

## **The sounds of people and birds: music, memory, and longing among the Batek of Peninsular Malaysia**

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**Abstract:** Through combining ethnography of human-bird interactions with analysis of Batek discourses on musical instrument playing, this paper describes the emotional entanglements between human and non-human persons in the Batek's forest. The argument is made that sound-making and listening are privileged means of deepening the relationships between people and birds, and that these relationships then come to be part of what defines people's sense of being Batek. Ways of understanding how sound, environment, memory, and emotion intertwine are presented, speaking to broader debates surrounding the role of 'music' in hunting and gathering societies.

*kliŋ kawaw halɔŋ... yeʔ haʔip masaʔ sarɔt paʔ yeʔ ɡɔs mnəy*

‘The sound of the *halɔŋ* bird (‘a type of hornbill’)... I *haʔip* (‘feel longing, love, desire, yearning, nostalgia’) for those times when my father was alive’

(NaʔMtkot)

This paper looks in detail at how birds are talked about by Batek people, and at how the sounds and sensations made by birds are then recreated by musical instrument players. Listening to birds, and recreating their sensations in musical form, are ways that emotional entanglements between human and non-human dwellers of the forest are created and deepened. This goes towards creating a sense of *həp* (‘forest’), that is plural, and understood as a ‘more-than-human sociality’ (Tsing 2013). In other words, non-humans are understood as being different kinds of ‘persons’. These diverse ‘persons’ are distinct from humans, and yet many of them also possess sentience, intentionality, and kinship relations, and experience emotions in response to one another and in response to human activities. This close-knit, relationally constituted *həp* (‘forest’) is thus set in stark contrast to the *dəŋ* (‘town’), and the *ɡɔp* (‘Malay people, outsiders’) who inhabit it. I therefore add to Lye’s description of the forest as a ‘moral community’ (Lye 2005b:257), through foregrounding the communicative means used by the avian members of this community of the *həp* (‘forest’). This ethnography of the emotional aspects of the relationships between the non-human and human persons that constitute the Batek’s *həp*, adds to scholarly understandings of the role of music in hunting and gathering societies. Evidence is also presented for the importance of paying attention to emic perspectives on the senses when thinking about human relationships with birds.

## **1 Introduction**

The Batek are one of the approximately twenty cultural-linguistic groups of Orang Asli (‘Original People’), of Peninsular Malaysia (Endicott 2016). The most recent estimate of their total population puts their number at around

1500 people (Endicott et al 2016:100). This paper draws on fifteen months of fieldwork conducted by the author between March 2014 and May 2016. Fieldwork was done in Batek De' (henceforth abbreviated to Batek) camps in and close to Taman Negara ('National Park') in Pahang. Activities in a Batek camp centre around hunting and gathering, and on trade, day labouring, and tourism work. Batek society is highly egalitarian (Endicott & Endicott 2008, Karen Endicott 1981), and people place important cultural value on love of and knowledge of the *həp* ('forest') and how to behave in it. This relationship with the *həp*, and the non-human persons they share it with, forms part of people's sense of what it means to be a Batek person. As well as being defined positively, this sense of 'Batekness' is also in part described as being in contrast to *gɔp* ('outsider, Malay person'), as has also been described amongst other Orang Asli groups, for example the Ceq Wong (Howell 2016:74), the Semai (Dentan 1975), the Maniq (Kricheff & Lukas 2015), and the Menraq (Gomes 2007).

Birds provide a useful tool with which to approach these entanglements between the human and non-human 'persons' who make up the *həp* ('forest'). This is because they are so often talked about as framing memory, because they form the largest part of inspiration for musical instrument repertoires, because of their potential as augurs, and because of Batek people's oft-articulated love and fondness for them (see also Lye 2005a[2004]:152). Indeed, in a Batek camp, or when out in the forest, birds are a common topic of conversation, and under the dense canopy of the forest, birds are some of the most noticeable creatures, not because they are seen, but because they are heard. All that might be seen is a flash of colour or a shaking leaf (see also Lye 2005b:150, Ichikawa 1998 on the Mbuti), but birds' songs and calls cut across the background hum of insects and chatter, making them powerful reminders of the particular memories and places that they have co-occurred with (see also Feld 1996, 2015 on the Kaluli).

Perhaps for this reason, birds are also a major (though not the only) source of 'musical' inspiration. Recreating the sensations of birds forms a large part of Batek musical repertoire, which is an important way that people identify

emotionally with their avian companions. Like many animals, plants, and other beings, some birds also played roles in Batek origin stories (see Endicott 1979:42-43, 56, Rudge 2017 91-119, and Feld [1990]1982 on the Kaluli), and in a few cases were once people (Lye 2005a[2004]:100). Though there exist similar emotional entanglements between humans and plants, animals, or other beings, birds have particular salience in the Batek's forest, and therefore provide a useful tool to approach these entanglements.

