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BEYOND THE SMOKE: HISTORICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES ON THE DAYAK BASAP

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Abstract *This article explores the social history and ethnographic realities of the Dayak Basap, an indigenous people group in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, whose presence remains underrepresented in anthropological literature. Drawing on 47 days of fieldwork conducted in 2022 across several villages in Karangan Subdistrict, especially Karangan Seberang Village, the study examines processes of ethnogenesis and ethnic distribution, intersocietal relations, migration pathways, and cultural continuity. It challenges outsider interpretations of the term "Basap" as "smoke people," reframing it through emic perspectives that assert territorial primacy and ancestral rootedness. The article integrates prior scholarly works with original ethnographic data, documenting social structure and kinship systems, language and necronymic naming, customary law and fines, livelihood and daily subsistence, and shamanistic beliefs. By analyzing both historical structures of subordination under the Kutai Sultanate and contemporary dynamics of marginalization, the article presents the Dayak Basap as a culturally resilient community navigating ecological, political, and spiritual transformations.*

Keyword:
Dayak basap, Customary, identity, History, Karangan Seberang Village

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1. Introduction

This article is part of my undergraduate thesis completed in 2023 at the Department of Social Anthropology, Diponegoro University. It was motivated by the considerable difficulty I encountered in accessing foundational references and ethnographic literature on the Dayak Basap. While Kalimantan has been richly documented in anthropological studies—particularly with regard to various Dayak ethnic groups—the Dayak Basap, as an indigenous people group inhabiting the coastal and inland regions of East Kalimantan, have rarely been the central focus of such scholarship. This scarcity presents a significant challenge in understanding their history, identity, and socio-cultural dynamics. As a result, this study aims to address that gap by synthesizing the limited existing literature and conducting in-depth field research directly within Dayak Basap communities.

One of the key conceptual challenges in studying the Dayak Basap lies in the interpretation of the term "Basap" itself. In several early notes written by researchers, the term has often been understood from an outsider's perspective and subjected to stereotypes. Guerreiro (2015: 149), for instance, notes that "Basap" derives from the perception that these people would disappear upon contact, leaving behind only traces of smoke from their campfires. This imagery has contributed to a view of the Dayak Basap as elusive, hidden, and difficult to apprehend by other people. In response, this article adopts the title *Beyond the Smoke*, to move past such nebulous and superficial representations. It seeks to portray the Dayak Basap not merely as "those who vanish into smoke," but as a community with a long-standing history, well-defined social structures, epistemological systems, and complex cultural identities.

This article pursues two primary objectives. First, examines the existing literature produced by earlier scholars who had direct contact with the Dayak Basap. Among the key works considered are Herwig Zahorka's (2001, 2006) accounts of semi-nomadic life and healing rituals, and Antonio Guerreiro's (1985, 2004, 2015) analyses of religious conversion, language, and symbolic motifs. Karina Arifin's dissertation (2004) also notes the presence of Dayak Basap in the upper Birang River and their socio-economic relationships with the Punan Sajau, particularly in the swiftlet nest trade. However, these studies do not focus on the Dayak Basap in the Karangan area, especially Karangan Seberang Village, which constitutes the primary site of this research. Guerreiro (2004b: 93) offers a rare glimpse of the Dayak Basap in the Karangan River region, noting their dynamic local developments, shaped by natural socio-historical circumstances and their lack of involvement in government resettlement programs.

Second, this article presents the findings of ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in 2022 in several villages within Karangan Subdistrict, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan Province. The fieldwork spanned 47 days and employed participant observation, in-depth interviews, and visual ethnographic documentation. I visited a number of villages inhabited by the Dayak Basap, including Baay, Batu Lepoq, Karangan Hilir, Karangan Dalam, and most notably Karangan Seberang Village, which became the central site of analysis. In this village, I observed firsthand various aspects of local social life, including the bilateral kinship system, customary institutions, the use of necronyms, subsistence activities such as swidden farming and fishing, as well as ritual practices led by the Kepala Belian (shaman).

Specifically, this article positions Karangan Seberang Village as a key node in the contemporary identity and spatial distribution of the Dayak Basap. The village exemplifies complex intersections between customary heritage and contemporary change—ranging from socio-political transitions and religious conversion to responses to the exploitation of natural resources such as rattan, swiftlet nests, and timber. As such, this study contributes significantly to the broader understanding of internal diversity among Dayak communities in East Kalimantan, with particular emphasis on the historical and ethnographic dimensions of the Dayak Basap.

2. Dayak Basap in the Notes of Researchers

Scholarly literature that addresses the Dayak Basap in a specific and in-depth manner remains exceedingly scarce within the broader anthropological and ethnohistorical studies of Kalimantan. One of the most frequently cited definitions is found in the work of Sellato (1994: 225), who classifies the "Basap" under the broader "Punan Group" as part of the "Nomads and Former Nomads" category. In this framework, the Dayak Basap are considered nomadic forest

dwellers reliant on a subsistence economy based on hunting and gathering, distinct from other Dayak groups that, according to Sellato (1994: 10), have agricultural traditions, especially shifting cultivation of rice. In his later work, Sellato (2019: 4) revised this classification, renaming the "Punan Group" to "Nomadic Groups," maintaining "Basap" as a category but without the "Punan" designation—unlike, for example, Punan Tubu or Punan Kelai. Furthermore, in the edited volume by Sercombe & Sellato (2007), the problematic use of "Punan" as a collective identity for all hunter-gatherer societies in Kalimantan is highlighted. Thambiah (2007: 106–107) notes that groups such as the Buket, Lisum, Sihan, Beketan, Kereho, and Bungan reject the label "Punan," asserting their distinct histories, identities, and social structures. Hence, externally imposed labels based solely on subsistence modes are ethnographically invalid unless they are internally recognized by the communities themselves. Based on fieldwork findings, this study adopts the term "Dayak Basap," as used and affirmed by the community.

One of the earliest researchers to write directly about the Dayak Basap was Herwig Zahorka. Since 1976, Zahorka had explored the interior of East Kalimantan as an environmental consultant. He reports discovering uninhabited caves containing remnants such as fabric scraps, jars, and sleeping mats, which he identified as belonging to the Dayak Basap (Zahorka, 2001: 241). His field visits in 1976 and 1978 revealed both settled and semi-nomadic Dayak Basap communities in Batu Putih, Batu Lepoq, and Dumaring.[1] Zahorka's subsequent writings (2002; 2005; 2006) focused on the Dayak Basap in Teluk Sumbang,[2] a community that underwent resettlement in 1992. He documented their daily lives, including domestic tools and the use of natural materials for both economic and ritual purposes. During his 2002 visit, Zahorka witnessed a healing ritual led by a *belian* (shaman), in which an illness was transferred into a small wooden effigy using medicinal plants—a practice he noted as common in other Indonesian contexts (Zahorka, 2006: 181–183).

