacred places in the forests associated with the god of honeybees, and an earthbound spirit (*hantu kayu*) who is believed to inhabit and guard the tree and the honeybees. In the Orang Rimba cosmology, the honeybees are managed by the god of honeybees (*or'ang de rapah*), who keeps them locked in a netted enclosure in heaven, located above the firmament in the sky. Shamans appeal to this god on an annual basis prior to the fruiting season in the forests to release the honeybees so they can fly down to earth, pollinate the forest plants, and make hives filled with honey.[2] Once the honeybees begin building their hives in a tree, it is said they attract an earthbound spirit (who is believed to be masculine) who makes the tree his home and forms a symbiotic union with the tree that includes shared emotions, sensations, and feelings. It is only then that it becomes a *sialong* honey tree, in which the honeybees annually return to build their nests. If the bees were to stop seasonally building their hives in the tree, they believe that the spirit would fall into a period of great sorrow, abandon the tree, and that the tree would eventually die of grief. Understandably, the spirit is believed to be very guarded of his tree and will make great efforts to expel those who trespass through his abode.

Unlike other Malay-speaking peoples in Sumatra and Malaysia, honey climbing is not a professional or ritual specialty, and the Orang Rimba have no terms for a honey collector or bee shaman.[3] Any man with enough bravery to climb these trees may participate in a climb. It is considered a sign of masculinity, bravado, passion, and an indicator that a man can provide for his wife and family. Whenever called upon by his mother, sisters, wife, or in-laws, it is a man's obligation to participate in a climb, and ensure that related women obtain control over a share of their trees' honey. As some men are afraid to climb *sialong* trees, there are less dangerous ways to participate in a climb. This may include helping to prepare the equipment (wooden pegs, basket, or rattan rope) or joining the ground crew.

Depending on the size of the tree and the number of hives in its branches, a honey-collecting team can consist of five to ten men. There are several climbers

who will collect the honey (*or'ang manjat* or *pamanjat*), and several who will form a ground crew at the base of the tree (*or'ang menalo* or *or'ang/tukang tesamput*) to receive the honey as it is lowered. The composition of the honey-collecting team, and thus which women in the larger group obtain the right to distribute a portion of the tree's honey, is largely determined by the owner of the tree. The woman who owns the tree always controls the majority of the honey and is responsible for sending up a closely-related male as the primary climber. This may be a husband, brother, son, son-in-law, or potential son-in-law performing bride service. The owner of the tree also chooses the other climbers and the ground crew, and thus determines the other women who will receive a share of the honey to distribute. As the men may take turns collecting the hives from several *sialong* during the honey season, there is an opportunity to participate in several climbs and ensure that their women obtain a share of the honey from several different honey trees.

Children begin practicing these skills early, and one of the most characteristic playtime activities of young boys is shaping wooden pegs, pounding them into small practice trees, and climbing them while singing honey-collecting songs. Because of the danger involved, parents are often hesitant to allow their own sons to climb *sialong*. Before making a first climb, children must receive permission from their parents. These precautions are not given to bachelors from other camps, who make their way around the forests during the honey-collecting season to participate in a honey climb and catch the eye of an unwed female from another camp.

Upon entering adolescence, bachelors will usually begin to travel to different camps outside their community forests, attending ritual ceremonies or seasonal subsistence pursuits in order to find potential marriage partners. While social interactions between potential suitors from different camps are highly restrictive, one socially acceptable way for bachelors and maidens to express their desire to enter into a relationship is through the singing love poems (*pantun*). If a couple wishes for their relationship to progress, formal approval is needed from both sets of parents, who then arrange for the bachelor to move into the maiden's camp for a period of work or bride service, which can last several years before a marriage is allowed. Sending a bachelor up a *sialong* is one of the best ways to size up a bachelor's intentions towards an unwed maiden, and is a characteristic trial of bride service.

The ritual practice of singing *tomboi* while collecting honey

In what appears to be a widespread verbal art and ritual practiced by Malay-speaking peoples throughout Sumatra and Malaysia, the Orang Rimba perform the ritual singing of magical love songs when collecting honey (Skeat 1900; Suparlan 1995; Silalahi 1998; Sakai 1999; Bashari 2001; Kang 2002a). While *sialong* belong to the women, they are also believed to be the home of a spirit and the honeybees. The climber sings these songs to the spirit of the *sialong* to prevent him from harming the climber as he collects the honey.[4] However, the majority tend to be love songs sung to the honeybees, which serve to diffuse their anger and prevent the climber from being stung. Despite the elaborate honey-collecting rituals of

Malay-speaking peoples throughout the region, only Petalangan honey-collecting songs (*tumbai*) have been described in any detail (KANG 2002a; 2002b). During her research in Riau, Kang was able to record thirty-two Petalangan honey-collecting songs, and while the words are different, the general format, story line, and purpose are very similar to those performed by the Orang Rimba.