Birds may evoke many emotions. However, as the statement by NaʔMtkot which opened the paper shows, as the sounds of birds and their recreation in musical form become associated with memories, these sounds often come to evoke the emotion of *haʔip*. *Haʔip* is difficult to translate neatly into English; it encompasses feelings of yearning, longing, nostalgia, or missing, at the same time as feelings of love and desire. It is a common response to something that is particularly 'beautiful' or 'good' (*btʔet*). Feelings of *haʔip* are commonly associated with yearning and nostalgia for the past, which people often describe in terms of an ideal representation of what the forest was like, at the same time as it is forward-looking, compelling people to travel to places to see people for whom they feel *haʔip*, to eat foods they feel *haʔip* for, or to evoke pleasurable feelings of *haʔip* through singing, playing, or listening to musical instruments. *haʔip* is therefore pleasurable, and yet tinged with sadness - indeed, if *haʔip* is unresolved it can lead to pining away and eventual death (see also Lye 2005a[2004]:33). At the same time as *haʔip* can have positive valence in terms of love, desire, and compassion, it can therefore also have negative valence, where yearning and longing tips from being enjoyably bittersweet to dangerous. Pleasurable *haʔip* is the desired response to musical instrument playing, and the dynamics of *haʔip* inform relationships between birds and people.

In terms of the practices that might be described as 'musical' in English, Batek people sing, and play two kinds of musical instruments - the flute and the mouth harp. This paper focuses on musical instrument playing, as it is this practice that is used to recreate the sensations of birds. However, related points have been made regarding singing and *haʔip* elsewhere (Rudge 2017).

Batek people do not talk about an abstract category of ‘music’ that encompasses both singing and instrument playing. Both are described as *kliŋ* (‘sound’), which also encompasses the sounds of speech, laughter, and other kinds of ambient man-made and non-man-made sound. Within the category of ‘sound’, songs are described as *hakaʔ* (‘song’), though this is not usually used to refer to the sounds made by musical instruments, which are described as *kliŋ* (‘sound’). I therefore refer to the ‘sounds’, rather than the ‘music’, played on the flute and the mouth harp throughout the paper.

I include the Linnaean and English names for some birds where they are known. During fieldwork, I used sound recordings of Malaysian birds, and, photographic field guides as elicitation tools to record Batek names for birds. However, often there was not a direct correspondence between the English and Batek names. As an example, the *ŋŋseŋ* was variously identified from the images as the black-eared shrike-babbler, long-tailed sibia, white-bellied erponis, oriental reed-warbler, Arctic warbler, mountain leaf-warbler, chestnut-crowned warbler, blue-throated flycatcher, yellow-throated flowerpecker, crimson-breasted flowerpecker, orange-bellied flowerpecker, and the scarlet-backed flowerpecker. However, from the recordings it was more consistently identified by different people as the brown-throated sunbird. I therefore include the English and Linnaean only where there was some consensus. Where there was not, I avoid implying a simple one-to-one relationship between Linnaean and Batek classification by including the Batek name only.

## **2 Sensing birds under the canopy**

Sensory understandings of birds underpin people’s understandings of, and emotional reactions to, their avian companions. In order to understand the how humans and birds relate to one another in the Batek’s forest, it is therefore important to understand how people talk about perceiving these birds.

The presence of many kinds of being, including birds, is indicated by their sound alone. Though the thing making the sound in question may not be in

sight, or may not even exist in visual form, it is still perceived as definitely there: one does not have to see to believe (see also Gell 2006[1999] on the Umeda). Often, if a Batek person heard one of the sound signatures of the numerous terrifying ghostly beings who also inhabit the forest, they did not wait for visual confirmation; they would turn on their heels and run away. One such example was when a whole camp of five nuclear families moved camps after hearing 'ghost birds' close by. They were worried these birds would make them sick. What distinguishes these specific 'ghost birds' (*kawaw hantu?*) from other birds is this power to make people sick, and that they do not take a physical form, but exist as sound alone.

Again showing the close attention that Batek people pay to birds' sounds is that many Batek names for birds are 'phonological iconisms' (Lye 2005a[2004]:151-154, Gell 2006[1999]:232 on Umeda, Berlin & O'Neill 1981 on Aguaruna and Huambisa, Ichikawa 1998 on Mbuti). Iconicity is often also found in the names of other sound-making animals, such as the *wkwāk* toad (call 'wk-wāk') and the *ptpēt* insect (call *pēt, pēt, pēt*), which is likely to be an insect of the *pomponia* genus of cicadas (Gogola & Riede 1995, Gogola & Trilar 2004). Birds' names, however, possess this property more commonly than other creatures. When a bird's name is a phonological imitation of its call, Batek people describe it as 'uttering its own name' (*ʔoʔ prbət knmoh ʔoʔ blaʔ*). Examples are the *sŋseŋ* (call: *seŋ-seŋ-seŋ-seŋ-seŋ*), the *sŋsil* (call: *sil-sil-sil-sil*), the *tltil* (call: *til-til-til-til*), the *pompakoh* 'Indian cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus*' (call: *pom-pom-pakoh*), and the *stsət* 'a type of spiderhunter' (call: *sət-sət-sət-sət*). This iconic naming is perhaps also a way that knowledge of how to recognise the sounds of forest is remembered and transmitted, and may be a way that the importance of attention to these sounds is inculcated (see Lye 2005a[2004]:152). Among the Kaluli, too, skills in recognising birds's sounds are inculcated using similar aesthetic means (Feld 1984:389).