Karina Arifin's dissertation (2004) on early human occupation in East Kalimantan's rainforest also mentions the presence of the Dayak Basap in the upper Birang River region, where they are commonly referred to as "Punan Basap." She states that the Dayak Basap began settling in the area around 1965 and developed social ties with the Punan Sajau,[3] particularly through the swiftlet nest trade (Arifin, 2004: 40). Arifin records three key encounters: a semi-permanent household near a logging road; a hut upstream on the Sembrata River containing cooking and hunting tools (Arifin, 2004: 45–46); and a cave inhabited by three Dayak Basap men on a hunting trip. She also notes the ritual use of animal skulls and jaws placed on wooden poles to ward off spirits (Arifin, 2004: 54), reinforcing the representation of the Dayak Basap as spiritually grounded and ritually active in their landscape.

Antonio Guerreiro is another key scholar who has written extensively about the Dayak Basap. In his early work on the Kelai River communities, he discusses the religious conversion of Dayak Basap[4] communities in Merabu, Merapun, and Pana'an, noting that 95% in Merapun were Protestant, 100% in Pana'an were Muslim, and Merabu was religiously mixed (Guerreiro, 1985:

[1] In his original account, Zahorka (2001: 241) identifies Kampung Baru in Batu Butih (present-day Batu Putih Subdistrict, Berau Regency), Domaring (now Dumaring Village, Talisayan Subdistrict, Berau Regency), and Batu Lopok (currently Batu Lepoq Village, Karangan Subdistrict, East Kutai Regency).

[2] Teluk Sumbang is presently located within the administrative boundaries of Biduk-Biduk Subdistrict, Berau Regency.

[3] This group was described by Rutten (1916: 236) as Basap who had adopted a Malay way of life.

[4] In his writings, Guerreiro refers to them as "Lebu," situating them within the broader Basap ethnolinguistic grouping.

108– 114). A scholarly debate ensued between Guerreiro and Zahorka regarding the chronology of baptisms among the Dayak Basap in Teluk Sumbang. Zahorka disputes Guerreiro's account, asserting that the baptism was conducted by a Dayak Lundayeh in a cave in 1992, and the preacher came from Tembudan Bangun, not Batu Putih (Zahorka, 2004: 99–100; Guerreiro, 2004a: 101; 2004b: 83–98). Guerreiro (2004b) also notes the spread of Dayak Basap communities involved in resettlement programs from the late 1970s to early 1980s across Berau, East Kutai, and Bontang. He identifies some communities, such as those along the Karangan River—including Karangan Seberang Village—as uninvolved in the state-sponsored relocation, a fact which frames the focus of this present study.

In a later article, Guerreiro (2015: 149–177) expands his discussion to linguistic features and *necronymic*[5] traditions among the Dayak Basap. His analysis was later critiqued by Smith (2018: 27), who argued that the Basap language should not be linked to the Sajau branch or Greater North Borneo cluster, but rather to the Barito-Basap group. Through a phylogenetic approach, Smith & Rama (2022: 193–225) further demonstrated that rivers have historically played a key role in the dispersal of languages and speaker populations across Kalimantan.

There is a relatively larger body of research focusing on Dayak Basap communities in the Bengalon Subdistrict. For example, Elmiyah (2011: 63–89) explores the disempowerment of Dayak Basap in Keraitan and Sepaso Village[6] due to mining expansion and administrative manipulation in land transactions. Mapi (2019: 153–163) observes that resettled Dayak Basap populations often returned to their previous lands due to unsustainable living conditions in the new sites. Ningsih et al . (2014: 1–6) discuss the potential commodification of Dayak Basap motifs within corporate empowerment programs. Meanwhile, Siswandi (2020) provides a comprehensive narrative drawn from a decade of involvement as a facilitator in Merabu Village, Kelay Subdistrict—offering insights into agricultural systems, sacred sites, and the community's self-identification as "Dayak Lebo'."

Nonetheless, Guerreiro's article (2004b) remains the only scholarly record to explicitly mention the presence of Dayak Basap in the Karangan River region, particularly Karangan Seberang Village, without further ethnographic elaboration. Another reference, by Allo and Putra (2021: 23–24), notes the Dayak Basap in the context of ecosystem services within the Gunung Beriun karst area but does not focus on the community itself. In that report, the Dayak Basap are estimated to constitute 60% of the village population—an overestimate that this article seeks to correct.

This article therefore fills a critical gap in the ethnographic study of the Dayak Basap, particularly in and around Karangan Seberang Village—a community previously overlooked in detailed anthropological inquiry. By focusing on the region's historical dynamics, patterns of dispersal, cultural practices, and social organization, this study not only expands the literature on Dayak societies in East Kalimantan but also contributes to a more nuanced understanding of internal diversity within the broader Dayak classification.

[5] A necronym is a naming practice associated with the death of a family member; it expresses the continuing kinship between the living and the deceased (Lévi-Strauss, 1966: 191).

[6] Today, Sepaso Village has been administratively divided into four distinct villages: Sepaso Induk, Sepaso Barat, Sepaso Timur, and Sepaso Selatan.

3. Findings on the History and Distribution of the Dayak Basap

3.1 Intersocietal Relations: Historical Trajectories

According to oral narratives shared by a Dayak Basap elder, significant landmarks such as the Karangan River, Mount Beriun, and Lake Tebo', all historically situated within the Perondongan area holding symbolic value as *tane danum*—ancestral lands occupied over generations. These places fall under the northern jurisdiction of the Kutai Sultanate, as stipulated in the 1850 treaty between the Sultanate and the Dutch colonial administration, which demarcated the boundaries with the Sambaliung Sultanate, listing Batu Belubang, Batu Pagar, Mount Tindeh-Hantung, Batu Tempatung, Lake Tebo', and Mount Beriun (Ahyat, 1991: 83–84). As such, the Dayak Basap's presence in Tapian Hamlet was historically recognized within the administrative reach of the Sultan of Kutai.

As subjects of the Sultanate, the Dayak Basap were bound by several fiscal obligations: a head tax of 1.25 guilders, a 10% land or extraction tax, and a 5% tax on goods entering and exiting the region (Ahyat, 1991: 31). Primary forest products such as rice, gutta-percha, swiftlet nests, dammar resin, and rattan were exchanged with Muslim traders sanctioned by the Sultanate, often through barter involving salt, textiles, or tobacco. According to the *Extract Civiele Gezaghebber van Koetei* from 1847, the Dayak Basap population numbered 425 and were explicitly recorded as key suppliers of forest commodities from the upper Sangkulirang region, along with other groups.

