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The orangutan

**A comprehensive approach of the parties involved in the
fires of Kalimantan**

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Abstract:

In the article "The orangutan", the author includes an innovative approach to the problematic surrounding the conservation status of the Bornean orangutan, an endemic species to the island of Borneo. The interconnections of this fact with the palm oil industry, the governments of several countries, the world of multinational corporations, the local communities of the island and the more complex relationship the Global Civil Society has with this issue are all subject to mention.

Immersed in the context of climate change, the author invites the academia and the Global Civil Society to act and rethink the way they are consuming: being mass and reckless consumption to the detriment of the environment. Asserting that the academia has been assuming an inertial role of describing the actors in this particular matter, the author explains that it has also failed to interconnect and locate the facts that link them. Furthermore, it is noticeable that the academia has also been inefficient in proposing courses of action and avenues for fighting the fires that are destroying Borneo.

The author explores the current status of the island and the components of it that are dragging orangutans to extinction. Likewise, he invites the Global Civil Society to consume responsibly. Nevertheless, he admits there are no concrete, long-term or permanent solutions to this specific issue. Convincingly, he manages to determine that the problematic is deeper than what the media communicates and that responsibilities can be tracked down to multiple operating and influencing spheres.

From within, the author addresses the issue in a comprehensive and panoramic way. His sources include local tourism guides, local communities, investment blogs, newspapers and journals, official webpages of numerous NGOs, his personal experience living in Indonesia and even the twitter account of Joko Widodo – Indonesia's current president. Climate change should be in the main agenda of all the actors mentioned in the article, including, but not limited to: the governments, local communities, MNCs, NGOs and international public organizations. With this article, the author makes the latter decisively clear.

"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

Ghandi

To Indonesia, home to me, in all its "greatness"

I. Pony: the doppelganger of Kalimantan

"We have enslaved the rest of the animal creation, and have treated our distant cousins in fur and feathers so badly that beyond doubt, if they were able to formulate a religion, they would depict the Devil in human form."

William Ralph Inge

Orangutan is probably my favorite word in Bahasa Indonesia after studying this language for more than seven months now. From Bahasa Malay, it derives etymologically from the words orang – man, and hutan – forest. As mystical as it gets, it literally translates “the man of the woods” or “the people of the forest”. What brought me to this country in the first place was the vast amount of unique features and characteristics that makes of Indonesia one of the most diverse countries in the world. And by diverse I mean culturally, geographically, linguistically, and of course, ecologically. Endemic species like the rhinoceros of Java, the Komodo dragon, the tiger of Sumatra and the orangutan of Borneo are a living proof of the latter, but potentially not for long anymore.

In fact, the International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) catalogues in its Red List all of the aforementioned animals as follows: rhinoceros of Java – critically endangered, Komodo dragon – vulnerable, tiger of Sumatra – critically endangered, and the orangutan of Borneo – endangered. Furthermore, all of the unique species of Indonesia are showing decreasing population trends.¹

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) estimates the population of Bornean orangutans between 45,000 and 69,000 individuals. At first sight, the numbers seem encouraging. Nevertheless, and as stated by the WWF in its webpage, orangutan populations have declined by more than 50% over the past 60 years, and the species' habitat has been reduced by at least 55% over the past 20 years.² I felt that I had to see the orangutans before they were gone for good, and I did.

Not long before going to Kalimantan - the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo, I was doing some research when I stepped upon an article called “Conclusive Proof that there is no God and humans are essentially evil” that would later change its title for “Conclusive Proof” by Jack Adams for the magazine Vice. The article is an interview with Michelle Desilets, the Director of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation that describes the story of Pony, an orangutan from a prostitute village in Borneo. As I discovered in my trip, what the villagers did to Pony was an enactment of what was happening to the entire island. Held captive by a madam, Pony was used as a sex slave.

Desilets described the situation as follows: “You could choose a human if you preferred, but it was a novelty for many of the men to have sex with an orangutan. They shaved her every other day, which meant that her skin had all these pimples and was very irritated. The mosquitoes would get to her very badly and the bites would become septic and be very infected, as she would scratch them constantly. They would put rings and necklaces on her. She was absolutely hideous to look at.”³

¹ The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (2015-4). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.iucnredlist.org/>

² Bornean Orangutan. (n.d.). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/bornean-orangutan>

³ Conclusive Proof That There Is No God and Humans Are Essentially Evil | VICE | United States. (October 3, 2007). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.vice.com/read/yo1-v14n10>

According to the official webpage of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation⁴, it was a nightmare to rescue Pony. Not only the madam opposed to it because the orangutan represented a significant portion of her income, but they faced “an army of local people who were armed with cleavers, ready to fight for the house owner”. If it takes an entire village to rape an orangutan, it takes an entire country to destroy a jungle.

