

**Carol J. Pierce Colfer. *The Longhouse of the Tarsier: Changing Landscapes, Gender and Well Being in Borneo*. Philips, ME: Borneo Research Council Monograph Series, 2008. 433 pp.**

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*The Longhouse of the Tarsier* is a collection of essays written or cowritten by Carol Pierce Colfer over the course of more than three decades of research on East Kalimantan. It charts the interaction of several Uma' Jalan Kenyah communities with the rapidly changing landscape of East Kalimantan while much of Borneo was being severely affected by timber harvesting, the expansion of oil palm plantations, and growing transmigration settlements over that period. Colfer relates the all-too-familiar story of the drastic ecological and economic changes that have taken place in Kalimantan and how these developments have had an impact on the livelihoods of the Uma' Jalan Kenyah.

The book is not your standard collection of previously published journal articles gathered together in a single publication, but rather a mix of sixteen essays that she wrote for a variety of purposes. Original sources and purposes include academic journals, chapters from edited collections, and papers prepared for granting agencies or as presentations at workshops where practitioners and Indonesian government officials were present.

The collection focuses on a several Uma' Jalan communities in East Kalimantan and provides an interesting comparison of the communities' differing circumstances as they adapted to the near total transformation of their landscape. Colfer's primary field sites are the village of Long Ampung, from where the Uma' Jalan originate, and a resettlement site named Long Segar. The latter is the main focus of much of her research, as she explores how resettled Uma' Jalan have adapted to living in a region undergoing rapid change. She does this by exploring changing agricultural practices, economic activities, and gender relations. In particular, she looks at the shifts that took place when a community moved from a geographically isolated location to one closer to the coast, where there was more access to markets and government services.

Colfer divides the book into four parts. Part one explores her theoretical context and introduces the reader to East Kalimantan, the Uma' Jalan, and her larger research project. Colfer uses a progressive contextualization approach that, in part, is aimed at making her research available to policymakers, a goal that she returns to at the end of the book. Part two explores various aspects of Kenyah agroforestry by looking at such topics as home gardens, changes in how resettled Uma' Jalan in Long Segar use the forest in comparison to how those in Long Ampung use it, and how changing environments have affected nutrition. Part three investigates the different roles of men and women in the economic system of the Uma' Jalan and how these changes have been affected by resettlement. I found particularly interesting her analysis of how changes in agricultural practices and the incorporation of resettled Uma' Jalan into a largely cash economy appeared to have a deleterious impact on the status and autonomy of Uma' Jalan women. Drawing from her early fieldwork observations at various sites, Colfer provides an in-depth exploration of the different roles taken up by Uma' Jalan men and women with respect to agricultural practices. She initially

concluded that women's economic status and autonomy appeared to be decreasing in resettled communities. Easy access to cash and consumer goods provided Uma' Jalan men in the resettlement village of Long Segar with opportunities to purchase chainsaws and outboard motors. Chainsaws provided the men with a tool for significantly increasing their contribution to rice production, as they were able to clear far more land than they could using traditional agricultural tools. Colfer noted that, despite access to consumer goods, no comparable new technology was available to assist women with their agricultural tasks, such as weeding and harvesting. Colfer feared that men's increased contribution to agriculture productivity relative to women's contribution was having a negative impact on women's economic status in the community, which was largely tied to their role in rice production. Outboard motors, too, enhanced male economic status and autonomy, since women were reliant on men to use power equipment, primarily because women had neither the strength to carry the motors nor familiarity with the technology (which men generally gained while working at timber camps). Furthermore, outboard motors and chainsaws offered men new opportunities to earn cash that far surpassed any new opportunities that developed for women in the 1980s and 1990s. These developments were compounded by the Indonesian government's focus on Uma' Jalan men in their agricultural extension efforts. Colfer notes in her conclusion, written in 2006, that her initial fears seem to have been misplaced, and her later research showed that Uma' Jalan women had taken advantage of educational opportunities in Long Segar to increase their economic status. Part four explores the last decade of her research, particularly looking at the changing policy environment in Indonesia and local perceptions about the causes of the large scale forest fires of 1997–98 in East Kalimantan and their impact on various Uma' Jalan communities. Colfer ends with a retrospective look at her three decades of research.

The text is characterized throughout by Colfer's optimistic belief, which she later describes as "naiveté" (p. 351), that solid empirical research presented in a clear and straightforward manner could influence, for the public good, the policies of the Indonesian government and of the various agencies whose work affected the Uma' Jalan. This view is, after all, one of the rationales for the progressive contextualization approach, which Andrew Vayda argued "leads to concrete findings about who is doing what, why they are doing it, and with what effects, and the very concreteness of the findings means that the policy implications are quite concrete, too, and readily communicable to the policymakers."<sup>1</sup> Colfer's optimism and purposefulness are particularly evident in several chapters where she provides concrete policy recommendations for her audience. In her final chapter, Colfer observes that this approach assumes that policymakers or Indonesian civil servants have some interest in the impact of their programs or projects (p. 351). For example, in chapter four, "On Resettlement from the Bottom Up," she provides a critique of the notorious Indonesian government program for the resettlement of isolated communities, based on a presentation that she delivered at a workshop in Indonesia. Colfer lays out several ideas on how to improve the program, such as decentralizing decision-making so that

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew P. Vayda, "Progressive Contextualization: Methods for Research in Human Ecology," *Human Ecology* 11,3 (1983): 265–81.

policies are relevant to a particular settlement. All of her suggestions have serious merit and would be evident to anyone who visited one of these project villages. However, as Colfer recounts in the introductory note to the chapter, her suggestions were not well received. Indonesian security officials “warned that [she] could be denied re-entry if [she] persisted in these damning analyses” (p. 44). With regard to her optimism, she writes in the final chapter, “I believed that all that was needed was more information; I underestimated the significance of power, patronage, and elite capture in governmental decision making” (pp. 351–52).

One strength of the book is that the quantitative data that back up Colfer’s observations are included in the text. The Borneo Research Council should be commended for including these figures and tables (more than seventy of the latter) that display this information for the reader. Overall, the collection provides an interesting longitudinal study of the changing ways in which a particular Borneo community is dealing with the large-scale ecological destruction taking place on that island.