Table 1. Forest Commodities by Interior Communities in 1847

No	Ethnic Name	Settlement or River Area	Commodities Produced	Population (1847)
1	Basap	Sangkulirang Region	Rice, gutta-percha, swiftlet nests, dammar resin, rattan	425
2	Dayak	Sangkulirang Region, from Samarinda to Tenggarong	Rice, rattan, gutta-percha	320
3	Modang-Wahau	Telen River, Wahau River	Rice, rattan, gutta-percha, swiftlet nests, gold	3.265
4	Modang-Long-Wai	Telen River, Klinjau River, Senyiur River	Forest products	2.045
5	Modang Long-Bleh	Belaiyan River and its tributaries	Forest products	1.000
6	Bongan	Muntai River and its tributaries	Forest products	4.000
7	Benua'	Pahu River and its tributaries, Sakka River	Rice, rattan, gutta-percha, swiftlet nests, beeswax	3.075
8	Bentian	Pahu River and its tributaries	Forest products	1.600
9	Tunjung	Sakka, Benanga, Labang, Barong, Bunyut Rivers	Hasil hutan, mandau (traditional sword)	1.500

No	Ethnic Name	Settlement or River Area	Commodities Produced	Population (1847)
10	Percampuran Bahau dan Modang	Mahakam River, its tributaries, and interior regions	Rice, swiftlet nests, rattan, mandau, tree bark, dammar resin, beeswax, tobacco, bananas, palm sugar	60.000
11	Punan	Klinjau River, Mahakam River, its tributaries, and interior regions	Forest products, no known cultivation practices, rice	4.150

To stabilize production and ensure political order, the Sultanate of Kutai instituted a system of co-optation through the appointment of local leaders known as *Petinggi*—a title that sat at the lowest tier in the Sultanate's hierarchy beneath *Punggawa*, *Menteri*, and the *Sultan*. In the Perondongan region, the figure of Jogonolo was widely recognized as *Petinggi*, both an administrative head and a charismatic protector, particularly in the face of external threats such as Dutch military expeditions.

Symbolic ties between the Dayak Basap and the Sultanate were further institutionalized through participation in the *Erau*[7] ceremony, where local leaders presented agricultural offerings to the royal palace in Tenggarong. While this act appeared to honor the Dayak Basap's contributions, it also functioned to reinforce the subtle dynamics of subordination through ritualized expressions of allegiance and deference.

Following Indonesian independence, shifts in local political structures ensued. The formal dissolution of the Kutai Sultanate in 1960 did not, however, automatically alter the Dayak Basap's marginal position. New challenges emerged in the form of *ensalar* (swiftlet nests), a high-value commodity harvested from caves in the region. In 1978, a regency-level decree in Kutai declared all swiftlet nest caves as state property, with extraction rights auctioned annually to external actors known as *paktar* (Michon, 2005: 59).

Derived from the Dutch *pachter*, meaning concession-holder, the *paktar* enjoyed exclusive distribution rights. While the Dayak Basap retained access to the caves, they were required to sell their harvest to the designated *paktar*, who were predominantly Banjar, Bugis, or Kutai individuals appointed by the government through an annual bidding process (Permana, 2015: 355). The Dayak Basap typically harvested nests every 40 days and arranged their sales around this cycle.

Initially, the *paktar* system fostered economic activity and optimism. Liang Bilat, a large cave, served as a key meeting point between Dayak Basap harvesters and appointed middlemen. However, toward the end of the New Order regime, the situation in Perondongan grew

[7] Erau, derived from eroh meaning "boisterous and joyful," is a traditional ceremony of the Kutai royal court that involves both the royal family and the wider community. According to Adham (1981:28), its first performance was based on a divine command that Aji Batara Agung Dewa Sakti—the eventual founder of the Kutai Sultanate—was forbidden from touching the ground until the age of five, at which point an Erau had to be held and closely associated with royal inaugurations and coronations. Over time, however, Erau developed into a broader expression of gratitude for agricultural abundance, marked by offerings presented by the people of the sultanate and by communal festivities. As Khuriyah, Utaya et al. (2017:107) observe, this tradition continues today, with people—particularly from Kutai Kartanegara Regency—still traveling to the royal palace to present their harvests.

increasingly unstable. Rising tensions—including frequent gunfire—prompted the establishment of a police post to maintain security. It was during the 1990s that the area began to be formally referred to as "Karangan Dalam Village," coinciding with the cessation of logging company operations and a growing presence of external actors.[8]

3.2 Ethnogenesis and Distribution of Dayak Basap

In the Basap language, the term *Ulun Basap* literally means "the Basap people," a self-referential marker of ethnic identity used within the community. The Dayak Basap are formally recognized in the Naskah Akademik Ibu Kota Negara (National Capital Relocation Academic Draft) as one of the indigenous people of East Kalimantan, noted for their historical occupation of the region. A similar acknowledgment is found in *Panji Selaten*, a sultanate legal code implemented under the reign of Aji Pangeran Sinum Panji Mendapa around 1635 CE, in which the Basap are explicitly named among the "adat yang teradat"—customary societies with distinct legal and ritual systems:

> Those referred to as "adat yang teradat" are those whose customs are specific to certain communities and regions, such as the customs of the Modang, Bahau, Tunjung, Benua, Basap, and others. We must not disparage their customs, as these are embedded within their people; anyone who violates them is said to "overturn the order" and is subject to the customary law of that particular region (*Panji Selaten*, Article 7 in Amin, 1979: 132).

According to oral narratives circulating among Dayak Basap communities today, their ethnogenesis traces back to two ancestral groups: the *Pensoh*, who once inhabited the Karst Kulat region, and the *Pesuraya*, based near Lake Tebo'. A central origin story recounts how a *Pensoh* man named Dato' Kelimau lured a *Pesuraya* woman to Karst Kulat, thereby initiating a lineage that came to be known as the Dayak Basap. According to a community figure in Karangan Seberang Village, the couple's descendants later dispersed (or *bahamburan*) across the region due to subsequent conflicts between their respective kin groups.

The etymology of the term "Basap" itself carries significant symbolic weight. Internally, the community understands the name to derive from the old word *bahasep*, meaning "the first" or "those who have long occupied a territory." This contrasts sharply with outsider interpretations, such as Guerreiro's (2015: 149) suggestion that "Basap" may derive from a pejorative view likening the group to "smoke"—implying a mysterious presence and elusiveness. The community's own interpretation asserts a legitimate and enduring historical claim to their territory.

Interethnic warfare, including headhunting (*ngayau*), occurred across Kalimantan over an extended historical period. The Dayak Basap community was not immune to these events; they were repeatedly pressured by the prevalence of such conflict and chose to avoid direct involvement. Importantly, oral traditions emphasize that the Dayak Basap's avoidance of war was not due to military inferiority or defeat. Rather, warfare was regarded as a forbidden act—

[8] Logging companies had been active in the area since the 1970s, initiating large-scale migration of Banjar laborers during that period. Even after these companies ceased operations, many Banjar people chose to remain in the area, establishing permanent settlement and integrating into the local socio-economic landscape.

morally and culturally inappropriate. Thus, retreat and withdrawal were seen as morally correct and deliberate strategies.