Orang Rimba honey-collecting songs (*tomboi*) are patterned according to *pantun*, traditional Malay poetry that usually consists of a series of metaphoric couplets that follow one another and together often contain a hidden meaning or riddle. They also include many features of ritual speech such as magical incantations (*bopato/jempi*) and prayer songs (*dekir*), which assist the climber to enchant the spirit and the bees in a variety of different ways. As with the Petalangan, *Orang Rimba tomboi* create a series of imaginary scenes or interactions between the climber, the spirit of the tree, and the bees (KANG 2002a). In these scenes, the spirit of the tree is portrayed as the father of the household (*sialong*), the queen bee (*induk rapah*) as the mother, and the bees, their beautiful unwed daughters. In their *sialong* home, the highest leafy braches are portrayed as the abode of the spirit. The parallel branches where the hives hang are portrayed as the entrances to the rooms (*balai*) of the bee maidens, while the portions of the branch directly above the hives are portrayed as their rooms. The climber plays the part of a passionate bachelor (*bujang*) who comes to their sialong home by way of wooden stairs to pay a visit, court, and win the hearts of the lovely bee maidens. The climber generally sings the *tomboi* in an orderly progression, which depends upon what level he reaches in the tree and what stage of work he begins. The main stages of work and scenarios in these songs are included in TABLE 1.

Stylistically, most *tomboi* sung to the bees are patterned according to love *pantun*, poetic songs exchanged between unmarried males and females to express their interest in one another. As with love *pantun*, the style and rhyme are believed to have some effect on the emotions of the bees. However, the emotions expressed are also believed to assist in their function, and in this regard, *tomboi* are performed in a manner that is uniquely different from other genres of ritual speech. They believe that the more passionately they sing these songs, the greater effect they will have on the emotions of the bees. When performed by a bachelor, these seductive songs may be directed toward winning both the hearts of the bees, and implicitly, the heart of an unwed female below. In their extra linguistic context, *tomboi* can also serve to indicate the climber's process of work to his assistants receiving the honey on the ground. Because visual communication is impossible between the climber and assistants below on the moonless nights when honey is collected, the members of the ground crew are informed of the climber's position and stage by what song he sings.

Honey is usually ready to be collected six to eight weeks after the bees finish building their hives, toward the end of the blossoming period or season of flowers, a time referred to as the "time of the honeybees" (*por'apahohon*). During my research, I attended several climbs during two separate honey seasons and was able to collect twenty-five different *tomboi*, although there are certainly more than

this. The following presents the *tomboi* in the general order in which they are performed during the different stages of the climb. There is some flexibility in this order, particularly with the seductive variants directed toward the bees, which the climbers sing as needed to diffuse their anger.

STAGE OF WORK	*TOMBOI* SCENE	PURPOSE
1. begin the climb	entering the home of the spirit and bee maidens	show respect; warn the spirit and bees of the power of the climber and his assistants below
2. hammering the pegs	building stairs to pay a visit to the bee maidens	facilitate fastening the pegs; diminish the power of the spirit; begin seducing the bees.
3. stop in work	perform magic	remove the spirit from the tree
4. climbing the tree, collect the honey	weaken the wings and sting of the bee maidens, seduce and warn father (spirit) and mother (queen bee) to leave the tree	avoid being harmed by the spirit, or stung by the bees
5. approaching the parallel branches	paying a visit to the room of the bee maidens	begin to seduce the bees with romantic and erotic *tomboi*; defuse their anger
6. sitting above the hive	entering the room of the maidens	seduce them with the possibility of marriage
7. smoking the hive and cutting it open	warn the bees not to risk the relationship	imbuing the knife with magic while cutting open the hive; avoid being stung
8. lowering the honey	reaffirm the relationship and suggest the possibility of children	strengthen the rope, prevent honey from spilling from the basket, and avoid being stung
9. coming down from the tree	exit *tomboi* addressed to the spirit of the tree	inform the spirit of his departure, and call for it to return

TABLE 1: Story frame of honey-collecting songs (*tomboi*).

Hammering the wooden pegs

Unlike other peoples in the region, the Orang Rimba do not climb honey trees with makeshift scaffolding or ladders, but rather with dense wooden pegs (*lantak*) made from the strong wood of the *sungor'i* tree. While this method of climbing may have been more common in the past, the only other peoples in Sumatra who still climb *sialong* in this manner are the Talang Mamak in southern Riau (Silalahi 1998, 10).[5] The climber puts a great deal of effort into carving the wooden pegs upon which their life will depend. They are smeared with oil and smoked over a fire to harden and provide them with strength. This will prevent them from cracking while being pounded into the tree and support the weight of the climber as he makes his ascent.

A day or two before the climb, the pegs are hammered in a single horizontal line up the trunk of the tree using a wooden mallet called the *genganden*. The pegs

are not hammered along the parallel branches, and to reach the hives requires that the climber leave the pegs and slowly make his way along the branch on his stomach, pushing his body along with a piece of cloth (*songkor'ot*) wrapped between his feet. The work of hammering the pegs begins at sunrise and usually finishes before sunrise the following day. At this time, the spirit has yet to be removed from the tree, so most of the *tomboi* sung during this period of work are addressed to him. The first *tomboi* serves as an entrance song, respectfully informing the spirit and the honeybees that the climber intends to briefly enter their home (*rumah*) in the sky by means of *lantak* stairs. This *tomboi* informs the spirit that he does not come alone, implicitly hinting of his assistants below and their collective strength or power.