The rainforest of Kalimantan is being destroyed at a really fast pace and at alarming rates. It has been raped, shaved, used, abused and disregarded just as Pony was. Because of a poorly performing justice system, the humans that took the orangutan out of her habitat and molested her were not punished at all. Luckily, she entered the rehabilitation program of the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation and she was recently translated to the pre-release facilities of Kaja Island. Will the entire island of Borneo encounter such luck?

II. About this essay

"The question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But can they suffer?"

Jeremy Bentham

I was deeply shocked when I first landed in Balikpapan, the second largest city of the province of East Kalimantan. The rather modern airport (for Indonesian standards) was filled with banners with the phrase: “Save the orangutan”. But how could I, a Colombian exchange student in Indonesia, venture in such a task? Honestly, I did not know, and I still do not know, but I was sure that in order to do so I should find first the responsible people who were dragging these majestic creatures to extinction. And I was determined to do so.

This essay encompasses a multi-dimensional approach in trying to explain what is happening to Kalimantan right now, its actors, and the entangled challenge that it poses to our generation and the Global Civil Society. It is true that there is literature appointing at different parties that might be blameworthy for destroying the jungle and consequently cornering the orangutans into a vulnerable conservation status. Notwithstanding, this essay is innovative because none of the already published articles consider the broader spectrum that is required for the situation to escalate to the point it has escalated to.

The quest for the academia right now regarding Kalimantan is not to play a “duck, duck, goose” game, blaming and running away. We have to find ways and avenues of collective thinking and acting that allow us to unravel the fragile and critical stage that the island of Borneo is going through. If we manage to do so, we will be establishing a precedent in the fight against the greater problematic that signifies climate change, pollution and environmental conservation for the Global Civil Society as a whole.

⁴ Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation. (July 25, 2013). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://orangutan.or.id/ponys-new-life-2/>

This essay is not limited to the description of the parties of the conflict, but to the explanation of how those parties are correlated – something that has been mentioned before but that has never been fully explored or analyzed. It is maybe because of that reason that this issue has been systematically disregarded by the mass media in spite of its central importance as described by George Monbiot in his column for The Guardian titled: "Indonesia is burning. So why is the world looking away?"

III. The role of the Indonesian government

"Until he extends the circle of compassion to all living things, Man will not himself find peace."

Albert Schweitzer

In at least two weeks of the second semester of 2015, Indonesia managed to become the world's biggest climate polluter. A 97% of the emissions are said to have its origins in burning forests. That signifies that those weeks Indonesia surpassed countries like China and the United States of America, which are significantly more industrialized. Additionally, with a population of approximately 255 million according to the World Bank, Indonesia is less populated than China and the United States, that are respectively inhabited by around 1,364 and 319 million people.⁵

Better described by Alex Morales for Bloomberg: "Indonesia's forest fires have catapulted the southeast Asian nation to the top of the rankings of the world's worst global warming offenders, with daily emissions exceeding those of China on at least 14 days [between the months of September and October 2015]".⁶ In fact, it can be concluded that during 14 days, the amount of CO₂ emissions attributable per capita in Indonesia were almost five times higher than those in China. International journals labeled this as "a crime against humanity"⁷ and in the current context, it was seen as a criminal act.

Protests followed in September 2015 but in a really small scale. A crime against humanity would cause a mourning Global Civil Society, but apparently we are not that environmentally aware yet. Nor were the fires a worldwide trending topic on Twitter. In Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan, 150 protestors were demanding governmental action in the containment of the fires as they spread and caused health concerns, the deceleration of business and even the cancellation of some flights in Pekanbaru, the capital city of Riau in Sumatra. Ali Wardana, one of the leaders of the protest, exposed the aims of the protest as follows when interviewed by Channel NewsAsia: "We want disaster management

⁵ Population, total. (n.d.). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>

⁶ How Indonesia's Fires Made it the Biggest Climate Polluter. (October 29, 2015). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-10-28/how-indonesia-s-fires-made-it-the-biggest-climate-polluter>

⁷ Lamb, K. (2015). Indonesia's fires labelled a 'crime against humanity' as 500,000 suffer. Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/26/indonesias-fires-crime-against-humanity-hundreds-of-thousands-suffer>

teams to be prepared in advance in order to safeguard people's health. And we want sanctions against those who burn the land for profit."⁸

In the same article, Ms. Umi Mastika, a member of the Palangka Raya city parliament, said the local government lacks the capacity to deal with these problems. "Companies keep burning the forest every year but it's time for the government not to search for who did or didn't do it, but it's time for the government to take care of the health of the cities' children and the general economy," she said. "Compared to previous governments, the current government of Joko Widodo is not acting as quickly as the previous central governments."⁹

Even local governments were pledging for action of the central government located in Jakarta, but not even them echoed in the international media. Some petitions online and small NGOs added some apparent pressure that was not enough for the central government to act on time. Some retention basins were allegedly built in order to contain the fires but the slow and inadequate answer of the government led to more criticism.