Accounts of the Dayak Basap's settlements and shelters being burned by Kenyah groups and other Dayak communities were recounted to me multiple times during fieldwork. In response, limestone karst formations and rugged mountain terrain became critical refuges for the Dayak Basap. These areas, due to their inaccessibility, offered protection and sanctuary. It is therefore unsurprising that the historical and contemporary distribution of Dayak Basap communities is frequently associated with particular karst landscapes or mountain regions. The following are the distribution of Dayak Basap settlements I was able to document during my field research:

Table 2. Findings of Dayak Basap Distribution in East Kalimantan

Province	Regency/Municipality	Subdistrict	Village
East Kalimantan	Berau	Batu Putih	Ampen Medang
		Biatan	Biatan Bapinang
		Biduk-Biduk	Teluk Sumbang
		Gunung Tabur	Birang
			Sembakung
		Kelay	Merabu
			Merapun
			Panaan
		Sambaliung	Suaran
		Tabalar	Semurut
		Talisayan	Dumaring
	Kutai Kartanegara	Loa Kulu	Jonggon
	East Kutai	Bengalon	Tepian Langsat
			Tebangan Lembak
			Keraitan
			Sepaso
		Kaliorang	Kaliorang
		Karangan	Baay
			Batu Lepoq
			Karangan Dalam
			Karangan Hilir
			Karangan Seberang
		Sandaran	Manubar
			Marukangan
			Susuk Dalam
			Tadoan
		Sangkulirang	Kerayaan

This article focuses on the Dayak Basap community in Karangan Seberang Village—a site that exemplifies the complex social and spatial configurations of contemporary Basap life. During the research, I conducted comparative observations across five neighboring villages—Baay, Batu

Lepoq, Karangan Dalam, Karangan Hilir, and Karangan Seberang—all of which host significant Dayak Basap populations. While genealogical and historical links unite these communities, each has undergone distinct migration trajectories and internal dynamics that warrant specific ethnographic analysis. Among them, Karangan Seberang Village stands out as a node of intensified socio-cultural change and intercommunal interactions over the past decade.

3.3 Migration Pathways to Tapian Hamlet

The distribution of the Dayak Basap communities across East Kalimantan reflects patterns of adaptation to ecological pressures, interethnic conflicts, and shifting political-historical dynamics. One of the most critical nodes in this dispersal is Tapian Hamlet, located within Karangan Seberang Village, which today serves as a convergence point for various segments of the Dayak Basap who migrated from different upstream regions along the Karangan River.

Settlement in Tapian Hamlet did not occur simultaneously or as a unified movement. Rather, it emerged through a gradual series of migrations, influenced by spiritual beliefs, ecological necessity, and sociopolitical contexts. Oral narratives trace their ancestral movements to the eastern fringes of Karst Kulat, which is regarded as the upper reaches (*pembo*) of the Karangan River. Their semi-nomadic lifestyle, notably devoid of longhouse (*lamin*) traditions found among other Dayak groups, was also shaped by spiritual customs. For instance, death within a household was believed to bring potential misfortune to survivors, prompting families to abandon their homes and relocate after a loss.

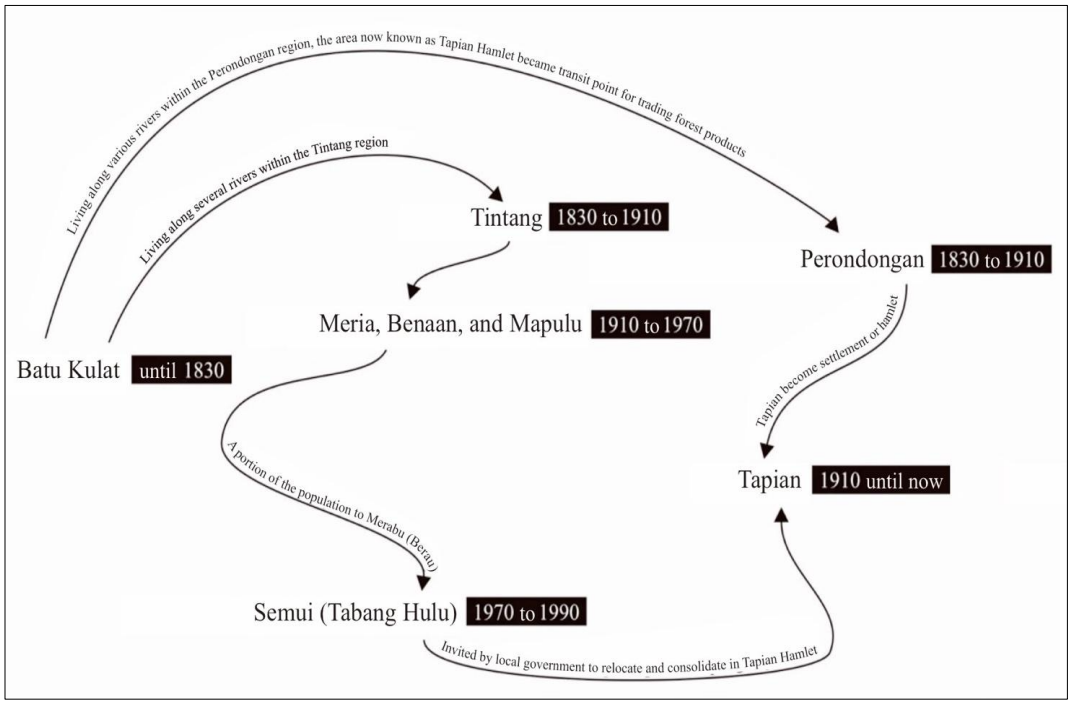

Figure 1. Migration Pathways of Dayak Basap to Tapian Hamlet

The earliest identifiable phase of migration to the Tapian Hamlet area dates back to the aftermath of the Tumbang Anoi Agreement in 1894, a landmark gathering of Dayak leaders across Kalimantan aimed at ending headhunting practices (Putra, 2011: 110). In the wake of this

peace accord, Dayak Basap communities who once inhabited Batu Kulat began forming two settlements: Perondongan in the lower stream area (*pibak*), under the political sphere of the Kutai Sultanate, and Tintang in the upper river region, aligned with the Sambaliung Sultanate.

These differing allegiances were reflected in the titles of local leadership. In Tintang, the community head referred to as *Pembakal*, while in Perondongan the title *Petinggi* was used. The natural boundary between them was the Aan River, a tributary of the Karangan. While both communities initially established semi-permanent dwellings, the Perondongan gradually consolidated into a more permanent settlement at Tapian in 1910, whereas those in Tintang retained a mobile pattern of habitation among tributaries such as Meria, Benaan, and Mapulu until the 1970s.

Significant ecological disruption occurred in the early 1970s with the arrival of logging concessions in the upper Karangan region, near Tintang. Environmental degradation and declining forest resources forced many in Tintang to seek new territory. At the same time, access to *ensalar* (swiftlet nests), once a key livelihood, became restricted under the state-issued *paktar* (concessionary) system. While the head of the Tintang community opted to migrate to Merabu Village in Berau Regency, many chose instead to move downstream, establishing new settlements at Semui River—later known as Tabang Hulu—and eventually to Perondongan (present-day Tapian Hamlet).

The Dayak Basap community remained in Tabang Hulu until 1992. During this period, state pressure to adopt official religions led to widespread conversion to Christianity in the upstream. In contrast, the Dayak Basap of Perondongan began converting to Islam during the same decade (1970s–1980s), resulting in a division of religious orientation within the broader community.

The final migratory wave to Tapian Hamlet occurred in 1992, when the village head of Karangan Dalam invited the Dayak Basap of Tabang Hulu to resettle in Perondongan to facilitate government outreach and service delivery. This movement was further accelerated by the collapse of the timber industry and the diminishing availability of natural resources in the upstream region. As a result, the previously distinct communities of Tintang and Perondongan merged into a single unified settlement: Tapian Hamlet.

Nevertheless, not all families relocated. An elderly couple, Mapura and Masita, remained in Tabang Hulu, choosing to live in isolation amidst the forest, far from the noise of motor vehicles. Their children and grandchildren, now residing in Tapian Hamlet, continue to visit them regularly, bringing rice, sugar, clothing, and other logistics to support their basic needs.