Oiiii, help me, my friend to cheerfully sing on the stairs	*Tulung kundang berdendan tango*
The stairs that lead to the sky	*Tango telepak de awang awang*
Stairs that are on the side of the room	*Tango meninggang ke rumah bandung*
Go into the house, come out of the house	*Noek ser'umah tur'un ser'umah*
This song is not sung by a single person	*Idak tedendan oleh seor'ang*

S*ialong* trees are hardwoods with dense trunks, which can make it difficult to apply the pegs. While conducting this work, they sing several *tomboi* to the spirit, so he does not provide an improper foundation or attempt to disturb the climber. The words in the *tomboi* below compare the *lantak* pegs to a *capo* fruit and the *sialong* to the softer wood of a *jelemu* tree, the point being to facilitate the hammering of the pegs into the tree.

Peg by peg	*Lantak ke lantak*
A *capo* fruit pegged to *jelemu* wood	*batan capo telantak batang jelemu*
Peg by peg we meet	*Lantak ke lantak kito betemuh*
We are not allowed to say a word	*Jengon bulih tegur sapa*

The next *tomboi* serves a similar purpose by attempting to divine the spirit's title or name. This technique is commonly used during healing rituals to diminish the power, or to find a remedy or ally to combat the spirit.

What is your name/title? The hammer is ready	*Apo lah bogelar kau?go ganden lah*
Your name is the source of the peg's adherence	*Bogelar sotampang lekat*
What is your name? The peg is ready	*Apo bogelar aau. Lantak lah*
Your name is the source where the sharp peg is to be fastened	*Bogelar setampang lekat ke mano di cecek kemano lekat*

When reaching the first set of parallel branches, the climber rests and only resumes hammering the pegs late at night to avoid being stung by the honeybees. When the sky is dark, the climber resumes hammering the pegs, and upon reaching the different levels of parallel branches sings another *tomboi*, which serves as an entrance song to the parallel branches, seductively asking permission to pass through or make an entrance into the rooms (*balai*) of the bee maidens. The climber sings this *tomboi* throughout the climb whenever approaching the horizontal branch levels where the hives hang. As is common in ritual speech, it begins by invoking the powerful words of God.

May peace be upon you leaves and branches	*Salam walikum daun jer'ambang*
Leaves and branches, may I pass through	*Daun Jer'ambang bulih aku lalu*
I wish to pass through to your long room	*Aku dak lalu ko balai panjang*
Much has been forgotten, long since I stayed	*Lamo lupo lamo tinggal*
One branch to go around my dear…	*Tiyang satu bokoliling adik … oiiyeyehhh oiiiyeyehhhh*

As the climber hammers the *lantak* into the highest levels of the horizontal branches, the climber sings the *tomboi* below to seduce the bees, who by this time tend to get aggravated by the climber's presence. The first stanza turns the tables on a familiar scenario encountered during a hunt, describing the bees as "seven" (a magical number) hunting dogs, and the climbers as "seven" pigs. In the second stanza, the climber is metaphorically referred to as a flower blown by a storm of bees, while "seven" mountains metaphorically represents the various nodes or branch levels that the climber has passed to reach the top of tree. They believe the top portion of the tree is the abode of the spirit, and the nodes or branch levels in the higher portions of the tree are imbued with his knowledge. By passing each node, the climber acquires or claims the spirit's knowledge as his own and weakens the spirit's ability to harm him.

A group of seven dogs bark	*Salak manyalak anjing tujuh sokawo*
They bark at a group of seven pigs	*Nye menyolok babi tujuh sokawon*
Constantly following	*Lah tekunting kunting ibar'at*
Like a flower that is blown by a storm	*Bunga di puput rebut*
Seven mountains have already passed me	*Gunong tujuh la kelompowan*

The fastening of the pegs is usually finished late that night, while the collecting usually does not begin until around midnight the following evening. To avoid bee stings, the sky must be pitch black without a trace of the moon. The work of collecting honey goes on throughout the night and usually finishes around five or six hours later, just before the sun rises. During the morning of the climb, the men prepare the various instruments needed, including a honey basket made of bark (*temeking* or *selundang*), a connecting loop (*tali kemanyang*), and the long rattan rope used for raising and lowering the honey (*tali hanyot*). The apparatus for smoking the bees (*tunom*) is made of bark from the *mer'anti* tree. After peeling it from the tree, they smear it with oils and slowly dry it out over a fire so it is able to maintain a slow burn to smoke the bees from their hive. There are numerous signs taken into account while preparing the equipment. If the *tunom* catches fire while being dried over a fire, it is a sign that danger will befall the climber, and the climb is postponed.[6]

Ridding the spirit from the *sialong* with magic

Similar to other Malay-speaking peoples throughout Sumatra and Malaysia, the spirit of *sialong* (*hantu kayu*) must be momentarily removed from the tree before they collect the honey. They believe the spirit of the *sialong* is very protective of his home in the tree and the honeybees and will make great efforts to expel the climber. One way the spirit can do this is by causing an unstable foundation for

the wooden pegs, causing the pegs to crack or split as the climber makes his ascent. The spirit also has the ability to take the form of various animals, such as a green tree snake, a monkey, or a demon tree shrew (*setan buyuto*). While in these forms, the spirit can distract or bite the climber, causing him to fall to his death.

After the light from the moon is absent from the sky, the honey collectors and members of the camp gather at the base of the *sialong* and recite a magic verse to rid the *sialong* of its spirit. As is common with magic, this verse begins with an invocation of the powerful words of God, followed by a warning to the spirit in case he decides to return to the tree and disturb the climber in the form of a monkey. Each line in the verse dissociates a portion of the tree from the spirit (or demon tree shrew), while claiming each part of the tree, its hives, and the honey-collecting equipment as their own. As is the case with magic, they recite these words very fast in a largely unintelligible fashion.

