# The Relevance of Myths and Worldviews in Pälawan Classification, Perceptions, and Management of Honey Bees

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After Murdock's (1967) attempt to classify human subsistence activities, terms such as hunting, foraging, gathering and collecting have been given a wide range of meanings. The last two are often used as synonymous, although collecting is generally associated with non-human primates (Teleki 1975). Common analytical approaches to indigenous food seeking practices have focused either on the pattern of procurement (technical factors) or on what they happen to yield. Efforts to explain gathering and hunting in terms of the opposition of collection versus pursuit have also been unconvincing. Overall, western explanations of, and approaches to indigenous ethnobiological knowledge and subsistence practices have often emphasized techno-economic criteria at the expense of ideology.

The indigenous inhabitants of Pälawan belong to three main ethnic groups: Batak, Tagbanuwa and Pälawan. The latter perceive themselves as divided into two major groupings: the Pälawan of the uplands, ***Pälawan ät bukid*** or ***Pälawan ät daja***, and the Pälawan of the lowlands, ***Pälawan ät napan*** (Novellino 1999; cf. Revel 1990). Most of the research presented in this paper focuses on the Pälawan of the uplands, shifting cultivators who relying heavily on hunting, subsistence and commercial gathering of non-timber forest products (NTFPs). Resin from *Agathis philippinensis*, ***bäktik***, honey, and rattan canes (semi-woody climbers of *Calamus, Daemonorops* and *Korthalsia* species) are collected to be sold and raise cash or bartered with modern items and food commodities. As this article stresses, Pälawan perceptions of bees and their understanding of honey gathering and other practices (e.g. palm-starch extraction) challenge cumbersome definitions of hunting and gathering coined by anthropologists.[2]

For example, the "aggregation of extracted produce" (see Ingold 1986:82) has been regarded as an essential feature of gathering and collecting. However, if one looks at the practice of honey gathering, it is clear that honey is far more than a simple substance formerly dispersed in the environment which is aggregated through collection. On the contrary, honey extraction implies a direct and potentially dangerous interaction with bees. In addition, honey is not simply collected but extracted and 'transferred' from a bee- constructed container (the hive) to a man-made container.[3]

By and large, hunting has generally being regarded as more dangerous and uncertain than gathering, thus attracting more prestige and symbolic importance. Like hunting, Pälawan honey gathering involves a strong element of risk and pursuit. Furthermore, this practice is highly represented in people's world views through myths and cosmological principles and, compared to hunting, it seems to occupy a more important niche in people's worldviews. In previous anthropological literature, hunting has also been contrasted to gathering by maintaining that the former is the pursuit of a 'moving' creature, while the latter is the 'searching for something' steady or relatively immobile. In support of this view Laughlin (1968:318, quoted in Ingold 1986:87) writes: "Plants do not run away nor do they turn and attack. They can be approached at any time from any direction, and they do not need to be trapped, speared, clubbed, or pursued on foot until they are extracted." Interestingly enough, Pälawan practices provide an exception to Laughlin's argument. As we shall see, among the southern Pälawan, the extraction of palm starch may be anticipated by the 'spearing' and 'killing' of the palm (*Metroxylon sagu* Rottboell). Moreover, ethnographic observation suggests that the ways that Pälawan deal with the Masters of plants and bees is not fundamentally different from the ways they deal with their fellow human beings.

It is within this context that Ingold's theoretical standpoint has practical bearing in my discussion. He has stressed that the involvement of self and other in a shared context of experience cannot be apprehended within the terms of the established dualism of subject and object, persons and things (1996a:129). This dualism may lead to an absolute division between humanity and 'animality' in a way that is alien to indigenous people. Above all, Ingold advocates replacing the Cartesian prioritisation of cognition over action with the synergy of person and environment. In doing so, he wishes to stress the distinction between two ways of apprehending the world: one (the Western) constructing the world through mental representations, and the other (the indigenous) 'taking up a view in the world' through personal engagement (Ingold 1996a:121).

Relating part of my argument to Ingold's work and drawing on my own field study, I will discuss how Pälawan 'metaphysics' (premises about the na-

ture of the world) articulate in practice. I intend to emphasize that Pälawan perceptions of bees and their understanding of honey gathering represent a distinctive mode of dealing with the environment which involves 'negotiation' more than adaptation, and the maintenance of relationships rather then the manipulation of nature. I suggest that the Pälawan do not simply collect[4] wild hives or harvest palm starch, but rather they foster certain conditions to enhance the 'behavioural disposition' of the Masters of bees and sago palms toward humans. It follows, then, that the harvesting of honey combs and sago starch is not a confrontation between subjects and objects, or person and things, but is an encounter between active agents, each endowed with its own capacity of acting in an autonomous way.

Figure 1. A Pälawan family with a newly harvested honeycomb of ***mugdung*** bees.