Figure 2. Dayak Basap preparing logistics for a routine visit to Tabang Hulu (Left) and a photo of Dayak Basap women cooking together (Right)

The path to Tabang Hulu is inaccessible to motor vehicles; need to clear vegetation and construct temporary bridges along the way. Each journey prompts concern among Tapian Hamlet people, who meticulously inquire whether all supplies have been packed. This shared attentiveness reveals a emotional bond and enduring social responsibility, underscoring that the migratory journey of the Dayak Basap to Tapian Hamlet is not merely a matter of physical—it is also a process of maintaining memory, relational continuity, and embedded cultural values.

4. The Dayak Basap of Karangan Seberang Village: A Closer Look

4.1 Social Structure and Kinship System

In the traditional social organization of the Dayak Basap, village leadership historically followed two primary titles: *Petinggi*, associated with territories under the influence of the Kutai Sultanate, and *Pembakal*, used in areas under the jurisdiction of the Sambaliung Sultanate. These positions functioned as direct representatives of the royal court within local communities. After Indonesian independence, the formal village administrative system gradually replaced these traditional roles. In Karangan Seberang Village, a Dayak Basap figure once held the office of village head. However, over time, this position has consistently been occupied by migrants, particularly from the Banjar ethnic group. As a result, Dayak Basap participation in village decision-making has diminished, and public programs have often failed to address their specific needs. For instance, a rubber cultivation empowerment initiative disproportionately benefited Banjar peoples who already possessed knowledge of rubber farming. By contrast, most Dayak Basap seedlings died or were sold cheaply due to the absence of technical assistance.

Table 3. Leadership Roles among the Dayak Basap in Karangan Seberang Village

No	Status	Roles
1	*Kepala Adat* (Customary Chief)	Serves as the official legal representative of the Dayak Basap community in external affairs; acts as a mediator in customary disputes; manages customary institutions.
2	*Kepala Belian* (Shaman)	Leads the performance of traditional ceremonies and rituals; conducts healing practices rooted in belian traditions; serves as an intermediary between the community and the semenget (spirit entities).

Although state administrative structures dominate governance, customary institutions remain active and officially recognized. The Karangan Seberang Village government has established a formal customary council for the Dayak Basap community. This council includes two key figures: the *Kepala Adat* (Customary Chief), who serves as the spokesperson and conflict mediator, and the *Kepala Belian* (shaman), who leads ceremonial rites and acts as a spiritual intermediary in traditional healing practices. The *Kepala Adat* is selected through communal deliberation, while the *Kepala Belian* is typically designated through spiritual revelation, such as dreams or trance experiences. Together, these figures help sustain the community's social and spiritual equilibrium.

In examining the kinship system of the Dayak Basap, it is crucial to situate it within broader anthropological debates on social organization. Unlike societies that follow strict unilineal descent principles, the Dayak Basap adhere to a bilateral kinship model that emphasizes relational flexibility and adaptability. This resonates with Malinowski (1932:xx) that kinship

controls the social relations, dominates their economics, pervades their magic and mythology, and enters into their religion and even into their artistic productions. Not merely a matter of descent but a living practice embedded in everyday life.

Building on this perspective, fieldwork among the Dayak Basap in Karangan Seberang revealed that kinship is enacted through patterns of cooperation in swidden agriculture, ritual sponsorship, and reciprocal caregiving across households. For instance, labor exchange during rice planting and harvesting is organized not only along nuclear family lines but also through the wider bilateral network, in which affinal ties are as crucial as consanguineal ones. Similarly, ritual obligations such as sponsoring a *belian* healing ceremony or contributing to mortuary feasts require mobilizing kin from both maternal and paternal sides, reinforcing relational bonds through shared responsibilities. These practices demonstrate that kinship is less about fixed genealogical categories and more about sustaining everyday alliances, where relatedness is actively produced through work, ritual, and mutual support within the community.

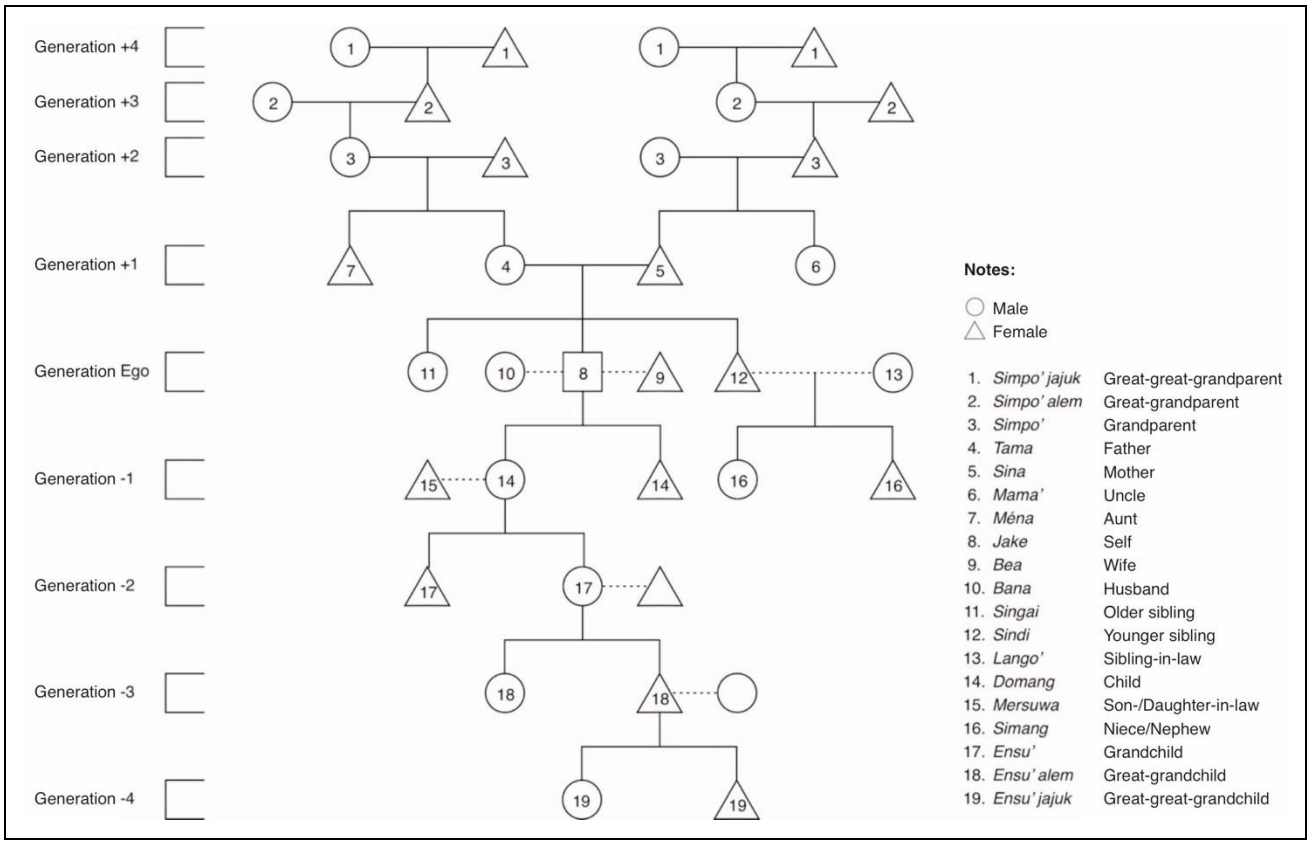

Figure 3. Kinship System and Terminology among the Dayak Basap in Tapian Hamlet

To illustrate how these relational practices are linguistically and conceptually framed, the Dayak Basap follow a bilateral kinship system, tracing lineage through both paternal and maternal lines. Local kinship terms reflect this structure, including *ensu* (grandfather), *domang* (grandmother), *simang* (sibling), and affixed descriptors such as *bebea* (female) and *lalaki* (male). The incorporation of terms like *kai* (grandfather) and *mamak* (mother) also indicates linguistic influence from the Kutai and Banjar languages in everyday speech.