However, Batek people pay attention not only to the *sounds* of birds' calls, but also to the sensations of their presence more broadly. Cadeʔ made me aware of this on one trip into the forest in 2014:

“Let’s go!” came the call of the gang of kids, as they began running down to the river. The adults followed at a slight distance. Cade? pointed, and told me in a whisper that there were loads of birds in that particular tree (*kɔm ʔay gin*). I stared blindly into the canopy. Cade? asked me if I could see them, I told him no, I couldn’t see their ‘ʔay’ (‘body’). Cade? sighed and said “don’t look for their ‘body’, look for their *jal*”.

*jal* it turned out, refers to the ‘traces of movement’ of something. It’s meaning is multi-sensory, crossing between the auditory and the visual. *jal* could refer to the sight of shaking leaves on a branch that a bird has just leapt up from, the cracking sound in the night of elephants knocking down bamboo, or the ominous sound of a tiger wading through a river. Often used in conjunction with *jal* is the word *gmpaʔ*, which translates as ‘the sound and sensation of movement’, crossing between the auditory and felt senses (it is possible that the word *gmpaʔ* in Batek is derived from Malay, though this is uncertain). Batek people might refer to the *gmpaʔ* of a bird’s flapping wings, of the wind, of a waterfall, of someone chopping down a tree, of rain falling on the lean-to, of a boat engine, or of the buzzing of a swarm of bees. This word is distinct from the word *kliŋ*, which refers purely to sound, though occasionally the two words may be used together, as *gmpaʔ kliŋ*. A bird’s call would be its *kliŋ* (‘sound’), but the sensation of its flapping wings as it flew past would be its *gmpaʔ*. *gmpaʔ* implies sensing movement through listening, which shows how auditory information is intertwined with kinaesthetic, visual, and haptic perceptions of the forest. To consider listening, then, it is essential to consider sound as experience, as bodily, and as inherently intertwining with the other sensory domains (Feld 2006[2005]), especially given that the way that Batek people talk about their perception of the forest uses a complex interplay of all of the senses. It is not just the *sounds* of the forest that they use in their daily life, but *sounds in conjunction with experience*.

Both *gmpaʔ* and *kliŋ* can evoke *haʔip*. On one evening, as NaʔTklõk and I sat outside on the ground as the sun was going down, there was a rush of wind low above our heads. She exclaimed:

*a-lah! syãl gmpa? sayap kawaw taʔic, ye? haʔip!*

‘Ah! ‘the sensation of rushing’ the sound/sensation (of movement) of the wings of the *taʔic* (‘a type of hornbill’) | *haʔip!*’

The sensation of the hornbill flying past, though it made no call and we barely saw it, was not only enough for her to identify what bird it was, but was enough to make her *haʔip*. Personal meanings of the forest are not read in the abstract, but experienced bodily (see also Feld 1996:100 on the Kaluli). As with other emotions, Batek people describe the sensation of *haʔip* physically, and as residing in the heart (as do the Temiar, see Roseman 1988:816). Exclamations of *haʔip* are often accompanied by the gesture of thumping the heart, and the pain caused by too much *haʔip* is described as *ptis klaŋes* (‘painful heart’).

The way the Batek talk about their perception of the forest, and of the birds in it, is a complex interplay of all of the senses. People are acutely aware not only of birds’ *calls*, but also their position in relation to their bodies, flashes of their feathers, the sensation of them flying past, or the ripples of motion as they come into contact with the foliage. This information not only evokes *haʔip*, but can also be used to understand other ecological phenomena, and in augury. For example, if you hear the *lhlah* bird (‘Crested Jay *Platylophus galericulatus*’) to the left of you, a friend will arrive, if you hear it to the right of you, a predator is approaching. If you hear the *wãl* bird, it tells that a new baby has been born, as its sound imitates the sound of a newborn baby’s cry. The closeness of the bird’s call indicates the proximity of the birth. This kind of Batek ‘augury’ is distinct from that of Bornean groups such as the Kantu’, who in Dove’s description use augury as a defined activity used as a way to deduce specific information relating to agricultural decisions (Dove 1996). Among the Batek, people are always listening out for birds, gleaning information from what they sense. This is not done as a specific or separate activity, but is ongoing.



There are two distinct ways that Batek people talk about inferring knowledge from the birds that they hear. These are *ləʔ* ('to signal', see also Lye 2016), a word also used to describe the process of inferring knowledge from other kinds of non-avian sounds, and *wayat* ('to tell' – a Malay loan), something that only birds and people can do. The word *ləʔ* implies a co-occurrence of phenomena, for example when you hear the *ptpə̃t* insect it 'signals' that it is the time of day that *bawɔŋ* fish (of the *Mystus* family) will bite (one nickname of the *ptpə̃t* insect is therefore the *ləʔ bawɔŋ*, or 'signals the *bawɔŋ*'), but this does not imply knowledge of this, or intent, on the part of the insect. The use of the word *wayat*, however, implies active 'telling' or intentional transferral of knowledge, on the part of the teller. Of the non-human 'persons' of the forest, it was only birds who were described to me as having this capability - and as such this capability of birds in the Batek's forest echoes that of the Kaluli understanding of birds as 'voices in the forest' (Feld 1990[1982]:45). For example, the *mncalaʔ*, described as speaking in Malay, 'tells' that '*sikit lagi kawan mati*' ('soon a friend will die'), '*sikit lagi kucing mari*' ('soon a tiger (lit. 'cat') will come'), or '*sikit lagi kawan mari*' ('soon a friend will come'). At the end of December 2014, NaʔKajaw passed away, and ʔEyBarəʔ, living four hours upriver by boat, said he had known before the phonecall came, because he had heard the *mncalaʔ* 'telling' him. Birds can also inform listeners about human emotions, for example, the *klkɔl* bird 'tells' that a friend is feeling *haʔip*.