Magic to Rid the Spirit from the Sialong

In the name of God and his Prophet	*Bismialhirohamirohim*
Comes a monkey that will be eaten	*Detong ber'uk simbo rayo*
Comes fire, which I will use to eat it	*Detong api simbo makan*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the trunk	*Bukon buyuto punya rumpun*
I have the trunk	*Aku punya rumpun*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the tree	*Bukon buyuto punya betong*
I have the tree	*Aku punya betong*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the bark	*Bukon buyuto punya gelam*
I have the bark	*Aku punya gelam*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the base of the branch	*Bukon buyuto punya jerambang*
I have the base of the branch	*Aku punya jer'ambang*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the nodes on branch	*Bukon buyuto punya bungkul*
I have the nodes on the branch	*Aku punya bungkul*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the branch	*Bukon buyuto punya dahan*
I have the branch	*Aku punya dahan*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the flowers	*Bukon buyuto punya bungo*
I have flowers	*Aku punya bungo*
The *buyuto* doesn't have leaves	*Bukon buyuto punya daun*
I have leaves	*Aku punya daun*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the tips of the leaves	*Bukon buyuto punya gumpoy*
I have the tips of the leaves	*Aku punya gumpoy*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the top of the tree	*Bukon buyuto punya puncuk*
I have the top of the tree	*Aku punya puncuk*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the baskets string	*Bukon buyuto punya tali kelak*
I have the baskets string	*Aku punya tali kelak*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the honey basket	*Bukon buyuto punya temalong*
I have the honey-collecting basket	*Aku punya temalong*
The *buyuto* doesn't have the bottom of the tree	*Bukon buyoto punya menalo*
I have the bottom of the tree	*Aku punya menalo*
The *buyuto* can bite, but the buyuto is stupid	*Buyuto nyanya buyuto bisu*
Go far away from the tip of my *sialong*	*Buyuto bosisa bosisik der'i rambu sialong rayoku*

The shaman then slaps the base of the tree while calling out *dstttt*, ridding the tree of its spirit and paving the way for the climber to visit and seduce the bee

maidens and collect the tree's honey. The spirit is always believed to be nearby, and throughout the night, many of the words in these songs are addressed to him.

Climbing the tree to collect the honey

After ridding the spirit, the climbers begin their ascent up the wooden pegs, passionately singing *tomboi* from the pit of their stomachs. The *tomboi* below is one of the first sung during the climb and is addressed to the queen bee (or mother) and her unwed daughters, the honeybees. This *tomboi* serves to weaken the wings of the bees, their sting, and their desire to harm the climbers. Notice the semantic parallelism in some of these songs, which is a common feature in the ritual speech of Austronesian peoples (Fox 1988).

Oii, iiyeah	
A *senkrilung* bird in the middle of the day	*Senkr'ilung tengah ar'i*
You come with the lightening	*Engkau detong nyer'to kilat*
You return with the darkness	*Engkau balik nyer'to gelap*
Black *keladi,* black *birah*	*Keladi hitom bir'ah hitom*
(two types of yams)	
Planted in the earth	*Dentanam deser'ung bumi*
A fatty piece of meat with black eyes	*Segajjih bemato hitom*
Bent down to the bodies soul	*Tetunduk pado baden tubuh haliku*
I have broken its sting	*Songotnye sodah kupatah*
I have weakened its wings	*Sayanye sodah kulemah*
Stabbed to the left, hung by stone	*Nikom de kir'i digantung batu*
Stabbed to the right, hung by steel	*Nikom de kanon digantung besi*
Bent, shackled	*Tetunduk, tepasung,*
Speechless to the body's soul	*Tebungkam pado baden tubu haliku*
Then the prayer is granted, said God	*Lalu sebut Kabul kato Allah,*
the answer comes to me	*setaa tiba de aku*
Oiii, oiiiii…	*Oiii, oiiiii...*

Upon reaching the first set of horizontal branches (the room or *balai*), the climber sings the "entrance *tomboi*" included above, then proceeds to leave the relative safety of the pegs and crawls toward the hive like an inchworm. During this process, the climber sings the *tomboi* below, warning the bee maidens (referred to as small pythons) of the *tunam* he is about to light the bath of smoke that will drive them away. He also sings of the power of the ground crew at the base of the tree, calling for the bees to fly like a rhinoceros hornbill (*enggak*) to another tree far away from those below.

Cut the tail, cut the head	*Panchunglah ikuk pancung kepalo*
Small python submerge in a bath	*Anak sawo mandi ber'endam*
Come one, come all	*Tur'unlah siku tur'un segalo*
The people below miss revenge	*Or'ang menalo r'indu dendam*
Hornbill fly to a smaller tree beside	*Enggak melayang kekayu anak di damping*
Not to the people below	*Jengon or'ang menalo*
People below have leaves, a long leafy	*Or'ang menalo bedaun kepur bedaun*
Branch	
A covering, a single rustling covering	*Alay lage mer'isik alay sebatang*
These are our thoughts my dear, *oiii...*	*Penano kami adik oii...*

A similar *tomboi* is directed toward the queen bee (*induk rapah*), calling for her to fly to a smaller tree away from the ground crew below. The last stanza warns the bees not to harm those at the base of the tree, who are also singing the magic-filled words of the honey songs.