4.2 Language and the Use of Necronyms

The Basap language is a central marker of ethnic identity among the Dayak Basap. Within intersocietal interactions, this language is actively spoken. Smith (2017: 411–412) classifies Basap as part of the Barito-Basap language group, not the Greater North Borneo family, and emphasizes how historical contact with the Kutai Sultanate and the expansion of Dayak Kayan influence contributed to regional linguistic hybridity.

Conversely, the Dayak Basap use Bahasa Indonesia when interacting with outsiders—Banjar, Kutai, or other migrant groups. Notably, many elders over the age of 65 demonstrate strong proficiency in Indonesian, indicating long-standing interethnic engagement that reflects both historical patterns of trade and contemporary processes of social integration across ethnic boundaries.

Table 4. Vocabulary of the Basap Language in Karangan Seberang Village

No	English	Basap Language	Example of Usage
1	Sleep	*Medem*	*Medem salu* (sleep first)
2	Eat	*Kuman*	*Kuman di deporan* (eat in the kitchen)
3	Water	*Danum*	*Tane danum* (homeland, literally "water land")
4	Afternoon	*Tiling*	*Long tiling* (it is already afternoon)
5	Morning	*Suba'*	*Maka' suba'* (not yet morning)
6	Not yet	*Maka'*	*Maka' dio'* (not yet bathed)
7	Already	*Long*	*Long, sina* (already, mom)
8	Yes	*Oa'*	*Oa'* (yes)
9	Who	*Ense*	*Ense ngadanmu* (who is your name)
10	Name	*Ngadan*	*Ngadanku Tewet* (my name is Tewet)
11	Good	*Pia*	*Pia-pia* (all good)
12	One	*Nya*	*Nya wakar* (one root)
13	Bathe	*Dio'*	*Dio' salu* (bathe first)
14	Drink	*Mensep*	*Mensep danum* (drink water)
15	Late Afternoon	*Tarub*	*Pano tarub* (walk in the late afternoon)
16	Noon	*Telang*	*Delo' telang* (tomorrow noon)
17	House	*Lebo'*	*Telu Lebo'* (three houses)
18	Tomorrow	*Delo'*	*Delo' nuan* (go tomorrow)
19	Day	*Ando*	*Tujo' ando* (seven days)
20	Rattan	*We*	*Ngule we* (search for rattan)

The linguistic system of the Dayak Basap functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a vehicle of cultural reproduction. Its sustained use within intra-community contexts underscores how speech practices articulate belonging and identity, demarcating boundaries between insiders and outsiders while safeguarding ecological knowledge, ritual vocabulary, and kinship terminology. Similar to other indigenous Bornean groups, the Basap language embodies collective memory and territorial claims. At the same time, it reflects processes of contact and adaptation shaped by interethnic exchanges; the incorporation of Kutai and Banjar loanwords into everyday speech demonstrates how external influences are localized within Basap idioms. This dynamic is likely linked to asymmetric relations, as Thomason & Kaufman (1988:10) note that populations subjected to intense cultural pressures—whether sociopolitical or economic—often become fully bilingual, a pattern that is clearly evident in the Dayak Basap case.

A distinctive linguistic-cultural feature is the use of necronyms—posthumous naming practices that avoid the mention of deceased individuals by assigning them new identifiers based on mourning status. For example, a person who has lost both parents might be referred to as "Tulus." Other necronyms such as "Teda'," "Malus," and "Bangkoy" are commonly heard in daily conversations. These names reflect the community's emotional depth and respect for kinship bonds during times of bereavement.

Table 5. Dayak Basap Necronyms in Karangan Seberang Village

No	Necronym	Description
1	*Boro*	A person whose father or mother has passed away
2	*Tulus*	A person whose both parents are deceased
3	*Teda'*	A person whose sibling has passed away
4	*Malus*	A person who has lost a child
5	*Lakas*	A person whose spouse died before they had children
6	*Bangkoy*	A person whose spouse died after they had children

Additionally, names are sometimes changed as spiritual protection. The death of a family member is believed to pose a threat to surviving relatives unless a name change is enacted to disrupt the pattern. These new names are often derived from emotional states or events surrounding the death. For instance, a person overwhelmed by grief may be named "Sedih" (sad).

Thus, the social structure and linguistic practices of the Dayak Basap reveal an intricate balance between ancestral heritage, adaptive strategies, and responses to broader social transformations. The coexistence of dual leadership systems, bilingualism, and necronymic customs illustrates the community's internal resilience and its capacity to preserve identity while navigating shifting cultural and administrative landscapes.

4.3 Livelihoods and Daily Subsistence

The Dayak Basap's livelihood strategies rely heavily on their surrounding natural environment, combining both traditional subsistence activities and participation in the formal labor sector. Although some members of the community are employed in industrial companies, customary practices such as fishing, farming, hunting, and gathering remain integral to their daily

lives.

Fishing is the most commonly practiced subsistence activity, engaged in by both men and women regardless of their employment status. The Keledan River, which connects directly to the Karangan River, is a favored site. A variety of traditional techniques are employed, including *tajur* (baited hooks attached to branches), *rendam* (handheld line fishing), *bubu* (bamboo fish traps), casting nets (*jala*), and drag nets (*jaring*).

Some individuals also fish at night, taking advantage of fish being attracted to artificial light. On one occasion, I was invited to observe this nighttime fishing method firsthand—a revealing experience that underscored the community's deep ecological knowledge and relationship with aquatic environments. This activity spans generations, serving not only economic purposes but also facilitating the intergenerational transmission of ecological wisdom.

Figure 4. Signboard of Tintang near the Aan River (Left), Huts in the Vicinity (Center), and A Dayak Basap Checking Drag Nets (Right)

Beyond riverine areas, the forests and lands surrounding the Aan River remain crucial sites for farming, hunting, and gathering. I had the opportunity to spend the night in Tintang, a former settlement approximately 20 kilometers southwest of Karangan Seberang Village. The area is still densely forested and largely unaffected by oil palm plantations. There, community members demonstrated their preparation for cultivating upland rice (*padi gunung*) on newly cleared plots. Local varieties such as *Mayas* and *Sibuyung* are favored. The land, initially overgrown secondary forest (*bajang*), is cleared, burned, planted, cultivated for roughly five months until harvest, and the yield is partly consumed and partly saved for seed. This relates to the system of land classification recognized by the Dayak Basap.