As well as birds telling the Batek about human events and emotions, Batek people also infer information about the birds' own emotional lives from their calls and behaviour. This is exemplified in the phenomenon of the birds' fruit season. For Batek people, the fruit season is the most anticipated time of the year, and it is associated with the joys and excitement of having plenty of delicious fruits to eat (see also Endicott 1974:43, Lye 2005a[2004]:132). Every sign that the fruit season is approaching causes people to exclaim feelings of *haʔip*. This is reflected in how people then talk about birds experiencing the fruit season. Birds have their own fruit season, which directly precedes the human one. In the birds' fruit season, many tiny fruits such as *ɲɛɛŋ*, *mtkɔt*, *rep*, *plɛp*, and *nɛm*, which are not edible for humans, appear at

the very tops of the trees. This does not occur every year, and when it does, people know that the approaching human fruit season will be an especially plentiful one. People know the birds' fruit season has arrived when they hear the *mjun* ('emerald dove *Chalcophaps indica*) call 'yun yun yun', or the *klkol* call 'kol kol kol' in *haʔip* for their delicious fruits. *Haʔip* for fruits therefore permeates both human and avian life, showing that birds are also understood as kinds of 'person', able to experience *haʔip* for fruits, just as humans do.

Careful sensory attention to bird sounds therefore not only allows people to *predict* events such as the coming of edible fruits (as may also be indicated by other phenomena), but also allows people to *understand* the emotional lives of one another (for example by knowing when far away friends are feeling *haʔip*), and of the birds themselves (for example when they hear birds feeling *haʔip*). This in-depth attention to the lives of birds, including attention to the birds' emotional lives (for example by understanding their emotions in relation to their fruit season), is made possible by Batek people's knowledge of the sounds and sensory experiences that birds create.

### **3 Making the sound of a bird: deepening relationships through instrument playing**

**[Insert figure 1 here]**

This sensory attention to birds, and consequent knowledge of their behaviour and emotions, has important bearing on people's uses of musical instruments. Batek people make and play the mouth harp and the flute, which are each used to recreate the sounds and sensations of birds in different ways (see also Roseman 1984 on the Temiar).

The flute (*puʔol*) (Figure 1), being essentially a melodic instrument, is perfectly equipped to recreate many of the sounds of the forest. However, it is most commonly used to play the sound of birdsong. The flute is even said to have its mythical 'origins' (*ʔasal*) in the call of the *bbaraw* bird. It is made from bamboo (the best type is *kladoŋ* but you can also use *ʔakar*), and is a

ductless, side-blown flute, which is stopped at both ends. Some flutes are stopped at both ends by the natural nodes in the bamboo, and other flutes are stopped at one end by a node, and at the other end by resin. They have three finger holes at the lower end, and the embouchure hole, or *haŋ* (which literally translates as ‘mouth’) of the flute is at the upper end.

The *bbaraw*, the *sɛkwɔk* (likely to be the dark-throated oriole *Oriolus xanthonotus*), and the *kranɨʔ* are the most commonly played bird sounds, but I have also been played the sound of the *prahāʔ*, *jrabet*, *mnyun*, *pnhɔŋ*, and *pompakoh*. The flute can also be used to play the *plhis* (‘rushing sound’) of rapids, and the calling of gibbons. Renditions are structured as a series of short, repeating motifs that recreate the sensation in question. Players do not seek to exactly imitate the sensation that they are recreating, but create a stylised impression of the sound in question, for example by extracting a signifying element of the original sound (see also Mora 2005:2-3 on the T’boli and Feld 1988 on the Kaluli). For example, the *bbaraw* bird has a very fast trill-like call, which is recreated by fast fluttering trills on the flute. The *sɛkwɔk* bird sings in fits and starts, with pauses in between each burst of song. When re-created on the flute, this is represented by frequent yet brief pauses where quick breaths are taken. These are illustrated in the transcriptions below (Figures 2 and 3):