**Pälawan Perceptions and Classification of Bees**

The most popular honey-producing bee[5] is locally known as ***mugdung***. ***Nigwan*** or ***tämaing*** is a smaller honeybee (probably *Apis florea* or *Apis indica*) that builds hives in tree trunks. Small varieties of bees such as ***kätih kätih*** and the stingless ***ätuldan*** (probably *Trigona* sp.) build only very small nests containing a negligible quantity of honey. The term ***kätih kätih*** seems to derive from the word ***kätiän*** (to attract/to charm). In fact, the honey of ***kätih kätih*** is considered very effective during healing practices, and the wax is burned to stop thunderstorms.

Like all animals, bees are imagined to have their own master— a 'mystical' beekeeper in charge of their welfare. The Pälawan call this entity ***Ämpuq ät burak*** (the owner of the flowers) or ***Ämpuq ät mugdung*** (the Master of bees). He is said to dwell in the upper-world, and can only be seen by the ***baljan*** (shaman) during trance. The last and seventh upper layer is the place where ***Ämpuq*** (the God creator) dwells. In the lowest level (***basad***), Upuq Mänungul is in charge of holding the world from its base (***puqun***) (cf. Revel 1990) and he bears the enormous weight. The weight of the world increases proportionally to human misdeeds. If the world becomes too heavy because of people's infringement of cultural norms, Upuq Mänungul will be unable to hold it. As a result the world will collapse and vanish in the vastness of the universe.

In order to understand the local classification of bees, it is important to understand how Pälawan perceive the difference between tame and wild animals. ***Sätwa*** is the most inclusive term to define all animals as opposed to 'humans' (***taw***) (cf. Revel 1990). The same word is also employed to differentiate 'wild' animals from domestic ones (***ajam***). The latter includes chickens, dogs, and other common animals of the house, as well as wild animals kept as pets (e.g., monkeys, talking mynahs, wild chickens). Another term, ***rämu-rämu***, commonly refers to non-edible small animals (and to a few edible insects). It also denotes those animals that bite (***pängagat***), are poisonous (***mäbisa***), and suck human blood (***pägsäpäp ät dugu***). Bees may be included in the larger ***rämu-rämu*** category, but are not perceived as malevolent animals. In fact, despite their potential aggressiveness, they are regarded as benevolent for their ability to produce honey, and for being associated with a benevolent super-human entity (***Ämpuq ät mugdung*** or 'The Master of bees').

Overall, bees seem to possess aspects that are typical to both tamed and wild animals; nevertheless, people do not perceive this as a contradiction. In reality bees are neither tamed nor wild, nor benevolent or aggressive. Bees only disclose certain aspects of their 'character' in response to human behavior toward their Master (***Ämpuq ät burak***). It would appear that, to the Pälawan, no ani-

mal is absolutely wild. Those animals that are 'wild' and 'aggressive' against humans may be 'tame' toward non-human agents. For instance aggressive and poisonous animals such as ***älupjan*** (centipede), ***bäncanawa*** (scorpion), ***kätimamang kätimamang*** (mygale), ***säli*** (snake) are said to be owned by malevolent non-human agents such as ***Länggam*** to whom they are totally obedient and friendly.

## THE *SIMBUNG* RITUAL AND THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF BEES

Every seven years during the wet season, or when appropriate, a large offering and ceremony (***simbung***) is performed in honor of ***Ämpuq ät burak***. The ***simbung*** is considered the highest among all ceremonies to restore the cosmic balance of the world (cf. Macdonald 1997; Revel 1990) or, as the Pälawan say, to 'help the earth' (***magtabang ät lungsud***). ***Imparäj***, a shaman (***bäljan***) from the Kadulan village, explains the ***simbung*** as follows:

> The ***simbung*** is made to ask the God creator (***Ämpuq***) for the flowering of trees and the growth of rice. Only if plants are flowering the ***mugdung*** bees will smell the fragrance and come down to the ***tängäq tängäq*** (the middle level of the universe). We make an offering to the God Creator, and the ***bäljan*** (shaman) will ask the Master of flowers to forward our request to him. If the request is accepted, the harvest will be beautiful, the flowering of the trees will be beautiful, everything that God made will be alive. When this happens, the bees will give abundant honey.

During the ***simbung***, there are a number of prohibitions to be respected. I will only mention those which are relevant to my argument. It is strictly forbidden to carry umbrellas or to change one's own clothes inside the house where the ***simbung*** is performed. According to some informants the closed umbrellas will make the beehives 'covered' (not visible), while taking off one's own clothes will cause the bees to 'take off' (to fly away).