It was not only until February 29 2016 that the predominant silence of the government was broken: 6 months after the fires hit their maximum pollution point. The Jakarta Post wrote: "The Home Ministry has ordered local administrations in Kalimantan and Sumatra to launch preventive measures to contain forest fire after the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) discovered a growing number of hot spots in the two provinces."¹⁰ Nevertheless, and recalling what Ms. Umi Mastika declared in September 2015: "the local government lacks the capacity to deal with these problems".

The fires ended up affecting not only the orangutans by the imminent destruction of their habitat, but also neighboring countries of Indonesia. Rising polluting indexes in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, The Philippines and Cambodia caused diplomatic tensions. The latter invigorated by the fact that Indonesia was the last country of ASEAN to adhere the Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, a project that was initiated by the member countries of ASEAN in the year 2002, entered in force in 2003 and was not ratified by Indonesia until 2014.¹¹ This evidences a lack of environmental commitment of the central government and explains why the governmental response was almost inexistent when the fires reached their peak.

In Kalimantan, specifically in the island of Derawan, I met a tourist guide that is head to My Trip My Adventure Balikpapan East Borneo, an organization of independent tourist guides that want to make a change in the region. He is also part of a community that is called Green Borneo, a small initiative to preserve the natural resources of the region,

⁸ Protesters in Kalimantan decry Indonesian inaction against forest fires, haze. (September 22, 2015). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/asiapacific/protesters-in-kalimantan/2142782.html>

⁹ IBID

¹⁰ Minister orders early containment of fires in Kalimantan, Sumatra. (February 29, 2016). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2016/02/29/minister-orders-early-containment-fires-kalimantan-sumatra.html>

¹¹ KEMENTERIAN LINGKUNGAN HIDUP. (September 16, 2014). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.menlh.go.id/indonesia-meratifikasi-undang-undang-tentang-pengesahan-asean-agreement-on-transboundary-haze-pollution-persetujuan-asean-tentang-pencemaran-asap-lintas-batas/>

including the orangutans. Among their aims, they plan to create a self-sustainable network of ecotourism that provides an alternative income to the inhabitants of Borneo.

Regarding the environmental crisis of September – October 2015, he just said that there is a big difference between what the government of Indonesia preaches and what it actually does, the second being almost nothing. And indeed, I discovered later that in the early stages of the fires, the Singaporean Government offered Indonesia an assistance package in order to contain the fires that Indonesia rejected. Furthermore, the Vice-president Kalla declared in New York at the Indonesian Consulate-General the following: "Look at how long they have enjoyed fresh air from our green environment and forests when there were no fires. could be months. Are they grateful? But when forest fires occur, a month at the most, haze pollutes their regions. So why should there be an apology?"¹²

"Companies from neighboring countries are paying locals to clear lands using the slash-and-burn technique" was also one of the declarations of the vice-president. I had the feeling talking to some locals that they do not think it is fair for other countries to be complaining about what Indonesia is doing right now. They claim that Malaysia engaged in similar practices in the Malaysian part of Borneo ever since 1960. In fact, the population of orangutans in Malaysia is almost inexistent because of such practices.

The guide I met said he is worried because of the pace of destruction of the forest. "As we plant 100 mangroves, they cut down 1 million", he claimed. I asked him if he had any hopes that the orangutans would survive over the next 5 years and he answered: "thanks to the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation I think they will". This foundation, the same that rescued Pony, is aiding orangutans and reinserting them into protected areas. Sadly, he also said that he is not sure about the future of the orangutans if the fires continue like this for another 10 years.