**[Insert Figure 2 here]**

**[Insert Figure 3 here]**

**[Insert Figure 4 here]**

The mouth harp (*raŋgɔŋ*) is a lamellophone made of *buman* (‘*Donax grandis* *ridl*’, of the *Marantaceae*, or ‘arrowroot’ family), which is scraped carefully and dried until it is pliable and resonant (Figure 4). A tongue, or lamella, is carved out of the centre of the piece of *buman*, and a string is attached to the end, or *kuy* (‘head’). Pulling the string whilst gently touching (*pi-tɛp* ‘to cause to gently touch’) the instrument against the lips causes vibrations to resonate (*liŋ*)

inside the mouth cavity. The player holds the instrument firmly and tightly (*kukəh*) with the left hand, and breathes gently (*hlhəl* or *pahən*) onto the instrument, as they pull the string firmly and rhythmically (*tir*). The pulling of the player's hand creates the rhythm, and the fundamental pitch is altered by the player changing the shape of their mouth, as if to pronounce different vowels. Whilst the mouth harp is a melodic instrument that uses the overtones in the harmonic series, it is also a highly rhythmic instrument. Whereas with a flute, the reverberations happen mostly inside the body of the instrument, the mouth harp uses the human body itself as the resonator – specifically the mouth and jaw (Ledang 1972:96). My own experience learning to play this instrument made evident that playing it uses not only the auditory senses, but the kinaesthetic ones as well. As you play, your whole body resonates, creating an embodied physical manipulation of the sensation one is seeking to recreate.

Reflecting this, the mouth harp is said to have its mythical 'origins' in the *gmpa?* of hornbill's flapping wings (*sayap kawaw ta?ic*) but it can also play one of the deep, resonant, rhythmic calls of the Siamang (*batew*; *Symphalangus syndactylus*), or representations of journeys through the forest. Examples I was played included walking up a mountain, feeling *ha?ip* for friends back at the camp, walking slowly on a difficult pathway, or going downriver on a raft. Again, as with the flute, players do not seek to create an exact imitation of the sensation in question, but a stylised recreation.

In any rendition on either the flute or the mouth harp, motifs may be repeated ad infinitum, either with no variation or with slight rhythmic or melodic differences each time. This goes on until the player decides to stop playing for whatever reason (they might tire, get interrupted by a child, feel shy, get bored, run out of breath, or simply feel they are done). Someone might play for a few seconds, or for as long as a few minutes, perhaps switching between sounds, or breaking to chat. Batek musical instrument players rarely 'perform', in the sense of playing something to a listening audience in a formalised setting. Instead, the sounds of musical instruments are woven into the fabric of conversations and other daily activities.

Due to the nature of the instruments, and the unique processes of playing them, a flute player will refer to the *klirj* ('sound') of what he or she is recreating, whereas a mouth harp player will be more likely (though not exclusively) to refer to the *gmpaʔ* ('sensation or sound of movement') of the sensation they are recreating on their instrument. This is because the experience of playing the mouth harp makes use of the sensation of movement as well as that of sound. This is reflected in the gestures of musicians as they play. Both instruments are most usually played sitting or lying down. However, whereas a flute player is likely to sit relatively still while they play, a mouth harp player might, to a greater or lesser degree, move their bodies to the rhythm as they play. ʔEyKtlet, for example, when playing the sound of a bird's flapping wings, moves vigorously up and down in his seated position, his body exaggerating the motion of his breath as he plays. As Impey has also written regarding women's mouth harp songs in Maputaland, 'both melody and harmony are transacted by the body, whose production is experienced through analogous concepts of spatiality, such as in the tension between the inhalation and expulsion of air (controlled through the passage from diaphragm, oesophagus and mouth cavity)' (2013:262). When Batek people listen to and play musical instruments, memories of movement through the forest, or the feeling of a hornbill flying past, become translated into physical movement of the body interacting with the instrument, meaning that these perceptions that they have with the forest become 'mirrored in the conceptualisation and production of sound' (Impey 2013:262 on women in Maputaland).

When a Batek person plays the sound of a bird's flapping wings, therefore, he or she is not simply imitating that sensation, but through embodying it, is more deeply understanding it - as described by them in terms of shared *haʔip*. Ingold's argument is relevant here, as he has written regarding hunter-gatherers that, 'far from dressing up a plain reality with layers of metaphor, or representing it, map-like, in the imagination, songs, stories and designs serve to conduct the attention of performers *into* the world, deeper and deeper' (Ingold 2000:55). In the Batek context, this 'attention' is emotional, and is described in terms of *haʔip*. On one occasion, an experienced mouth harpist,

TaʔKŋkuŋ, played the sensation of the *səkwok* bird calling (a bird whose call I'd up until then only ever heard rendered on the flute). The *səkwok* bird is a *kawaw sarət* ('bird associated with dead people'), and its call is said to be *hey ciwəh*, 'let's go up' (referring to 'the afterlife'). In other words, it tries to attract the listener into the realm of the dead, which would either cause terrible sickness or death. It could thus be perceived as a fearful sound, but in TaʔKŋkuŋ's rendition, after calling for a while the bird hears its own sound and it is so beautiful it feels *haʔip*. This *haʔip* is represented by playing, in his words, 'a bit faster' (*hǎʔ cpət sikit*). Through recreating this sensation on the mouth harp, TaʔKŋkuŋ turned his attention more deeply 'into' the emotional life of the bird, demonstrating and deepening his understanding of how beautiful sounds can make birds feel *haʔip*, just as they might among Batek people themselves.