Preparatory activities for the ***simbung*** ceremony include the procurement of the needed quantity of honey, from April to June. The honey is cooked, and later fermented into jars called ***kibut***. Fermentation is enhanced using a mixture (***säpura***) of tree-barks from ***däräq*** (*Nephelium mutabile* Blume), ***burungäw, ginuqu*** (*Koompassia excelsa* Taub.), ***ärisurang, dipanga*** (*Pometia pinnata* Forster), ***rimäräw, kälasa*** (*Dipterocarpus grandiflorus* Blanco), ***usäaw*** (*Nephelium lappaceum* Linné), ***mantiq*** (*Sapindaceae*), ***mantaulaj***, ***dugjan*** (*Durio zibethinus* Murr.), ***maraitum***, and other species. The chanting of a prayer-song (***daruhan***)

by the shaman is followed by the opening of the ***taräk*** dance, and the fermented beverage is offered to the Master of flowers. This is to request a good flowering season and an abundant harvest of rice. Prior to this offering, and in order to obtain permission for starting the ceremony, two shamans establish contacts with the God of the Upper-World (***Ampuq manungaq***) and that of the Lower-World **(*Ampuq ät basad***).

Pälawan envisage a kind of cyclical system in which the seasonal production of honey depends upon the flow of bees from the upper levels to the central layer (***tängaq tängaq***) of the universe. The 'seasonality' of honey is not simply attributed to climatic and meteorological factors but, more importantly, to the different ontological status of bees. These animals are believed to be creatures of the over-world visiting the central layer of the universe 'to get the pollen from flowers' (***mägsäkbit it burak***).

The flowers of the ***mäkärutus*** vine are regarded as the major providers of pollen. However, according to Pälawan, ***tämaing*** bees are said to also feed on the flowers of certain trees which do not grow on this level of the universe, hence, ***tämaing*** honey must be consumed with caution. One such tree is said to have branches from different plants such as ***bawing*** (*Staurogyne sp.*), ***ruku ruku*** (*Ocimum sanctum* Linné), ***alumbiagan*** and ***lagundiq*** (a tree visible only to the shaman). The legend narrates that the roots of this tree cross the universe through its layers, reaching the very base of the world (***basad***). Furthermore, its canopy is said to function as a sort of shield to protect the middle level of the world (***tängaq-tängaq***) from the direct impact of rain and inundation.

The flow of bees from the upper world to the middle level is said to depend on a number of conditions, such as a favorable negotiation between people and the Master of flowers. Bees need to be invited through appropriate practices and ceremonies. Interestingly, it is considered a bad omen when the ***mugdung*** bees make their nest in people's houses without being invited. In this specific case, according to the informants, ***mugdung*** bees are sent by ***Ämpuq ät burak*** to inform people about danger or an imminent 'epidemic' (***dugpäk*** or ***rädäk***).

Overall, bees are perceived as limited in number, thus people say the concentration of bees in one place is countered by their scarcity in other areas. As a result, different communities may become competitive over wild honey; typically, they will resort to spells (***sumpa***) in order to enhance bees' concentration in their own territory. These spells are believed to make beehives invisible to others. According to Därmin, a Pälawan from the Taw ät Batu community, the shaman pronouncing the spell ties a piece of cloth or a woven net between trees. Then he positions himself at one side of the cloth (imagined as an invisible wall separating his community land from that of others), and he throws a handful of ashes across the cloth. When this action takes place the shaman will pro-

nounce words such as these: "Now I make a request to the bees, I like them only for me. The others should not see them. This net is like a wall covering their eyes." Among Pälawan, such spells may be socially sanctioned, and are said to be in contradiction with the objectives of ***simbung***. In fact, ***simbung*** aims at ensuring prosperity for all communities and at maintaining the socio-ecological balance.

## FOUNDATION MYTHS

The connection between myths of the origin of honey and people's subsistence activities is critical to the understanding of the interaction between humans and the Master of bees, and of the local principles underlying food-seeking practices[6] (see Novellino 1999; Revel 1990). Below I review two popular myths, and provide only a succinct account of a few central themes, rather than report the myths in their full length.

According to one myth, a long time the ago, the ***kätih kätih*** (a small species of bee) told the Master of flowers (***Ämpuq ät burak***) that the ***mugdung*** (a large species of bee) were aggressive toward humans. Therefore, the Master of the flowers decided to transform the ***mugdung*** into ***tämaing*** (a medium size bee) by roasting them in a ***kawaliq*** (frying pan). The transformed ***tämaing*** returned to the ***tängaq-tängaq*** (the middle level of the universe), but their behavior toward humans continued to be aggressive. As a result, the Master of flowers punished them for the second time, transforming the ***tämaing*** into ***ätuldan*** (a very small bee), and pulling out their sting (***säkäd***). According to the narrator, this is why, until now, the ***ätuldan*** bees are not harmful.