Indonesia ended up accepting the assistance package offered by Singapore and the Government of Malaysia and Russia assisted likewise.¹³ Joko Widodo made a series of statements the 13 of September 2015 that are certainly questionable and I will allow myself to do so since I know from the voice of a local that the governmental declarations frequently differ from the governmental actions: "I supervised the haze disaster. South Sumatra had the biggest number of hotspots. But today the number was reduced from 321 to 129 hotspots. Last year, forest fires destroyed 8,000 hectares; this year it's down by 1,000 hectares. Forest burning can't be tolerated anymore. We've discovered the cause and solutions. Companies which commissioned the forest clearing should be stripped of their licenses and brought to justice. In the future, prevention measures should be the priority."¹⁴

¹² Indonesia VP Kalla reiterates that Indonesia does not need to apologise to neighbours over haze. (September 25, 2015). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20150926020730/http://www.straittimes.com/asia/se-asia/kalla-reiterates-that-indonesia-does-not-need-to-apologise-to-neighbours-over-haze>

¹³ Indonesia seeks help from Singapore, Russia, Malaysia and Japan to fight forest fires. (October 8, 2015). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.straittimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-seeks-help-from-singapore-russia-malaysia-and-japan-to-fight-forest-fires>

Joko Widodo twitted himself that he was supervising the haze disaster in Sumatra, but what about the fires of Borneo? He visited the island of Borneo a couple of weeks after that but the responses were characterized by being inefficient and slow. If the number of hectares destroyed in 2015 in comparison to the previous year is one to eight, why did Indonesia become the world's biggest climate polluter during 2 weeks in the second semester of 2015 and not so in the past year as discussed above in section I? Why, after almost 7 months of his declarations, no company was brought in front of a judge because of the fires?

IV. Local communities, culture and agricultural practices

"Love animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and joy untroubled. Do not trouble their joy, don't harass them, don't deprive them of their happiness, don't work against God's intent. Man, do not pride yourself on superiority to animals; they are without sin, and you, with your greatness, defile the earth by your appearance on it, and leave the traces of your foulness after you-alas, it is true of almost every one of us!"

Fyodor Dostoyevsky

After reading the last section, it should be clear that the government of Indonesia and its inaction is to blame for the fires, the destruction of the habitat of the orangutans and their subsequent vulnerable conservation status. I discovered that the blame game that most media play is not as simple as they want their readers to believe, or may be the issue is not as simple as they understand it to be.

From Balikpapan I flew to Tarakan, an island in front of Borneo and part of the province of Kalimantan. The island used to be known as the "oil city" of Indonesia in a recent past. Like the rest of Kalimantan, it relied on an economy of extraction and of exploitation of the soil in disregard of the environment. From Tarakan I took a boat for around 3 hours to Derawan, the island where I met the guide that helped me deepen my research through local eyes. Derawan, Sangalaki and Kakaban are beautiful islands, rich in marine biodiversity. Sadly, a recent increase of local tourism has brought problems other islands of Indonesia are already facing: contamination. There is plastic everywhere and no one is picking it up – so it is only likely to increase in quantity over the next years.

He told me that Kalimantan was highly dependent on the economic model of extraction and that some coal mines were closing, leaving hundreds unemployed. Those were moving into activities that were not less detrimental for the environment, namely, the palm oil industry.

Palm oil has a large variety of industrial applications. The following industries use or employ palm oil or any of its derivatives at a determined stage in the production process of their goods: consumer retail food and snack manufacturers, personal care and cosmetics,

¹⁴ Haze Returns to Southeast Asia as Indonesia's Forest Fires Reach Critical Level · Global Voices. (September 13, 2015). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <https://globalvoices.org/2015/09/13/haze-returns-to-southeast-asia-as-indonesias-forest-fires-reach-critical-level/>

biofuel and energy, animal feed, the pharmaceutical industry, and the foodservice/service industry.¹⁵ Talking in terms of industries separates the final consumers from the issues, but Cadbury, Dove, Ritz, Palmolive, Gillette and Ben and Jerry's might sound familiar to you. You might use them in your day-to-day life, and all of them require palm oil in their production processes. Those industries are stimulating the growth of the palm oil fields and consequently the diminishing of rainforest areas.

A rise in consumption of such products generates pressures to raise the production of palm oil. After visiting Derawan and some of its surrounding islands I hopped on a boat again and went until Tanjung Batu. As the guide I met recommended me, I was heading to Kutai National Park, where he assured me I was going to be able to see free orangutans in a well-preserved environment. From Tanjung Batu I took a car to Berau, the closest city to the national park. The panorama was devastating: never-ending fields of burnt rainforest. There was almost no tree that surpassed the height of 3 meters in certain places. The entangled perfection of the jungle was replaced by the millimetric imperfection of modern agriculture that seeks to get the most out of the soil.