The process of recreating the sound of the bird on the mouth harp therefore amounted to identifying emotionally with the bird, in a process similar to how Feld has described that 'hearing and voicing link the felt sensations of sound and balance to those of physical and emotional presence' (Feld 1996:97) among the Kaluli. Among the Batek, this is only ever framed in terms of *haʔip*, in other words, in terms of musical affect. Among other groups who also take bird song as a basis for musical inspiration, such as the Kaluli (Feld 1990[1982], 1988, 1996), the Waxei (Yamada 1997), or the T'boli (Mora 2005), the link between musical sound and bird sound is formalised by using fixed structures, and elaborate, detailed lexicons for describing these. This is not the case for Batek musical instrument playing, where *haʔip* is the guiding principle, and though renditions of certain sounds are recognisable between players, they are not always the same.

Batek people therefore cement themselves as part of the 'more-than-human sociality' (Tsing 2013) of the *həp* ('forest') through the *haʔip* that is evoked both through listening to birds, and through recreating their sensations on musical instruments. It is important to think beyond 'imitation' in considering what Batek people do when recreating the sensations of the *həp* on musical instruments. Taussig has theorised the concept of 'mimesis' as a way of using

realistic imitation to take power from that which is imitated (1993). By contrast, in the Batek context, instrument players are concerned neither with achieving 'realistic' imitation, or, it seems with power. Instead, the ways people listen to birds, and recreate them musically, amounts to a process of imaginatively delving into the emotional lives of the other 'persons' (articulated in terms of *haʔip*) who make up the 'more-than-human sociality' (Tsing 2013) of the *həp*. Playing instruments is therefore a way of 'keeping in touch' with the *həp*, a phrase that Bird-David has used regarding the role of hunting and gathering practices themselves (1992a:30, 2005).

#### **4 A community of *haʔip* feeling persons: the *həp* as contrasted to the *dəŋ***

How, therefore, do these practices of listening to birds, and recreating their sensations in musical form, influence how people understand themselves in relation to the *həp* ('forest')? In order to answer this question, it is first necessary to interrogate the idea of *həp* ('forest') itself (see Burenhult et al 2017 for further discussion of the meanings of 'forest' across cultures). Though *həp* ('forest') is talked about often by Batek people, the word is difficult to define simply (see also Lye 2005a[2004]:51). When in the camp, people say 'I'm going to the *həp*' (*yɛm ciɸ ba=həp*), to mean that they will be leaving the camp and going hunting, fishing, digging or anything else they might be going to do in the *həp*. If inside a lean-to, then anything outside the lean-to is referred to as *həp* as well: I might have been told to throw a pan-full of old rice just outside the lean-to by someone saying 'throw it into the *həp*' (*paŋkaʔ ba=həp*), or, as my feet often dangled out of the edge of people's lean-tos, 'your feet are in the *həp* still!' (*can moh ba=həp lagi?!*). But even the whole camp and the surrounding forest becomes *həp* when compared to the outside (*dəŋ*). For example, Batek friends calling me on the phone when I was away from the forest might say '*masaʔ ʔay=liw mɔm wek ba=həp?*', meaning 'when are you coming back to the forest?' In that case, *həp* refers to the whole general area, camp included. *həp* is therefore defined relatively, depending on the speaker.

More importantly, the *həp* is part of people's histories (Lye 1997:156), and so talk of the *həp* often occurs concurrently with talk of longing for the 'olden days' (*masa? kə=sɛŋ-sɛŋ*), the 'primordial times' when the '*batek ?asal*' and other beings were creating the world, or even people's childhoods, or descriptions of their parents or grandparents childhoods. Na?Tklōk, for example, insisted when we were collecting hair decorations that she knew how to make herself beautiful without 'outside things', and to prove it decorated our heads with leaves without a mirror, and did our *bilɛŋ* ('a decorative line painted across the forehead') with *bataŋ klandes* ('a type of tree with dark black sap'). She then pointed out that we were just like young, beautiful Batek women from the old times, and said that she therefore felt *ha?ip*. Making and playing musical instruments are also examples of things that are described as being activities of 'real Batek from the old times'. In fact, singing Batek songs, and playing the flute and the mouth harp were said to cause *ha?ip* precisely *because* they are things that people associate with the Batek from long ago (*kɔm brakɛs kə=sɛŋ-sɛŋ*). Food is another example: unless they were joking around, I didn't hear people seriously tell me that they felt *ha?ip* for banana cake, sardines, or fried chicken, though people also enjoy eating these things and would express desire to eat them. However, Na?Mtkət told me that she wanted to move to the forest to dig for wild tubers because she felt *ha?ip* for the starchy foods (*bap*) of the forest (*həp*). It seems that the things that Batek people love to do, and value doing, are *ha?ip*-ed for precisely because they are 'Batek'. In turn, these things are reminders of the 'old times', and are intrinsically bound up with the *həp* ('forest').

