

**„The rainforest is our home.
The Orang Rimba of Sumatra between Autonomy and Heteronomy”**

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The rainforest is our home.

The Orang Rimba in Sumatra between Autonomy and Heteronomy

The Orang Rimba are a group of semi-nomadic forest dwellers living in Jambi (Sumatra, Indonesia). For the Orang Rimba the rainforest is a world of gods, spirits and resources, in which life follows its own laws. The rain forest as lived environment determines the existence of the Orang Rimba as an ethnic group, as well as their ethnic identity.

Their way of life makes the Orang Rimba a marginalized minority in the multi-ethnic state of Indonesia, where the rain forest is constructed as the opposite of modernity and civilization and is therefore not classified as an appropriate living environment for human beings.

The present study examines the discourses and processes which produce the ethnic identity of the Orang Rimba in connection with their lives in the rainforest. A central role is played by the interactions of the Orang Rimba with different actors at local, national and global level, who have their own interests with regard to the forest. To illustrate the nature of identity as a dialectical process of internal and external categorizations, the attitudes of the Orang Rimba with respect to the forest as a living space are compared to those of other actors in a variety of contexts. The articulation of the ethnic identity of the Orang Rimba takes place in a complex field of relationships, meanings and processes in which the forest is always a point of reference and establishes a connection between the various actors in question.

At the same time the life of the Orang Rimba in the rainforest is under threat as forest areas are further reduced, while the remaining forest area has been designated as a national park in which human activities are severely restricted or prohibited by law. For the Orang Rimba, this means that they must formulate and represent their demands on the forest as a lived environment to various stakeholders with competing interests. In these negotiations different discourses regarding the forest, and the associated articulations of the ethnic identity of the Orang Rimba, play a central role.