After being in there and after all the research I made, the only way I find to explain the fires is culturally. In order to clean the rainforest and have a field that is ready to be used for modern agricultural purposes people burn the jungle down. It is the easiest way to do so. The quick exit. It is the solution that requires the least effort and that goes along with the Indonesian lifestyle if it can be called so.

A society that lives in the present does not care about the future implications of its actions. That can be backed up by the fact that their language, Bahasa Indonesia, has no tenses at all. They have ways to refer to the present and to the past, but the tenses are inexistent. In one of the islands close to Derawan, Maratua, fishermen used dynamite to fish some years ago. Nowadays there are no more fishes in there, the coral has bleached and the island is not attractive for professional divers anymore. With the exception of the ones working for luxury European-like resorts, the villagers of Maratua lost their daily income to their own environmentally harming practices. The case of Maratua should stand as an example for the entire island of Borneo, a point to avoid reaching.

On the one hand, there is a problem of deforestation and air pollution that is highly hazardous for human life. Animals are losing their habitats to palm oil plantations and South East Asian cities are becoming covered by haze. On the other hand, researches on palm oil plantations show a high correlation between this type of agriculture and soil erosion. "Erosion occurs [both] during forest clearing and plantation establishment when the soil is left uncovered. Erosion is also accentuated by planting trees in rows up and down hillsides instead of contours, by not properly siting or constructing infrastructure such as roads, and by establishing plantations and infrastructure on slopes of more than 15 degrees."¹⁶

¹⁵ What is palm oil used for? (n.d.). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://greenpalm.org/about-palm-oil/what-is-palm-oil/what-is-palm-oil-used-for>

¹⁶ Palm oil & soil erosion. (n.d.). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/footprint/agriculture/palm_oil/environmental_impacts/soil_erosion/

The fact that the soil under the plantations is eroding implies that along with an indiscriminate cleansing of the rainforest, the damages done to the soil are going to be irreversible. Once the rainforest of Borneo disappears, one of the oldest in the world, it will disappear for good.

It is understandable that people without education follow certain practices that are going to be to their own detriment. They just do not acknowledge the whole spectrum of facts. In a conference in Jakarta with Prof. Irid Agoes Ph.D., I remember paying a lot of attention to the fact that only 13% of Indonesians follow any sort of academic education beyond high school and only 6% reach university. In addition to that, you can not just judge a man that burns the forest to have space to plant his seeds because he has a hungry family to feed at home and his grandparents told him to do it in that way. Yet the problematic goes even deeper than that.

Using data from Index Mundi, the online portal Indonesia-Investments.com estimated the palm oil production for Indonesia in the year 2014 as high as 33 million metric tons making it the world's first palm oil producer followed by Malaysia (19,8 million metric tons), Thailand (2 million metric tons) and Colombia (1,1 million metric tons). It implies that between 85 to 90% of the palm oil production of the world is concentrated between Indonesia and Malaysia. Furthermore, the portal explains that "few Indonesian industries have shown such a robust growth as the palm oil industry did during the past 15 years" and that (...) "the majority of Indonesia's palm oil production is exported (...). The most important export destination countries are China, India, Malaysia, Singapore and the Netherlands".¹⁷

An attentive reader would notice that both Malaysia and Singapore are not only contributing to put the fires down, but are also buying the produce of the burnt lands. Of course you could make a differentiation between the Malay and Singaporean government and Malay and Singaporean companies. This configures a scenario that is even more complicated because small Indonesian farmers and big venture companies are receiving the stimulus necessary to continue to burn the jungle: or clearing it in the easiest and fastest way. Yet at the same time, the Malay and Singaporean governments are pressuring the Indonesian government in order to avoid the pollution that comes along with the clearing of the rainforest. So far, it sound really complicated, but it does not end here.

If Kalimantan is as destroyed as I saw it, imagine how destroyed Sumatra is: it hosts 70% of all the palm oil plantations of Indonesia, whereas Kalimantan is home to about 30%. According to the same portal, the Indonesian Ministry of Agriculture said that "the total area of oil palm plantations in Indonesia is currently around eight million hectares; a number which is twice as much as in the year 2000 when around four million hectares of Indonesian soil was used for palm oil plantations. This number is expected to increase to 13 million hectares by 2020."¹⁸ If going from 4 to 8 million hectares created the environmental catastrophe of that spread all around South East Asia last year, how much damage is the transition from 8 to 13 million hectares going to be?