Most importantly, the *həp* is people's home, and even for the people who live more in the settlements than the forest nowadays, it is filled with memories (see also Lye 2016). Because of this, often when staying in settlement camps, people exclaim how they want to move to the *həp* because they feel *ha?ip*. On one occasion, when visiting the shops with Na?Tklōk I pointed out some paintings of forest scenes that were being sold. I asked if she thought they were good. She looked at me and replied slightly incredulously 'of course they're good, they're of the forest! If you see it you *ha?ip*' (*bt?ɛt leh, sa? ba=həp! mi? tɔt mi? ha?ip*). The *həp* is filled with memories, and 'as long as



there are paths and people to move along them, then there is no true wilderness' (Lye 2005a[2004]:64, Langub 2011:101 on comparable concepts among the Penan). There is a profound value placed on things that are Batek, of the *həp* and of the past. These are the things that make people feel *haʔip*, and inform ideas of what is *btʔet* ('good, beautiful'). This defines boundaries between the persons who are part of the *həp*, and the *gɔp* who do not understand, have knowledge of, or love the forest as Batek people do.

These dynamics of *haʔip* frame relationships between birds and people in the forest, as exemplified by the fact that *haʔip* is the marker by which the sounds played on the flute and the mouth harp are judged as 'good' (*btʔet*). For example, on one evening spent on the Kənam river, ʔEyJanʔkaw was playing the flute, as the rest of us were lying around, half-listening and chatting. At one point, he started playing the sound of a hornbill's flapping wings, and it was so beautiful, we all stopped talking to listen. After a few moments he suddenly stopped and asked me 'do you *haʔip* yet?' (*mɔh haʔip bah dah?*). When I replied yes, I was really *haʔip*, he said 'well, I'm done playing then'. *haʔip* might be evoked because the sound is simply so *btʔet* ('beautiful'), or, particular sounds and melodic motifs played on the flute and the mouth harp become associated with the style of playing of that particular person. Because of these strong associations, when people hear sounds played by a loved one, or sounds reminiscent of those a loved one used to play, they may be reminded of that memory, and feel *haʔip*. One of the flute players recorded by Endicott is the late father of ʔEyGamponʔ. I played this recording to some Batek friends, and they called ʔEyGamponʔ over to listen. After a few moments, he had to move away – hearing his father play made him *haʔip* so much he couldn't bear it. This was a contrast to when NaʔTklōk, who is the late player's niece, asked to hear the recordings. She fell about laughing and said 'that's so him – he always played it wrong – just like that'. Though she was laughing, however, she also said that she felt *haʔip* remembering her uncle.

Both the sounds and sensations of the birds in the forest, and their recreation on musical instruments, become indices of people, places, and memories that

can also take on new layers of meaning every time they are played. As they do so, they become associated with a 'plurality' of thoughts and memories. As Bird-David argues in relation to the Nayaka's perception of 'things', 'the human connection is centrally in focus (2005:210, 2017): 'just as a person can be associated with a plurality of relatives so can a thing be associated with a plurality of persons... it is precisely its co-use which brings into focus the users' joint living, highlighting their association and co-operation. For only joined people can use the same knife; co-using it is one of the ways by which their joined living is expressed' (2005:211). The same applies to the ways that the sounds of musical instrument playing circulate around Batek camps. Hearing and playing the sounds expresses people's connectedness to one other, through evoking the webs of connections that link sounds to people and places, to birds, and indeed to the forest as a whole. The *həp* is thus experienced as a plural community of *haʔip*-feeling persons.

Within the *həp*, therefore, although human versus non-human distinctions are kept clear, the idea that there is a radical divide between 'nature' and 'culture' (Descola 2006) is absent (Lye 2005a[2004]; see Howell 2011 for similar concepts among the Ceq Wong). Indeed, in stories of the 'old times', many non-humans, including plants and animals as well as birds, were once people, and vice versa (see also Feld 1990[1982] on the Kaluli). Tsing's (2013) concept of a 'more-than-human sociality', consisting of connected, and related, yet distinct kinds of person, is therefore useful to use here, as it encapsulates how human and non-human persons can exist together in webs of connectedness, tightly bound by *haʔip*, without implying sameness. Rather than implying a shared 'essence', as is common in Amazonian ethnography (Viveiros de Castro 1998), the idea of a 'more-than-human sociality' allows for variation between cultures, and also allows for the existence of difference between the beings who make up this sociality, at the same time as bringing to the fore how different species 'come into ways of life through webs of social relations' (Tsing 2013:28).

There is a clear and considerable divide that is built between the 'more-than-human sociality' of the *həp* (Tsing 2013), and *gəp* ('outsiders'). This is despite

the fact that as well as hunting, fishing, digging for wild tubers, or searching for fruits and other edible forest products, there are some Batek people whose main income comes from tourism, from working on palm oil plantations, or from the trade of forest products. A few Batek people also own boats, or motorbikes. Some have lived outside the forest for months at a time working for *gɔp*. Almost all enjoy watching cartoons and music videos on TVs, which they power with a diesel generator. Some Batek people can play the guitar, and some young people (and a few older people) use mobile phones. A lot of people enjoy listening to Malay and Indonesian pop music, using mp3 files that they share via Bluetooth. However, Batek people regularly articulate a very clear ideological separation between these desirable *gɔp* things that they have incorporated into Batek life in the *həp*, and the things that they see as being 'Batek'.