Another myth tells of a man who lost his way while 'searching for honeycombs' (***päningärä***). During his wandering into the forest he reached the place of the Master of flowers and was invited to enter his house. Then the Master of flowers asked: "Nephew, would you like to eat my nose mucus? (***mänak mängäqän kälang it musung ku***)." Although the proposal was repulsive, the men decided to accept the offer so as not to offend the old man. So the Master of flowers 'sneezed' (***isingä***) his mucus into a plate and offered it to the visitor. Here the narrator hints at the surprise of the guest upon discovering that the mucus in the plate was real honey. Because of his good manners, and his willingness to accept the 'mucus' of the Master of flowers, the man was given a magic spoon to obtain all varieties of food. The myth further tells how this privilege was lost, due to the irresponsible and greedy behavior of the cousin of the good man. According to the narrator, a few days later the cousin also lost his way into the forest, reaching the house of ***Ämpuq ät burak***. However, his be-

Figure 2. A Pälawan gatherer climbing a rattan aerial bridge to reach the canopy of a ***ginuqu*** tree (*Koompassia excelsa*).

havior towards the old man was absolutely disgraceful and impolite. He refused to eat the mucus of the old man and he started to harvest the honeycombs inside the house without asking permission. As a result, the Master of flowers cursed the human race with the following words: "From now on you will not be able to see me. You will have to 'call' ***(tumingkäg)*** me and 'make offerings' ***(magungsud)***. (To request my help) you must cut a piece of white cloth, shape it as a hive, and tie it to a tree."

## HONEY GATHERING AND BEEKEEPING IN PRACTICE

The gathering of ***mugdung*** hives is risky and requires considerable skill. The basic equipment consists of a rope, a smoking torch of ***äga äga*** (*Artocarpus* sp.) bark or other material, and a 'bush-knight' (***tukaw***). The gatherer climbs the vines encircling the trunk, until he reaches the canopy. If trees are very tall and have a large diameter, the people may build an aerial rattan 'bridge' made of a single rattan pole (generally of *Calamus subinermis* H.A. Wendl. Ex. Becc. and *Calamus merillii* Becc.), linking the forest ground to the canopy. The bees are

driven away by smoking the nest. Then the hive is cut, wrapped in leaves, placed in a container, and lowered down with a rope. In the process, the nests are completely destroyed.

On the other hand, efforts to attract swarms may include the preparation of shelters that encourage bees to construct their hives. These activities include the clearing of suitable tree branches, hollow logs, and concave stones of vines, mosses, spider webs, and dead leaves. Furthermore, after the construction of these shelters, each person must inform the Master of flowers of his readiness to welcome the bees. The most common techniques of beekeeping include the following methods:

- ***Rasuk***. This technique is only suited for ***mugdung*** bees. A log is inserted into the ground, along a steep slope. A thatch (***säpäw***) is placed above the log to protect it form rain and excessive heat. There are restrictions on the material to be used. The log can only be extracted from trees such as: ***tawläj*** (*Ulmaceae*), ***ägtäp*** (*Ficus sp.*), ***kärämpi***, ***säjapuq*** (*Trichospermum sp.*), ***lindägung*** (*Trema orientalis* (L.) Blume), ***käjäjänsung***. Conversely, the use of ***mälaga*** trees (*Wendlandia densiflora* (Bl.) DC.) is forbidden because the areas where ***mälaga*** trees are abundant are said to be inhabited by benevolent female deities (***Linamain***). Thus, the cutting of ***mälaga*** trees in such areas is believed to cause ***kabubusung*** (swollen stomach).

  The leaves of ***bätbat*** (*Arenga undulatifolia* Becc.), ***tägbäk*** (*Alpinia sp.* or *Amomum sp.*) and ***njug*** (*Cocos nucifera* L.) are considered to be the best material for thatch making. Conversely, the leaves of ***änibung*** (*Oncosperma sp.*) must be avoided. The frond of this palm is said to be susceptible to strong oscillations when the wind blows. The people fear that bees may 'imitate' the movement of the frond, and thus will 'fly away' (***mäglajug***) rather then staying under the thatch. In addition, the use of ***änibung***, ***kaläpi*** (*Calamus merillii* Becc. Var. Merillii) and ***diplak*** (*Calamus sp.*) is forbidden because such palms have thorny leaves. According to local accounts, spiny palms will make the bees more aggressive. It is said that bees will not only use their natural stings to attack humans, but will resort to palm thorns to injure the gatherers. The leaves of ***banga*** (*Orania palindan* (Blanco) Merrill) are also considered unsuited for the construction of thatch. It is said that the smell of its decaying leaves will force the bees to abandon their hives, or it will affect the taste of their honey.
- ***Siläb***. Fixed-comb hives made of hollow trees closed by lateral disks with a single entrance are particularly suited for ***tämaing*** and ***ätuldan*** bees. This is a common method of beekeeping in Paläwan and elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

- ***Tämbäl***. This technique is analogous to ***siläb***, but requires minimal human intervention. A natural object (an empty log or a concave stone) is cleaned of dust, earth, and spider webs to attract swarms of ***tämaing*** and ***ätuldan*** bees.