¹⁷ Palm Oil. (n.d.). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.indonesia-investments.com/business/commodities/palm-oil/item166>

¹⁸ IBID

The 30th of September of 2015, Joko Widodo declared that Indonesia needs three years to solve haze problem, in an article with the same name for the Jakarta Post.¹⁹ It is exactly in 3 years that his Ministry of Agriculture is going to reach the goal of 13 million hectares erasing more and more hectares of kalimantanese rainforest in this way. Added to that formula for disaster, the Indonesian government owns palm oil plantations that “play a modest role in the Indonesian palm oil industry as big private enterprises (such as the Wilmar Group and Sinar Mas) produce approximately half of total Indonesian production. Smallholder farmers account for around 35 percent, most of whom are highly vulnerable to global downswings in palm oil prices.”²⁰

Both the Wilmar Group and the company Sinar Mas are based in Jakarta, yet a significant portion of the capital comes from private investors based in Singapore and Malaysia. And as if it was not complicated enough, the government of Indonesia announced in “February 2015 (...) to raise biofuel subsidies from IDR 1,500 per liter to IDR 4,000 per liter in a bid to protect domestic biofuel producers.”²¹ That is like pouring gasoline into the fires of the rainforest of Kalimantan.

“The government of Indonesia signed a two-year primary forest moratorium that came into effect on 20 May 2011 and expired in May 2013. After expiration, Indonesia's president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014) extended the moratorium by two years. This moratorium implies a temporary stop to the granting of new permits to clear rain forests and peat lands in the country. In exchange Indonesia received a USD \$1 billion package from Norway. (...) Skeptics of the moratorium point out that prior to its implementation the government had concessioned around nine million hectares for new crops. Moreover, the large palm oil companies possess wide land banks of which many are only half planted, meaning that there is still ample room for expansion. In May 2015, Indonesian President Joko Widodo extended the moratorium for another two-year period.”²²

As evidenced by the paragraph above, the Indonesian government allegedly concessioned 9 million hectares before signing the moratorium, 4 hectares more than the required to accomplish the established goal of expansion of the Ministry of Agriculture and just in case the state-owned plantations and refineries need to grow, financed by the capital obtained from Norway. The doing of all of that would be evidently be below the table and in front of the noses of a nonreactive Global Civil Society, if they even have the time.

According to the article of the World Economic Forum called “Is climate change about to claim its first cities?”²³ a study suggests “that by the end of the century, parts of the

¹⁹ Indonesia needs three years to solve haze problem, says President Joko Widodo. (September 30, 2015). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/09/30/indonesia-needs-three-years-solve-haze-problem-says-president-joko-widodo.html>

²⁰ OP. CIT.

²¹ IBID

²² IBID

²³ Is climate change about to claim its first cities? (October 28, 2015). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/10/is-climate-change-about-to-claim-its-first-cities/>

Middle East may become uninhabitable for human beings. Extreme heatwaves could create conditions in several Middle Eastern cities that would exceed the threshold of what human beings can endure. Scientists used what is known as 'wet bulb temperature' (WBT), the combination of temperature and humidity. At 35 degrees WBT, a combination of 45 degrees celsius and 50% humidity, "any exposure for more than six hours would probably be intolerable even for the fittest of humans". That temperature was already almost reached in Iran earlier this year."

It continues: "Data from British firm Verisk Maplecroft suggests that the Middle East will not be the only region threatened by rising temperatures. Singapore and Malaysia could both see up to a 25% decrease in productivity due to rising heat stress. Other countries could feel similar stresses with loss of productivity predictions at 21% for Indonesia, 16% for Cambodia and the Philippines and 12% for Thailand and Vietnam."

At one pace of destruction of the rainforest like the one seen last year, cities in South East Asia are likely to become uninhabitable for human beings in a near future too. I am not an environment expert, but I am sure that there is a point of no return: because as discussed above, after the palm oil plantations, the erosion of the soil will make the recovery of one of the world's largest green lungs impossible. The pollution indexes are going to be outrageously high like the ones experienced in Singapore and the cities of the Malaysian Borneo last year, the health risks are likely to be unaccountable and the extinction of the orangutans imminent.

From Berau to Kutai, I saw some active fires regardless the fact the raining season had long begun. The dry season of 2015 was one of the most enduring Indonesia faced in the past years and that fueled the flames that almost ate the hearth of Kalimantan. Kutai was no wonder. There is no primary forest and any lackadaisical visitor could tell that the jungle had been cut down before. Udin, my guide inside of the Kutai, told me that the park was constituted by two administrative regions or "kecamatan": Kutai Timur and Kutai Sarga Negara. The park is 200.000 hectares, a number that looks ridiculously small in comparison to the 13 million hectares of palm oil plantations that the Ministry of Agriculture forecasts by 2020.