Indeed, Batek people articulate a strong sense of suspicion towards the *gɔp* who inhabit the *dəŋ* ('town'), a sentiment with a long history rooted in the slave-raiding by the Malays of the Nineteenth Century, and which is further compounded by current attempts at forced conversion to Islam and assimilation into Malaysian society (Dentan et al 1997, Lye 1997:78-95, Endicott 2016:13-29, 1983). This suffering at the hands of outsiders is not merely a historical phenomenon: prejudice against the Batek (by the government, missionaries, local Malaysians, and Malaysian and foreign tourists) is still widespread.

Batek people use the word *gɔp* as a blanket term to refer to all outsiders, but is particularly used in reference to Malay people. Even if the Batek have met the person many times, and the person is not a stranger, they will still almost always be referred to as *gɔp*. There was one particular Malay man who sold cakes at Was Yɔŋ once a fortnight or so. The Batek people at that camp knew his name, and were not on unfriendly terms with him. Even so, he was usually referred to as 'cake *gɔp*' (*gɔp kwɛy*), rather than by name, reducing his identity to simply one of many of a homogenous group - a far cry from the emotional entanglements that people seek out with the birds of the *həp* ('forest'). Furthermore, not only are the ways of *gɔp* considered to be 'bad' in the sense

of being morally wrong, for example the fact that *gɔp* do not adhere to the taboos that Batek people adhere to (Rudge 2017, Endicott 1979), but the ways of *gɔp* are often considered to be aesthetically and sensorially displeasing. Again, this is a contrast to how people talk about the beauty of birdsong. Though there are some exceptions, almost any interaction with *gɔp* would prompt statements such as ‘we’re not like them’ in some way, showing that the community of the *həp* is contrasted spatially, culturally, and ideologically with the *dəŋ* (‘town’), and with the *gɔp* who inhabit it.

What can be extrapolated from this discussion regarding the role of music in hunting and gathering societies more broadly? Lewis has written of Mbendjele music making, that it is used to foster ‘communitas’ not only between humans but also with the forest itself (2014). Similarly, Bird-David has described Nayaka rituals involving music that create opportunities for communication between people and the forest, allowing her to draw the conclusion that hunter and gatherer epistemology is ‘relational’ (1999). Reinforcing this, among Batek people, this paper has described how ways of listening and musical instrument playing are used to create deep emotional entanglements between humans and birds, helping to cement the *həp* (‘forest’) as a ‘more-than-human sociality’ (Tsing 2013). Evidence suggests, therefore, that one important role of music in hunting and gathering societies is in fostering the relationships between people and their environments that are so often described by the groups themselves as being essential to their identity. In particular, Batek people articulate that these relationships are not just practical, but that they are deeply emotional as well. ‘Keeping in touch’ with non-human persons, such as birds, through careful listening and musical instrument playing, maintains this particular kind of ‘more-than-human sociality’, and hence in maintaining ideological separation from *gɔp*.

## **5 Conclusion**

It is through *haʔip* that Batek people taught me about their values. They would point out to me the things that made them *haʔip* because they were the things that they cared about. By the same logic, young children and babies begin to

learn the same system of values as they are taken about the forest in the course of daily activities by their parents. In the act of exclaiming that something has made them *haʔip*, people ensure that it will be remembered, that its importance is taken note of by whoever is present. Since playing musical instruments evokes *haʔip*, then like walking in the forest, it is a way that memories and knowledge are transmitted to the younger generation, in particular as *haʔip* is connected to ideas of the past. For example, on hearing the ‘kawooooo’ of the *kwaŋ* bird (Great Argus Pheasant *Argusianus argus*) on the Kəŋam River, NaʔMtkət remarked that she felt *haʔip* for the old times, the times when there were many Batek deep in the forest, and they lived in the way of the old Batek, ‘not like us new Batek nowadays’. The *kwaŋ* was in the forest then, and it is still calling now even though so much in the lives of the Batek has changed. I am reminded here of how Lye describes Batek people as ‘shar[ing] a history with the forest. Therefore, in perceiving the forest, they perceive their own histories’ (1997:156). The sounds of birds in the forest, and their recreation in musical form, become a link between the people’s pasts and the present day, either a remembered past, or a past from long ago. At the same time, the ever-present and sensorially all-encompassing awareness of birds, in combination with people’s rendering of these sensations in musical form, mean that *new* memories and associations between people, music, and the forest, are always being created, making these sounds and sensations relevant to listeners in the present. Sounds are powerful in this respect, as they can be transported, and transport people, across geographical and temporal divides.

Both the sensations caused by the birds themselves, and their recreation in musical form, are perhaps therefore part of what reinforces a resilient sense of ‘Batekness’, in the face of other changes in people’s daily lives. Indeed, perhaps people’s strong desire to feel *haʔip*, and to encourage *haʔip* in their children, is in part a response to the anxiety caused by forest loss (see Lye 2005a[2004]). The past is brought into the present, and the present into the past through the power of sound, in particular the sounds of birds, to evoke old memories and create new ones. In the process, powerful and personal links are forged between people and their non-human companions.

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## **Appendix: Notes**

Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.

Orthography is based on the International Phonetic Alphabet, but adheres to the orthographic standards commonly used in the description of Asian languages (see Kruspe et al 2015).

In cases where an exact English translation is either unknown or difficult to put into a single-word translation, I have given the Batek term, alongside a description in English.

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