(Mother bee) help us, and fly far away	*Layangko sambat jauh jauh*
Assist us by flying to a small tree	*Sambat melayang ke kayu anak*
Don't come close to those who are below	*Jengon di damping mendalo kami*
The people below are fearfully singing	*Or'ang mendalo nyola dendan*

The *tomboi* below is addressed to the spirit of the tree, who at this point may be angry that the honeybees are being disturbed. The first stanza seductively addresses the spirit as the climber's handsome and smart uncle (*mamak*), a relative of primary importance in their society. In the *tomboi* below, he is flattered and seduced to go far, while the following stanza addresses the bee maidens. Their relationship is compared to *puar*, a type of fruit that commonly grows together in bunches.

Handsome uncle, smart uncle	*Mamaklah dancak, mamaklah dancik*
Go far away, bring me some sugar	*Pogi ketalang mengantar gulo*
We are united like ripe *puar*'s	*Kami sepantut puar masak*
It is just memories	*Diketuk tupai tinggal lagi*
How beautiful my dear is, *oiii*...	*Ker'ompongnye adik, oiii*...

Eventually the climber makes his way to the hive, the room of the bee maidens, which is beneath him like a hammock hanging below the branch. A single *rapah* hive can reach up to six feet in length and contain over forty thousand bees. As the mother (the queen bee) and father (spirit) of the maidens have been seduced or chased from the tree, the *tomboi* below frames the climber and bees in an imaginary encounter between a young bachelor and a maiden. In this seductive song, the bachelor comes to her room to laugh and play, suggesting they fly down to a royal bed of flowers located in another tree.

We didn't come here to kill you	*Bukanlah pulo andun ndok nyakat*
We visit with joy, to laugh	*Andun beusik gur'au tetawo*
A bachelor comes to play, sweetheart	*Andun mengasu sibujang, item*
Bachelor, come down bachelor	*Or'ang bujang tur'unlah bujang*
Maiden, come down maiden	*Or'ang gediy tur'unlah gediy*
Come down to a small tree	*Turun bebilang anak lawai*
There is a flower with a lot of dew	*Situ nian bungo primbunan*
A flower that you can visit	*Situ nian bungo perladangan*
A flower that has a beautiful smell	*Bungo dikandung elok mambu*
It is ornamental, like a delicate	*Lah besunting peadu aluy adik oiiii…*
royal bed my dear, *oii…*	

When conducting work above the hives, the climber passionately sings a number of seductive and sometimes erotic *tomboi* to the bee maidens, particularly as the bees are disturbed by his presence. These *tomboi* serve to reduce the bees' anger by enchanting, mesmerizing, and charming them to fall in love with the climber. In the *tomboi* below, the climber refers to the bee maidens as a small child (*budak pandok*), a term of endearment between lovers. The framing of these

magical words creates an imaginary scene in which the bachelor begins a romantic encounter with the maiden.

Oiii. oiiiii	*Oiii, oiiiiii*
Small child with a black shirt	*Budak pandok bebaju hitam*
Stroking her long hair	*Tebelai rambutnye panjong*
The black one falls bent	*Tentang tetunduk hitam*
Tonight we will play	*Malom iko main jedi*

In the "seductive" variant below, the scenario progresses to an erotic encounter between the bachelor and the maiden at a river.

Bathe where it is not desired	*Mandi di mana idak ingin*
The bath is rejected by a sharpening stone	*Mandi dinulak lesung batu*
Whose heart doesn't long for this	*Hati siapo idak ingin*
A breast is pushed out of the shirt	*Susu menulak dalam baju*
My dear, *oiii…*	*Adik oii...*

The next *tomboi* creates a scenario where the relationship progresses beyond desire, hints toward the possibility of marriage, and provides extra incentive and obligation for the bees to allow the climber to safely collect the honey. In the first stanza, the slippery rafter refers to a marriage ritual performed by their ancestors in a common origin story shared with the Malay villagers in *Tanah Garo* (Sager 2008). In this story, the ancestor Bujang Per'antau was reluctant to marry the goddess *Seti'au*; however, Bujang Per'antau agreed to marry if both were able to walk across the slippery log and meet in the middle. As both ancestors met in the middle and were married, it implies a similar possibility.

I play on a slippery rafter	*Aku bemain kasau lilak*
Kubu play on a tricky rafter	*Kubu main kasau licik*
Steep rafter in the middle of the current,	*Kasau tunggang tengo arus arus*
in the time of the dew, look not	*Ditempo embun melihat jengon*
in our time, don't do it	*Ditempo kami gemali jengon*
my dear, *oiiii….*	*Adik, oiiii…*

Sitting directly above the hive, the climber lights his *tunom* and waves it around the hive to smoke the bees from their nest. The smoke disorients and stuns the bees, preventing the climber from being stung. While smoking the hive, showers of sparks float to the ground together with stunned bees. During these events, the forest is enlivened by the magnificent buzzing of thousands of bees, who in confusion fly down from the tree and throughout the pitch-black forests.

The assistants below are careful to remain still and not to light a torch. While smoking the hive, the climber sings the *tomboi* below just before he cuts open the hive. It refers to the royal bed of flowers, the danger of the hot *tunam*, and further enchants the bees not to harm the climber or his assistants. These magical words refer to his knife as poisonous, or rather it is magically imbued with poison in order to distract the bees from the collector's hand as he cuts open the hive. He then proceeds to seduce the bee maidens with promises to "play" later that night.