Table 6. Land Classification According to the Dayak Basap of Karangan Seberang Village

No	Local Term	Object	Usage Conditions
1	*Rerungan*	Perennial and fruit-bearing trees	As long as the planted trees are alive, others are not allowed to cultivate the land without permission.
2	*Uma*	Upland or wet rice fields	Ownership may transfer once the field is harvested and left fallow.

No	Local Term	Object	Usage Conditions
3	*Bajang*	Shrubs or wild vegetation	Anyone may open and cultivate this type of land.
4	*Rima Metal*	Natural vegetation	The original state must be preserved; disturbance is prohibited to maintain ecological balance.

Nevertheless, these traditional land tenure systems face growing challenges. Parcels of land once temporarily loaned to outsiders have become difficult to reclaim, especially after being formally certified through state mechanisms. As such, efforts to legalize customary lands now form a core strategy in the community's attempt to assert their territorial rights amid escalating economic and agrarian pressures.

Hunting continues, albeit in decline, due to environmental degradation and the depletion of wildlife populations. The traditional blowpipe (*seputan*) is now more often stored than used. While tools such as *ipo* poison and bamboo containers (*telo'*) are still maintained, many have shifted toward simpler snare traps (*gipah*), typically made from forest roots (*wakar*) and bark strips from *bawang hutan* trees.

Figure 5. Newly Cleared Bajang (Left) and Gipah Making Process (Right)

During my research, I witnessed only two successful deer hunts (*payau*). The meat was consumed within the community or sold among other Dayak Basap. However, other groups, especially Muslims, remain hesitant to purchase such meat, citing concerns over ritual slaughter methods. This illustrates how cultural and religious boundaries continue to mediate economic exchange, even after formal conversion to Islam within the Dayak Basap population.

Foraging practices such as honey collection (*wanyin*) have also declined in recent years. Many villagers report that since 2018, honey yields have dropped due to the reduced availability of flowering plants—key nectar sources for bees. In response, some community members have begun cultivating *gaharu* (agarwood) as an alternative livelihood strategy. Although profits have not yet materialized, there is optimism that current efforts will yield future economic returns. All of this livelihood system exemplifies a flexible form of socio-ecological continuity. Through these practices, the Dayak Basap continue to negotiate their presence and agency within a transforming social and ecological landscape.

4.4 Customary Fines and Law

The social structure of the Dayak Basap in Karangan Seberang Village is supported not only by systems of leadership and kinship, but also by the enforcement of customary legal mechanisms known as *Denda Adat* (customary fines). This institution has been passed down across generations and remains the primary mode of resolving internal conflicts within the community. Unlike the state legal system, which tends to be formal and hierarchical, *Denda Adat* operates on the principles of *musyawarah* (familial dialogue) and takes into account the degree of grievance felt by the aggrieved party.

In practice, *Denda Adat* involves the active role of the *Kepala Adat* (customary chief), who serves as both mediator and final arbiter in dispute resolution. The process typically begins with an offering known as *tanda pengharapan*—a symbolic token from the disputing party to the *Kepala Adat*, often in the form of cash or traditional goods such as jars or handmade crafts. The value of this token is not standardized, as it is context-dependent and symbolic rather than transactional. There are several categories of *Denda Adat* within Dayak Basap customary practice, each corresponding to specific violations and their associated social consequences:

Table 7. Customary Law and Fines (Denda Adat) among the Dayak Basap in Karangan Seberang Village

No	Type	Description	Sanction/Fines
1	*Sanga Dara*	A regulation that addresses the spilling of blood, such as during childbirth or violent acts.	Mandau (traditional sword) or spear as symbolic compensation.
2	*Sumang*	Regulation to resolve disputes arising from acts of infidelity.	Fine in the form of *tajau* (jars) or *tanyin* (woven mats).
3	*Mamuru*	Regulation applied to resolve issues of theft or stealing.	Mandau and spear as restitution
4	*Muno*	Regulation applied to cases of homicide.	Known as *Denda Kampung* as the entire community acts as the plaintiff
5	*Itimu*	Regulation governing marriage procedures and customs.	Fines in valuable goods or banishment from the village
6	*Niba Tane*	Regulation related to agricultural and swidden farming activities.	Believed to bring *ngebusungan* (misfortune or supernatural retribution)

Beyond individual cases, *Denda Adat* is also employed to resolve collective conflicts. For example, in 2016 a dispute broke out between the Dayak Basap and the Timur community in Baay Village following a football match. The conflict was resolved through customary means, with the Timur community offering a reconciliation fine of Rp60.000.000,- as a peace restoration. One of the defining characteristics of *Denda Adat* is its contextual flexibility. The amount of customary fines is determined not only by the severity of the offense but also by the victim's perceived grievance, allowing similar cases to yield different outcomes based on mediation and consensus led by the *Kepala Adat*. The system has also adapted to contemporary social and economic changes, with traditional items such as *tajau* (jars) and *tanyin* (woven mats)

increasingly replaced by monetary equivalents due to their rarity and shifting material culture.

The scope of *Denda Adat* remains bounded by the symbolic and social authority of the *Kepala Adat* within each village. Nevertheless, its continued application stands as a testament to the vitality of local wisdom in conflict resolution—restoring not just a sense of justice, but also healing social bonds within the Dayak Basap community.

4.5 Shamanistic Beliefs and Ritual Practices

As with many indigenous peoples in Kalimantan, the Dayak Basap of Tapian Hamlet have undergone processes of religious conversion. If Chua (2012:110) observed that the Dayak Bidayuh utilized Christianity as a buffer against Malay-Muslim ethnic hegemony, the conversion to Islam among the Dayak Basap has similarly allowed them to avoid marginalization within Banjar-Muslim-dominated networks. Two distinct attitudes toward Islamic conversion can be identified among the Dayak Basap: one group prioritizes Islam and distances itself from traditional customs, while another maintains Dayak Basap adat (customary practices) and disregards formal Islamic teachings. Both groups, however, become integrated into Banjar-dominated social networks. Consequently, any analysis of the Dayak Basap belief system must be grounded in an understanding of their local cosmology, rather than interpreted solely through the framework of formal religious doctrine.

When asked about their beliefs prior to adopting Islam, most Dayak Basap stated that they were *belum beragama* (not yet religious), but rather followed *Belian*. The term *Belian* carries two key meanings: first, it refers to the ritual specialist or shaman who leads healing ceremonies and spiritual rites; second, it denotes the belief system itself. The *Kepala Belian* (Shaman) is believed to possess the ability to communicate and negotiate with the spirit world, mediating with both benevolent and malevolent entities. This ability is not acquired through formal instruction but is said to arise spontaneously through spiritual experiences, often revealed in dreams.