## DEALING WITH TREES, FELLING PALMS AND CHARMING BEES

When trees are flowering they should not be called according to their local names—a substitute name should be used instead. It is believed that breaching this prohibition will prevent the bees from 'getting the pollen' (***mäprian***) from flowers. For instance, the ***natuq*** tree (*Payena* sp.) should be called ***bäbäqälän***, and the ***kälasa*** (*Dipterocarpus grandiflorus* Blanco) should be called ***kärurungän***. ***Kärän kärän*** is the alternative name for ***dipanga*** (*Pometia pinnata* Forster), and ***gamang*** and ***pagibutän*** are substitute terms for ***rimäräw*** and ***ginuqu*** (*Koompassia excelsa* Taub.), respectively. This prohibition is also imposed when there is a linguistic assonance between two different things. For instance the tree name ***rimäräw*** resembles the term ***mäuräw*** (to vanish). People say that to mention the word ***rimäräw*** will make the flowers vanish.

Furthermore, anyone walking in the forest should refrain from expressing verbally his appreciation for the scent of honey and flowers. For instance, one should not say "How sweet is the scent of these flowers!" or "How sweet is the scent of honey!" Conversely one should says phrases conveying the opposite meaning such as "The flowers of *Koompassia excelsa* stink like rotten" (***mägburäknä it pagibutän***) or, when referring to honey, "It smells like urine" (***mäpäsäng***). According to my informants, verbalizing the opposite of what one may perceive (a bad smell rather then a pleasant odor) will cause the trees to bear more flowers, and the bees to produce more honey.

Pälawan resort to a multitude of charms (***pängtiq***) to ensure the success of hunting and gathering (cf. Revel 1990). The term ***mäniningäraq*** indicates a search for bee hives, and the words ***päniningäraq*** or ***pängtiq ät pänapu*** (cf. Revel 1990) are employed to define the charms and amulets utilized in this activity. As I will attempt to show, Pälawan utilization of 'symbolic' devices (charms) is coterminous with technical ones. The use of such charms is based on the principle that certain actions, or the utilization of natural or man-made objects (having a specific shape, colour, texture and other characteristics), may produce desired outcomes, due to their analogy, affinity or opposition to something else (cf. Novellino 1999b).

Among some of the most common charms employed during honey gathering and during palm starch extraction (see Novellino 1999c) are ***piranta***, or

charms and amulets used to identify swarms and honeycombs. For instance, a mirror may be swayed eight times in front of the eyes pronouncing words such as these: "I am swaying this mirror in front of my eyes, and if this is true, I shall see the bees flying behind me." A piece of wood from tree species such as ***kamiriq***, ***däräq*** (*Nephelium mutabile* Blume), or ***ginuqu*** (*Koompassia excelsa* Taub.) is carved, shaped as a hive, and tied around the neck. Such trees are important producers of pollen for the bees. This type of ***piranta*** is believed to function as ***pisulbud***, i.e. helping the gatherer to spot the 'swarming' (***sulbud***) of bees. The carved wood is usually spotted with black dots to resemble the cells of the honeycomb. A fragment of glass may be placed on the wooden hive, and it is said to function "as an eye, to see the honeycombs."

***Tipugdak*** is another common term for various charms, which are said to make bees very defensive of their nests. It is believed that when such charms are employed, the bees will swarm around those entering their territory, thus facilitating the location of their hives. ***Tipugdak*** charms may also be attached to the carved wooden hive. Other charms are utilized during the 'collection of honey' (***magsäpuq***), to reduce the aggressiveness of bees. The plant ***äjaq-äjaq*** (*Mimosa pudica* Linné.) is employed as ***pilämäj*** (to weaken) the bees. In fact, the informants explain that bees will become weak like the ***äjaq-äjaq*** leafs carried by the gatherer. ***Mimosa pudica*** is a sensitive plant; when touched, the leaflets immediately fold together upward and the main stalk folds down, giving the impression of loosing strength.

Charms employed in other activities such as sago extraction are based on similar principles. Some of these charms, as in the case of the ***bätbat*** palm (*Arenga undulatifolia* Becc.), are employed specifically to enhance the production and quality of starch. In connection with 'palm starch' extraction, such devices are defined under the general term ***pinatäk*** (which can be roughly translated as: "For the ***natäk***," meaning for the purpose of enhancing palm starch). According to one informant, ***pinatäk*** is the ***uru ät natäk*** (literally "the medicine for the ***natäk***"). In other words, it is the sort of remedy needed to induce the ***bätbat*** palm (or better, its Master) to produce and release more starch. One specific ***pinatäk*** device called ***pituqug*** pours 'shell lime' (***dinaruqung***) around the trunks of palms. It is believed that when ***pituqug*** is well performed, the starch found in the inner part of the palm will become as dried (***tumuquq***) as the lime of the ***tuwäj*** shells (*Astarte borealis*), and thus suitable for consumption. In fact, according to local informants, when the marrow is too wet ***natäk*** extraction will yield very little.