Beckoned to a spot that is extensive	*Tekuit-kuit ikuk rua*
Below the flower is already nudged	*Bewoh betonglah mencuit*
The charcoal of my tunam my little friend	*Bar'a tunom kundang kecik*
The charcoal comes, do not respond	*Bar'a detong disambut jengon*
Don't scratch, don't nudge	*Dikubik jengon dicuil jengon*
A small knife is a poisonous digger	*Pisau kecik penggali tubo*
We are small, do not try	*Kami kecik jengon becubo*
Poison doesn't give shyness	*Tubo jengon dibagi malu*
How beautiful my friend is	*Alangkah elok budikundanku ini*
Later a promise to dance in the darkness	*Nanti nar'i janji bekela*
Our promise is not permitted to be broken	*Janji kito idak bulih lah bekiran*
My dear… *oiiiii*…	*Adik...oiii…..*

Afterward, the climber begins removing the honey-filled combs, folding them in half and placing them into a bucket, which is lowered to the assistants. The *tomboi* below and similar variants are sung while lowering the honey, and repeated until the hive is emptied. The first stanza warns the bees through an analogy of poisoning fish in a river. In this *tomboi*, the hive stands for the river, the bees, the fish, and the smoke, and the magical words in the *tomboi* symbolically stand for the poison. The words in the next line serve to ease the wind and steady the honey basket so not even a drop of honey spills as it is lowered to the ground. The fourth line metaphorically associates a drop of honey ("water") with the climber's semen, and a flower as the bee maiden. The next line is reference to the rattan rope used to lower the honey, which symbolically stands for the relationship between the bachelor and the bee maiden. The breaking or snapping of the rattan rope implies either that the relationship has broken, or a baby has come along. In either case, these magical words serve to strengthen the rope, and the relationship with the bees, so it does not snap or break while the honey is lowered.

The song makes you shiver with fear	*Lagu metup panggung suluang*
A child poisons the headstream	*Budak menubu ulu lout*
A drop of water is not to be spilled	*Aik setitik jengon tebuang*
A drop of water is asked by the flower	*Aik delom mintai tanjung*
A drop of water is not to be spilled	*Aik setitik jengon tebuang*
Not full of dew	*Bukonlah pulo sar'at diembun*
Not full of wind	*Bukon pulo sar'at di angen*
One thread breaks into two	*Benang putuy satu belimba duo*
The base of the rattan, my dear *oiiii*…	*Tingkil manna adik oiiii…*
My dear, *oiii*	*Adik oii….*

The example below makes a more explicit analogy between a drop of honey and the climber's semen, and suggests the possibility of a child. With this suggestion, the relationship, and implied obligation, progresses even further. The climber further warns the bee maidens not to sacrifice this possibility by getting angry and stinging him.

Like a duck flying	*Itik-itik manggung suluang*
Child, poison the headstream	*Budak, menubo ulu laut*
A drop of water, the source of a child	*Setitik aik setampang anak*
Don't be absentminded my dear, *oiii*	*Jengon menawar adik, oiiii…*

They repeat these *tomboi* throughout the night as the climber makes his way to the various hives in the tree. They sing them in concordance with the various levels of the tree, the stages of work, or as needed to diffuse the anger of the honeybees. After the hives are collected, a final exit *tomboi* is sung when climbing down the pegs to call the spirit back to his home in the tree.

Safety Father/Sir, safety to all, safety	*Amenlah Tuah, amenlah nyamo, amen*
I, upon the spirit of the tree	*Aku de hantu kayu*
I go down the wooden pegs	*Aku tur'un betangga lantak*
The spirit goes up the golden stairs	*Antu kayu noek betangga emas*
The next season will come again	*Musim di hadap ngulang pulo*
The *kedundung* tree, which is big	*Kedundung godong betong*
Meranti which is full of leaves	*Mer'anti lebat daun*
There are only a few leaves at the top	*Meilang mer'amba daun*
Leaves will stay here	*Daun nipi tinggal di siko*
Not yet broken, not yet dead	*Rusak bolum benaso bolum*
Prudish from long ago, who knows	*Linjang dar'i lamo siapo tahu*

Depending on the size of the tree and the number of hives, the honey from a single tree can be collected in one to three nights. The men usually finish collecting from all of their trees within two or three months, or around midway through the rainy season. As fresh honey (*maniy mata*) does not last long, shortly after it is collected the women begin slowly stirring it over a fire in large pots in order to make cooked honey (*maniy masak*) and seal it in bamboo receptacles or bottles where it can be stored for long periods. The men initially trade a portion of the honey with the villagers, although a great deal is kept for personal use.