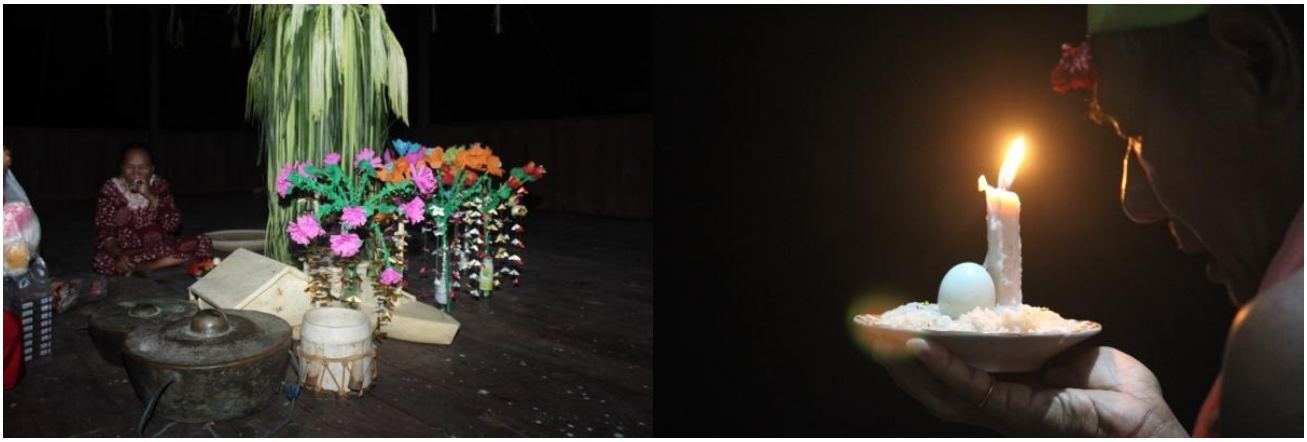

Figure 6. *Seriding* and Ritual Musical Instruments Used in Belian Ceremonies (Left), and a Shaman Performing *Bebabar* or Spelling (Right)

Analogous to the concept of the shaman in comparative religious studies (Eliade, 1974: 27–28), the *belian* functions as an intermediary between the human and spirit realms. Spirits are locally referred to as *semenget*, conceptually divided into benevolent spirits (*dato*) and harmful spirits (*bebe*). Through ritual practices, the *belian* engages with these spirits for various communal purposes—such as seeking permission for harvest, healing illnesses, or averting

misfortune.

Rituals led by *belian* employ an array of ceremonial instruments, including *tebuan* (large metal gongs), *pemenik* (small gongs), and *tubung* (drums made from animal hide). Although not all ritual paraphernalia were observed directly, community narratives refer to the use of *seriding* (sacred spirit trees), *tepatung* (wooden effigies), and *tepung tawar* (cleansing herbs). The following table presents a list of documented rituals:

Table 8. Ritual Practices among the Dayak Basap Community in Karangan Seberang Village

No	Ritual	Description	Contextual Belief
1	*Nakan*	A post-harvest family ritual lasting 1–3 days	The belief that surrounding spirits have the right to partake in the harvest
2	*Pelas Kanak*	A purification ritual for mothers and newborns	The belief that both mother and child are spiritually impure after childbirth
3	*Tasmiahan*	Naming ritual for newborns, performed any time up to the 40th day, often accompanied by *aqiqah*	An expression of gratitude to Allah SWT for the child's birth
4	*Keram*	A ritual held in the late afternoon following a funeral near the deceased's home	The belief that the spirit of the deceased can disturb grieving family members if not properly appeased
5	*Nyelesak*	A prayer ritual held in front of sacred tassels (*rumbai-rumbai*) with offerings (*peturut*)	The belief in spirits inhabiting particular places
6	*Belian*	A traditional healing ritual involving spirit intermediaries, also part of harvest festivals	The belief in spirits that can aid in curing illness
7	*Nembang Taun/Pelas Kampung*	A three-day communal harvest festival ritual	The belief in ancestral spirits who bestow soil fertility
8	*Narusan*	A ritual offering of the first rice harvest to spirits	The belief that spirits are entitled to a portion of the harvest
9	*Somahan*	Formerly a wedding ritual involving the exchange of valuables as a marital commitment	The belief that husband and wife must mutually affirm and uphold their union; the valuables symbolize their bond
10	*Tenung*	A divinatory healing ritual that involves communicating with malevolent spirits (*bebe*)	The belief that spirits can indicate the cause of illness and

No	Ritual	Description	Contextual Belief
			appropriate remedies through symbolic responses
11	*Betawar*	Healing with sacred water or herbal infusions that have been ritually blessed	The belief that blessed substances can draw out illness with the help of spirits
12	*Bejamah*	A healing ritual aimed at extracting intrusive spiritual from the body	The belief that certain illnesses result from spiritual attacks requiring extraction by ritual means

The *belian* plays a central role in each of these rituals. Following a ritual, the community observes *peding*, a temporary restriction on activities near the ritual site—including a ban on working—to ensure that the *semenget* departs peacefully. This post-ritual silence is an integral part of spiritual cleansing and the restoration of social-spiritual balance.

Beyond ritual events, the Dayak Basap also maintain various sacred taboos tied to their ecological surroundings. One such taboo prohibits mentioning sea creatures, particularly salted fish, while in the forest—especially near rivers or karst formations. Violations are believed to invoke *keteguran*, or spiritual reprimand, manifesting as sudden illness, misfortune, or even being "sucked" into the spirit realm. Locally, this experience is referred to as being "blowpiped by a *bebe*" (*disumpit bebe*), and typically necessitates the intervention of a *belian*.

Healing procedures often involve *peturut*—ritual offerings tailored to the specific demands of the spirit—placed in locations deemed sacred. These practices demonstrate that the belief system and ritual life of the Dayak Basap are not merely symbolic or spiritual expressions, but constitute an intricate knowledge system. This system mediates the community's relationship with the rainforest environment of East Kalimantan, preserving ecological balance through spiritual protocols rooted in cosmological ethics.

5. Conclusion

This study has sought to enrich the sparse ethnographic literature on the Dayak Basap by combining critical engagement with existing scholarly work and the presentation of fieldwork conducted in Karangan Subdistrict, East Kutai Regency. By tracing historical intersocietal relations, patterns of dispersal, and processes of ethnogenesis, it becomes evident that the Dayak Basap constitute a distinct indigenous people whose identity has been forged through both marginalization and resilience. Their long-standing presence in the Karangan River region—particularly in Tapian Hamlet, Karangan Seberang Village—demonstrates how spatial mobility, strategic withdrawal from conflict, and adaptation to ecological and political pressures have shaped their collective memory and social organization. The findings also challenge outsider-imposed labels, such as the etymologically reductive interpretation of "Basap" as "those who vanish into smoke," and instead foreground the community's own understanding of their name as "those who were first" to inhabit the land.

Through ethnographic documentation of kinship systems, bilingualism, necronymic practices, customary governance, subsistence livelihoods, and ritual life, this study underscores the Dayak Basap's complex and dynamic cultural world. Their ability to maintain customary

knowledge—such as land classification, ritual healing, and shamanistic beliefs—alongside strategic engagement with state institutions and economic transformations, reveals a flexible mode of cultural continuity rather than a static tradition. The coexistence of Islamic or Christian identities with enduring indigenous beliefs illustrates an ongoing negotiation of modernity on their own terms. Ultimately, this article affirms that going "beyond the smoke" requires not only ethnographic immersion but also a deconstruction of reductive tropes in favor of more nuanced, community-affirmed representations of indigenous life in Kalimantan.

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