Pälawan say that the pouring of ***apug*** (shell lime) around the base of the palm makes the palm's marrow dry, and that the use of ***äjaq-äjaq*** leafs in honey gathering will make the bees weak. This seems to suggest that the shell lime

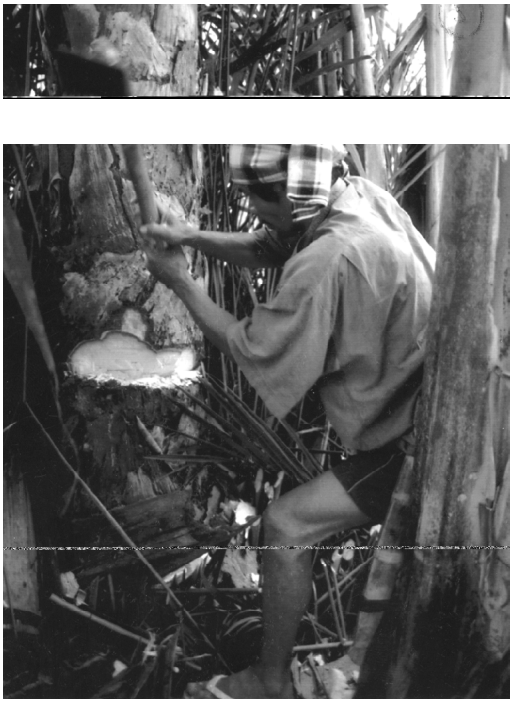

Figure 3. The felling of ***gumbja*** (*Metroxylon sagu*).

and the ***äjaq-äjaq*** are perceived to possess certain qualities and characteristics that both palms and bees are expected to resemble.

Livelihood practices such as sago extraction provide important insights into how people relate to other animals. For instance, among the southern Pälawan, the felling of ***gumbja*** (*Metroxylon sagu* Rottb) is preceded by a sort of skirmish mimicking a duel between the gatherer (acting as a sort of warrior) and the ***gumbja*** (addressed by the gatherer as ***käläng taw***—the "Big Man"). The one in charge of felling the palm wears a band around his forehead (as in a real fight between warriors) and approaches the ***gumbja*** by saying: "***Lawajän tayo it käläng taw***!" meaning "Let's go fighting the big man!" After shouting these words, the man brandishes a bush-knife and rotates it in the air. He hits the palm trunk first, and then begins to fell the ***gumbja***.

As soon as the trunk collapses to the ground, the man rushes toward it, and hits the ***gumbja*** again with a spear (***bujak***). Symbolically, the spearing of the ***gumbja*** represents the dead of the ***kälang taw***, and thus it is accompanied by a loud call of victory: "***Nalimbäs nä kälang taw***!" meaning "The big man is finished!" Surprisingly, none of my Pälawan informants were able to provide a detailed account of the ritual skirmish between the ***natäk*** gatherer and the ***kälang täw***. The only commentary was provided by Emparej, a local shaman

who claims that "you would 'disappoint' *(**mägsunguq**)* the palm if you say let's go felling down *(**tumbäng**)* the ***gumbja***. Instead you should say let's go to fight the ***käläng täw*** (the big man)."

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We are now able to delineate the basic principles underlying Pälawan perceptions of bees as well as people's attitudes toward animals and plants in general. The ethnographic examples presented here suggest that a dualism between humanity and animality, including the entailed restriction of 'personhood' to human beings, is not endorsed by the Pälawan. They further suggest that it would be misleading to regard beehives as a fixed supply of raw material that can be turned to when necessary. To the contrary, bees (and their products) are not perceived by Pälawan simply as things that are found in the environment, but rather as something which needs to be negotiated through appropriate behavior and ceremonies. The attitude of the gatherer is not that of somebody seeking mastery over nature (Novellino 1999, 1997), but is instead characterized by the necessity of keeping in constant 'consultation' with the Master of flowers and with the bees. One fundamental feature of this negotiation is the acquisition of knowledge through socialization[7] and direct engagement. This theme is clearly expressed in one of the Pälawan myths mentioned in this article. The analysis of the third myth suggests that 'the magic spoon' to obtain a variety of food was acquired through a process of socialization between the 'first gatherer' and the Master of flowers, and that this relationship must be restored constantly through the ***simbung*** ceremony.