In our numerous treks I was able to see 3 orangutans. Labu, a 23 year-old mother of two, Langit, his first son, male and 7 years old; and Luna, a 2 month girl. They are as I expected them to be: wonderful creatures, so peaceful, so unaware of what we humans are doing to their species. Talking to the coordinator of the park, a man called or nicknamed Sapian, he told me that the area accessible to tourists hosted around 25 orangutans and the entire 200.000 hectares park was home to around 600 more.

In fact, Kutai is not a hotspot for tourism nowadays. The facilities of the park are deplorable; they have only a couple of rooms with wet mattresses and mosquito nets above them. No beds, one bathroom and one broken shower. More to the south, there is Tanjung Puting National Park, one that I did not visit on my student budget. North American and European tourists pay travel agencies over 1.000 USD per person to go to the jungle and see orangutans. In today's exchange rate, 1.000 USD equals 13.157.000 IDR, or in other words, the budget of 7 months of a rather upper-middle class Indonesian student. If only that money was used to boost the conservation efforts that the WWF and the Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation are pursuing.

After Kutai, I went to Samarinda and I stayed with a local named Ikhsan in the home of his parents. I met him in Couchsurfing.com, one of the tools we have nowadays if we are low on hotel budget. Really open-minded, he told me about the attitude the local farmers have towards orangutans. Because farmers sort of invaded the territory where the rain-forest once used to exist, the orangutans go there in their search for food. Their diet is mainly based on small insects, leafs and fruits. The farmers see the orangutans as a menace for their own survival thus eating their harvest and what follows is that they kill them. When the orangutan is a mother, they keep the babies as pets as long as they can until it becomes unmanageable for them to control them in captivity any longer and they suffer the same destiny of their progenitor. As I saw in Kutai, babies stay as long as 7 years with their moms, something that makes them more vulnerable once their mother is dead. There is no coexistence between small farmers and local species, and there is not even the attempt of one from the side of the farmers.

I hopped on a boat again. This time for 18 hours through the Mahakam River in order to reach Melak, a place where I could see Dayak tribes– the name for the indigenous communities of Borneo. All the way to Melak was really disappointing. After entering into the hearth of one of the biggest islands of the world, there was no primary jungle on any of the sides of the river. There were numerous villages all the way to Melak and even the town has an Indomaret, an Indonesian convenience store famous in every big city of Java. My friends and I were the only tourists and we were sharing the same boat with about 200 Indonesians. As I am used to see now, the trash was thrown by the locals directly into the river where once was easy to see sweet water dolphins.

Once in Melak, we found out thanks to some local friends that there was a Dayak festival close by. Of course we did not want to lose such an opportunity of cultural immersion. What I saw in there was enough for me to say that I could not leave without writing about my experience in Kalimantan. I expected the local communities to have an ancestral relationship with nature. I thought they understood better than anyone living on a city that we are dependent on nature and that we need to preserve it if we want to continue inhabiting this planet. I hoped they respected the land that gives them their daily livelihood and the animals that help keep the necessary balance of the environment. But it was not so.

Before going to see them, I was wishing I could add Dayak communities into the counterparts of this conflict: fighting for their land, for preserving some of the natural richness of Borneo, their history and roots. Sadly, they are not. They are a part of the conflict as much as the government, the multinational corporations, and the corrupted network of actors that enable, cause and magnify the environmental catastrophe Kalimantan is suffering. I am not in the place to judge their ancestral practices but I can describe what the festival was about: hubristically feeling superior to nature. Torturing buffalos and cocks. All about gambling and drinking. It was a ridiculous parade of who owned the biggest Toyota, of who had more money to humiliate the other in the context of humiliating nature.

Talking to some of them, they work for mines, for timber companies and for palm oil plantations. Some of them even owned them. In the festival that they were supposed to honor their ancestors and their deceased children, I only saw abuse. And that is a euphemism. They are also blinded by the fact of living in the present. Not even the people that were born in the island care about preserving its integrity, so who should do so?

V. The Global Civil Society is also to blame

"Not to hurt our humble brethren [the animals] is our first duty to them, but to stop there is not enough. We have a higher mission-to be of service to them whenever they require it... If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men."

Saint Francis of Assisi

I found myself criticizing the actions of small farmers and big multinational corporations, the reactions and behaviors of the Indonesian government towards the fires in Kalimantan, the agricultural methods used by Indonesians together with their ancient cultural practices and the way they appropriate their immediate surroundings. All of that having a jar of Nutella in my kitchen counter, which contains palm oil. In this way, I am also to blame for the crisis the Indonesian rainforests are experiencing. I am as responsible as all the other actors involved in this problematic for the threat the orangutans and all kind of other species are facing. I am guilty of supporting multinational corporations, small farmers and the Indonesian government in their crusade of destroying Kalimantan. And so are you.