As long as a camp member is in good standing, is a hard worker, and shares whatever he has, any woman in possession of honey is obliged to share it with whoever asks. A woman's right to distribute or share honey is a form of power in itself and, more importantly, builds bonds of reciprocity (*beloi budi*) between people, which oblige the receiver to return the favor in the future. The last thing anyone wants is to obtain a reputation for not sharing, which is largely the foundation on which this society stands. This does not imply that women easily part with their honey; an attempt is always made to keep some around. Honey adds sweetness to their diet and gives men an energy boost during their work in the forests. It also fulfills the ritual requirement of sweets called for during special ritual occasions such as religious wedding ceremonies and the first ritual bathing of a baby in the river. Outside of these events, the sharing of honey can be an interesting battle in itself, particularly when a woman's supply begins to dwindle.[7]

Conclusion

Sialong honey trees occupy a central place in the lives of the Orang Rimba. They are certainly of great economic importance, but their influence also branches into numerous social and religious aspects of their lives and plays a major role in the construction of their identities. Their unique management of *sialong* trees and honey reflects a mobile life in the forests, fluid group membership, and

an egalitarian society in which women possess a great deal of power over the management and distribution of resources. *Sialong* are used as a primary example to justify uxorilocal residence patterns, grounding a female and her family to their community forests, and giving them implied rights to use the resources found within. For bachelors, climbing *sialong* is an avenue to attract the attention of a female, begin a period of bride service, and eventually obtain a future wife. Given the fact that the honey is openly shared in the larger camp, ownership of honey trees by individual women provides an efficient manner in which to arrange collection teams and determine which women have the right to distribute the honey to the larger group. A woman's right to distribute honey is a form of status in itself, and more importantly builds bonds of reciprocity between the members of the camp, obliging the receiver to return a favor in the future.

Orang Rimba beliefs and rituals surrounding the fruiting season in the forests, when the honeybees are called down from the sky, are unique among Malay- (and Austronesian-) speaking peoples and share curious similarities with Austro-Asiatic speaking forest peoples in Malaysia (Endicott 1979; Benjamin 1979).[8] However, the belief that honey trees possess a spirit, which must be appropriated through magical charms and honey-collecting songs addressed to the spirit of the tree and the honeybees, is common among Malay-speaking peoples throughout Sumatra and Malaysia. In the late nineteenth century, Skeat was probably one of the first to write of the Malay belief in a "ghost" of the honey tree and the practice of honey-collecting charms in the Selangor region of Malaysia (Skeat 1900, 203). In a later book with Blagden, he includes a single stanza from a Jakun (a Malay-speaking minority group in Malaysia) honey charm in which the climbers refer to the honeybees as grandmothers, and to themselves as moon-white apes who climb the tree to beg for the knowledge to weave mats from the wax of the honeycombs (Skeat and Blagden 1906, 231–32). More recently, Buchmann and Nabhan (2008) write that professional Malay climbers in the Kedah region of Malaysia sing a series of honey-collecting songs to the honeybees, addressing them with terms of endearment such as "black sweetness or beauty" (*hitam manis*), "blooming flowers," or "fine friend." While the function and intent appear to be similar, the village Malay variants seem to share more similarities with the honey-collecting songs found throughout Sumatra.[9]

In the highlands of South Sumatra, the Gumai refer to the spirit of the *sialong* as *dewe*, while in northern Riau the Sakai also believe the ghost of the honey tree (*antu sialong*) must be removed from the tree before collecting honey (Sakai 1999, 311; Suparlan 1995, 197). According to Bashari (2001), village Malay honey collectors in the province of Riau sing *tumbai* to make the honey bees fall in love with them to avoid being stung. Some of these songs are addressed to the spirit of the tree, asking for permission to pass through his abode, while in others, the climbers portray themselves as bushy red-tailed tree shrews (*tupai*) who enter the tree in order to visit and play with the lovely bee maidens (Bashari 2001). Upon leaving the tree, they sing songs to invite the spirit back to his home and inform him of their departure (Bashari 2001). Along the borders of Jambi

and Riau, *Talang Mamak* honey collectors (*juara*) also recite magical incantations to remove the spirit from the tree (*penunggu sialang*) and sing honey-collecting songs infused with idioms of kinship and obligation to the honeybees (Silalahi 1998, 10). Despite the widespread occurrence of this ritual practice among Malay-speaking peoples, only the honey-collecting songs of the Petalangan in Riau have been described in any detail (Kang 2002a; 2002b).

Like the Petalangan, Orang Rimba honey-collecting songs create a series of imaginary scenarios between the climber, the spirit, and the bees, which take place in their *sialong* "home." That the context for these scenarios is the home is significant. In Austronesian societies, "the house is cultural emblematic; it relates to and embodies abstract social ideals and a variety of specific values of a society" (Fox 1993). Whenever visiting a person's home, there is an understood code or set of differentiated and largely implicit social expectations from the guest and the host, depending upon their degree of social distance (Frake 1975). Through formalities, flattery, emotions, and the magical power of the poems, the goal of the climber is to emplace the hosts in a position of close familiarity, in which the hosts are obliged to provide a degree of formal hospitality, as if they were immediate family. It is important to point out that gender-based social interactions between unrelated men and women are highly restrictive; the use of love magic is considered deviant, and it would never be appropriate for a bachelor to enter into a woman's house and make an attempt to seduce her in this way. That said, one indirect and socially acceptable way to express one's feelings and desires to enter into a relationship is through the singing of love *pantun*.