One important aspect of the first myth is the punishment given by the Master of flowers to ***mugdung*** bees for attacking honey collectors. Indeed, bees' aggressiveness against humans would have endangered socialization, thus jeopardizing people's practical involvement in honey gathering (this is why bees are being punished by their master). What is at stake becomes clear: to be successful at honey gathering requires the 'socialization' and mutual engagement of various parties (humans, the 'Master of flowers' and his bees). In fact, if no 'negotiation' has occurred, the arrival of ***mugdung*** bees is perceived as a bad omen (***majat näng ngasa***).

Furthermore, these ethnographic examples reinforce the argument that Pälawan apply societal norms of behavior not only to human society but to the Masters of animals and trees as well. As we have seen, when trees are bearing flowers, their names cannot be mentioned. It may be interesting to note that among Pälawan the use of proper names to address persons of an older age is forbidden. Elders especially must be treated with reverence, and are always

referred to as grandfather or grandmother. Under certain conditions, this prohibition of proper names seems to apply not only to people, but also to the Masters of animals, plants, and other non-human agents. Of great relevance to this argument is the example of the sago palm felling. There is, in fact, an evident relationship between the productivity of the ***gumbja*** (its ability to release starch), the successful harvest of honeycombs, and the capacity of the gatherer to accredit the Master of palms, trees, and bees with 'personhood.' For instance, by being defined as ***käläng taw*** (the Big Man), the ***gumbja*** is attributed human-like qualities and feelings. This also implies that the action of felling the palm cannot be simply carried out by a regular man; conversely, 'the killing of the palm' must be ritually performed by a warrior. Again, the death of the big man (i.e. the palm crashing to the ground) and the harvesting of honey combs are not perceived by the people as man's victory (culture) over a passive and inferior life-form (nature). Conversely, it is by virtue of the status attributed by the gatherer to the palm (the big man) that sago palms become affordable to humans.

Moreover, what especially characterizes honey gathering and sago extraction is the ordinated utilization of 'symbolic' and technical devices. Such utilization challenges the original claim that magic is resorted to when technology does not permit people to ensure the outcomes of their actions (Malinowski 1947). In reality, charms are not perceived by the Pälawan as an alternative to technology, but as a particular expression of it. Thus, we are not dealing with an obscure magic where desired objects are obtained through the manipulation of 'supernatural' forces. Charms are not ambiguous, but rather they are the tangible manifestation of empirical knowledge acquired through direct observation of animal behavior, plant characteristics, meteorological phenomena, and body conditions. Knowledge of charms includes notions of how things and actions impact on each other by virtue of their analogous resemblance and opposition. This knowledge and the ability to use technical skills (e.g. climbing a tree, felling a palm) are therefore two sides of the same coin. Charms, in fact, do not serve to mediate between subjective and objective experience, but they appear to function as linkages between overlapping worlds of subjects (e.g. that of humans, bees, and palms). Specifically, the shell lime, the wooden hive and the ***äjaq-äjaq*** plant do not simply denote something by virtue of their resemblance and analogy to something else (e.g. ***äjaq-äjaq***-withering/bees-weakness, thorns-sharpness/bees-aggressiveness). Instead, they have the capacity to produce direct outcomes across multiple and intersecting domains.[8]

As we have seen, independently from human will, specific actions or the use of certain objects may set a process in motion. For instance, using the leaves of ***änibung*** causes bees to fly away, and the use of spiny leafs make them aggressive. Clearly, the use of such techno-symbolic devices (charms) is more a

way of interconnecting things, reorienting and enhancing plants' and animals' capacities to 'release' or produce something, behave in a certain way, acquire specific characteristics, and to enhance the disposition of their Masters toward humans. Ultimately, humans, bees, and plants are all subjects in their own respect, experiencing the world through direct engagement.

Behind this argument lies a point of fundamental significance. Not only subsistence activities but also their foundation myths seem to suggest that people's acquisition of knowledge about the world is the result of acts carried out by active agents (cf. Novellino 1999). In the first myth, the good and bad cousins come to represent the best and worst of human traits. The latter is the breaker of taboos and customary norms, the epitome of inappropriate behavior. However, by breaking all social rules he also creates the conditions for people to move out of ignorance. The innocent state in which human may use a magic spoon to have access to food is suddenly subverted. Now humans become engaged in the world through their actions and thus they begin 'to perceive what it affords' (Ingold 1986:48). As the myth narrates, the Master of flower, by laying a curse on the human race, makes beehives difficult to see and difficult to obtain. On the other hand, he instructs the people on what they have to do in order to obtain honey (e.g. they must ask for it, and make offerings). However, this knowledge is not provided *ipso facto*—it is only partially revealed to them. In fact, it is the responsibility of humans to interact with the environment,[9] and to apply such instructions to real circumstances.