How the Global Civil Society is addressing this problem could be described as silent complicity. Who is willing to give up their Kit-Kats because of the sake of orangutans' survival? It is in our hands to save the orangutans from extinction, because the conditions of today's society requires from us to be responsible and informed consumers. It is our duty to monitor and observe the practices that the companies incur in order to provide us with their goods and services. We cannot look away while they make of our world -while we make of our world-, a place that is *absolutely hideous to look at* just as Pony was before she was rescued from her captors.

The thing is that as a Global Civil Society we are failing to the world. Even looking at the local, direct level of the conflict. There were no protests in Java, Bali, or in Sulawesi. Why would there be any? They were breathing fresh air and the haze was all over other islands. The fires, on the other hand, guaranteed a steady supply of their favorite ice creams and chocolate bars. University professors - that should serve as guides for a forum of discussion of such important matters - succumb under the fear of being fired by the Indonesian government. The topic is taboo in the most important universities of the country. Locally, no one is stepping up.

The fact that the Indonesian law is not efficiently enforced - and in some circumstances not enforced at all - does not explain why the international community is also looking away on this matter. Where are the international consumer organizations, the interstate environmental treaties, and organisms such as the UN or ASEAN? Why are they leaving NGOs stand alone against a corrupted system of influences and lies? In 2015, the very same year of COP21 in Paris (officially the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference) and of the adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York, Borneo and Sumatra were in flames.

Be responsible consumers is what each one of us could do by now. To start checking what we consume and avoid those companies that do not make a commitment to the environment is just the starting point in the path of saving the orangutan. For the specific case of the palm oil industry, there are some rankings online regarding the level of involvement in the issue of the companies that employ palm oil in their supply chains.

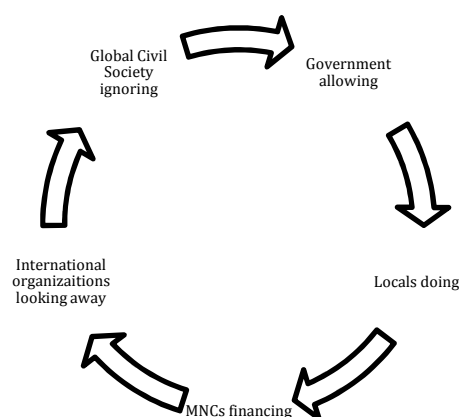
For example, The Union of Concerned Scientists publishes every year a palm oil scorecard.²⁴ The report assigns scores to companies operating in the sectors of wholesaling, fast foods, packaged foods and personal care. I am not telling you to stop consuming donuts, but I am begging you to buy your donut from Dunkin' Donuts and not from Starbucks. Since the score for all Dunkin' brands show that they have a strong commitment in environmentally friendly and responsible farming of palm oil, it sounds like a reasonable choice, whereas with little commitment there is Starbucks. Go do your shopping in Safeway instead of Target or Costco, buy puddings from Danone instead of those from Kraft. For the purposes of this essay, this illustration is sufficient but I recommend you to visit this and other rankings online before making a decision on what to buy. That is the bare minimum we can do if we are against orangutans losing their home and all that it implies: their extinction, exacerbated pollution, increased health risks and international diplomatic tensions - just to name a few.

VI. Conclusions

"Even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath, so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is Vanity."

Ecclesiastes 3:19

The image below essentially sums up the scenario of Kalimantan right now. The fact the whole island was a giant match last year and that orangutans are being driven to extinction is not as simple as the international media tends to abstract it to.



²⁴ Palm Oil Scorecard 2015: Fries, Face Wash, Forests. (n.d.). Retrieved April 03, 2016, from <http://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/stop-deforestation/palm-oil-scorecard-2015#.VwE7CBOLRhA>

Responsibilities can be tracked, as evidenced by this article, to a series of different actors. In short: the Indonesian government - by allowing the fires, inefficiently fighting them and allegedly also sponsoring some of them; the locals - by using abrasive agricultural practices that are not sustainable in the long run; the Multinational Corporations - by raising capital and investing it activities that are profitable, yet questionable because of undermining the integrity of the rainforests; the International organizations - by being totally out of the issue and being unable to enforce international environmental treaties; and the Global Civil Society - by choosing to ignore one of the biggest criminal acts against the environment of our times.

VIII. Pictures of the author



The Borneo of our times

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