Orang Rimba *tomboi* are stylistically patterned according to love *pantun*, yet incorporate elements from other forms of ritual speech such as magic, healing ceremonies, and communication with the spirit world. As with other forms of ritual speech, the words, style, and ideas embodied in *tomboi* are believed to contain the power of the ancestors, and to a large extent have the power to enchant, seduce, and exert their influence in a variety of different ways. Some *tomboi* are framed with the introductory verse, "in the name of the prophet" or "may peace be upon you," invoking the powerful words of God, while others include the number seven, a magical number to Malay-speaking peoples. The metaphors and riddles embedded in the *pantun* format are believed to have the ability to achieve magical results. As in healing rituals, some *tomboi* are believed to have the ability to divine or claim to capture or know the spirit (or the bees') identity or knowledge, thus reducing his power and desire to harm the climber. Some *tomboi* contain elements of semantic parallelism, the pairing of words and phrases in the formal expression of culturally significant knowledge, which is common in the formal ritual speech of Austronesian peoples throughout the region (Fox 1988). Many have multiple implicit meanings and purposes, which may serve to enchant the bees, strengthen the rope, or steady the honey basket as it is lowered.

However, the main purpose of *tomboi* appears to be the magical forging of close and intimate personal relationships, seducing and sometimes binding the spirit and the bees into certain social roles and obligations based upon notions

of hierarchy, respect, kinship, and love. These relationships can be understood in the wider context of everyday social relations and come to include certain obligations between the parties, which includes allowing the climber safe access to their abode in order to collect the honey. The spirit of the tree is sometimes addressed as *tuan*, a term of respect or status reserved for elders or superiors, or the kin term uncle (*mamak*), both which imply certain obligations as a caretaker. The bees, on the other hand, are often addressed with terms of endearment such as small child (*budak pandok*), little girlfriend (*kundang kecik*), or younger sibling (*adik*), terms normally reserved for those involved in a romantic relationship. The progression of romantic/erotic variants work on the hearts and emotions of the bees, and as the storyline progresses, comes to include subtle suggestions of marriage and children, which places them in a role of a fiancé or wife. The more passionately they sing these songs, the greater their effect on the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of the bees, and possibly, a maiden down below. By placing or binding the spirit and the bees into these relationships, they in turn become obliged to share the tree's honey. When coupled with magical threats and charms cleverly placed throughout these scenes, *tomboi* empower the climber with the confidence to harvest the trees without being harmed by the spirit, or being stung by the bees.

Notes

1. In the anthropological literature, the Orang Rimba have traditionally been referred to as the Kubu, a Malay exonym ascribed to animist forest peoples in the upstream regions of Palembang/South Sumatra and Jambi, Sumatra. The Orang Rimba have a unique economy which continuously shifts in and out of periods of swidden gardening and a nomadic life based on digging for wild yams. This is combined with hunting, trapping, and the collection of forest products for trade. They are also unique for their non-Islamic religious beliefs, extreme ethnic boundaries with the Malay, and institutionalized prohibitions which restrict interaction with the outside world. This article is based on eighteen months ethnographic research with Orang Rimba along the Makekal River, within Bukit Duabelas National Park in Jambi. I would like to thank Bekilat, Mijak, Peneti Benang, Penyaruk, Linca, and Ejam for describing their honey-collecting songs. For an extended account of Orang Rimba beliefs surrounding honey trees and honey see Sager (2008).

2. According to Endicott, the Batek annually call the honeybees down from the heavens through singing sessions, and after the flowers disappear the bees are believed to return to the sky and resume human-like form (Endicott 1979).

3. In Malay villages throughout provinces of South Sumatra, Jambi, and Riau, honey collecting is performed by professional and ritual specialists referred to as *juragan*. Variants of this term are used by the Talang Mamak, Petalangan, and Sakai in the province of Riau (Bashari 2001; Kang 2002a; Kang 2002b; Silalahi 1998, 10; Skeat 1900, 204).

4. In rare instances, a single colony of honeybees (*rapah*) will build a single beehive in a smaller tree for a season, and in these cases the trees are not considered to be *sialong*. The Orang Rimba call these bees *rapah lolok* ("disoriented or confused bees") because they do not build their hives with other colonies in larger *sialong* trees. These trees are not individually owned by women, and similar to the solitary hives of smaller *nyur'uon* bees (*Apis indica*), can be harvested according to the first person who claims the tree. These trees are not believed to possess a spirit, although *tomboi* are still performed while collecting from them, to avoid being stung by the bees.

5. In the late nineteenth century, Skeat wrote that Malay peoples in Sumatra and Malaysia climbed honey trees by means of bamboo pegs (Skeat 1900, 204).

6. There are a number of different prohibitions (not using soap, or eating hot, spicy, or smelly foods) that a climber must follow on the days surrounding a climb, which serve to prevent drawing attention from the spirit or the bees (Sager 2008).

7. While women control the distribution of honey, their access to eating it is somewhat restricted. The Orang Rimba believe that honey is associated with "heat," and if overly indulged, can accentuate sexual urges, and lead to infertility and insanity, particularly in women (Sager 2008).

8. The Orang Rimba appear to be the only Malay-speaking or Austronesian peoples who perform seasonal rituals to initiate the annual fruiting season in the forests, which are broadly similar to some Austro-Asiatic-speaking forest peoples in Malaysia (Benjamin 1979; Endicott 1979). For a more in-depth examination of Orang Rimba religious beliefs and seasonal rituals surrounding the annual fruiting season see Sager (2008).

9. While the article written by Buchmann and Nabhan does not include transcriptions of Malay honey collecting *pantun*, it does mention that the bees are addressed by terms of endearment, which are very simliar to Orang Rimba and Petalangan honey-collecting poems (Buchmann and Nabhan 2008).

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