To conclude, this article has attempted to present a culturally specific way of perceiving and dealing with bees, animals, and plants in general. I have argued that practices such as palm starch extraction and honeycomb gathering are not discrete economic activities, but are linked to other crucial aspects of social life. They do not portray humans as driven by intention and desire, nor as esoteric manipulators of a passive nature. Pälawan relationships emphasize the mutual engagement between people and the Masters of animals and plants. This is to say that plants and animals acquire specific connotations for the people, and the people acquire specific connotations for the Masters of animals and plants on the basis of their mutual involvement and disposition toward each other. The corollary of this is that human beings, the Master of bees, and the Master of animals and trees are just different expressions of personhood, each endowed with property of agency. Paraphrasing Ingold, humans exist in the perceptual world of the Master of bees, and Masters of plants and other living entities in the same way that the latter exist in the perceptual world of humans.

As this article has attempted to show, coming to good terms with bees includes making shelters for them. This is an action of generous reception and entertainment of long waited guests. In Pälawan mythology, this action re-

sponds to the same criteria according to which hospitality was generously offered by the Master of flowers to the first honey gatherer. There is, however, what may appear as a contradiction: at a later stage humans will destroy the hives to extract the honey, causing the bees swarms to disperse. The Pälawan informants I consulted on this topic have replied that after the harvesting of honeycombs, the bees recompose their swarms. They also claim that gatherers should rescue the bees which have fallen into the honey container. Each bee needs to be washed with water and placed on a leaf or in a safe spot. It is believed that the surviving bees will either reconstruct a new hive or, most likely, will return to their celestial abode.

It is perhaps not surprising that Pälawan do not seem to regard intense honey gathering as a possible reason for the declining number of swarms. As they say, it is people's breaking of cultural norms rather than climatic factors that affect the flowering of trees and the migration of bees. Surely environmental catastrophe is not a Western preoccupation alone. Pälawan are very concerned that at the present pace of deforestation[10] (Novellino 1999a, 2000a,b) their world will no longer sustain itself. Again, the physical reduction of trees, bees, and game does not preoccupy the people as much as the deterioration of their social relationship with the environment as a whole. An old Pälawan told me: "The bees will never die, they will just stay in their upper-abode, refusing to deal with humans. This is the sign that the world has become dirty, the masters of game will make the people sick, the flowers will dry up, and everything will collapse and disappear."

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**NOTES**

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2. For example, Ellen's classification (1982) of the techniques for the procurement of 'non domestic' resources rests on the criteria of what they yield. Honey gathering is in-

corporated with the 'collecting of animal species and their products' and differentiated from the 'gathering of vegetable species' and 'hunting and trapping.'

3. In Palawan, the container is generally made of a bambu tube of ***käwajan*** (Bambusa blumeana Bl. Ex. Schultz).

4. Ingold (1996b:20) has argued that collection defined in opposition to production "come to mean finding things: picking up one's supplies, as it were ready-made, from the environment." In reality, "neither production nor collection offers an adequate conceptualisation of what people are doing in their activities of livelihood. Rather, we are dealing with processes of growth, in which human beings, animals and plants come into being, each in relation to the others, within a continuous field of relationships."

5. In the Indo-Malaysian region the most common bee species producing honey include the giant honeybee (Apis dorsata), the Eastern honeybee (A. cerana) and the dwarf honeybee (A. florea). In addition several stingless bees (Trigona spp.) are found. The giant honeybee is the major honey-and wax-producing bee.

6. Vayda has rightly argued that social scientists concerned with human influences on the environment have often over-emphasized concepts and values about nature to show how behaviour conforms to them (1996:2). In fact, I do not aim to suggest that myths are the framework for imbuing meanings to experience, and determine the way in which all actions are carried out. Today Pälawan perceptions, values, and resources utilisation are drastically changing as the people become involved in the market economy.

7. Ingold (1992:47) proposes that "sociality is rather given from the start, prior to the objectification of experience in cultural categories, in the direct perceptual involvement of fellow subjects immersed in joint action in the same environment."

8. With respect to this, Ingold's statement is particularly revealing. He (Ingold 1996b:23) argues that "what magic does is to dispose people in a particular relationship to the constituent beings of their environment, to orient and focus their attention so as to achieve a kind of resonance or sensory attunement."

9. Ingolds (1992:50) notes that "the history of an environment is a history of the activities of all those organisms, human and non-human, contemporary and ancestral, that have contributed to its formation."

10. Palawan, the fifth largest Island in the Philippines, has the highest percentage of forest cover in the archipelago. Today many Pälawan communities are losing their access to traditional food zones which are being occupied by Filipino migrants. Forest conservation options proposed by both government and non-government organizations may further curtail indigenous 'subsistence' practices.

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