

## When ear squats were fun

Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Article

New Sunday Times - 12/11/2005

YESTERDAY, Dec 10, was International Human Rights Day. Human rights has been making headlines recently.

However, none is as hotly debated as the nude-squat issue. Attached to it is an unpleasant image, in fact a dehumanising one.

*Ketuk ketampi* is the Malay word to describe squats done repeatedly, usually as punishment. This has been practised for a long time in our society without much fuss, let alone being linked to human rights abuse.

What has changed?

The Kamus Dewan (2000) definition of *ketampi* is a kind of bird, an owl of the genus *Ketupa*, which recently has been changed to *Bubo*.

It is said to be related to the commonly named Brown Fish Owl. It is similar to a local owl called the Buffy or Malay Fish Owl, *Bubo (Ketupa) ketupu*, a popular species that had made it on a Malaysian stamp collection as *Burung Hantu Kuning*.

This is because of its golden yellow to brilliant yellowish eyes (<http://www.bird-stamps.org/species/73056.htm>).

The Malay Fish Owl is found not only in the Malay peninsula, but also in Sumatra, Borneo, Java, Bali and the adjacent Indonesian islands.

Its habitat is the woody areas near water, mangrove forests, coastal areas and padi fields often near human habitation.

Interestingly, the Malay Fish Owl is reported to make a loud rattling sound "*kutook, kutook*" and a ringing "pof pof pof".

Though its habitat is near humans, the bird is more often heard than seen.

Compared to other Eagle Owls or Fish Owls, only the *Burung Hantu Kuning* produce unique sounds or calls which are described in some children's mystery folk tales as an eerie sound.

Because of the unique sound, it is therefore tempting to conclude that the word *ketuk ketampi* may be a corrupted name referring to the same bird.



NEW IMAGE: *Ketuk ketampi* has somehow retained its subtle message that some rule has been breached.

After all, *ketuk* and *kutook* sound very much alike.

Another version is that *ketuk*, which means to hit (normally on the head), could be the response somewhat similar to the movement during an ear squat, that is moving its head up and down.

Notwithstanding that possibility, it is interesting also to note that another common name in Malay for *Ketupa ketupu* is *Burung Hantu Ketumbuk Ketampi*.

*Burung Hantu Ketumbuk Ketampi* is described by some to move its head in a up-down motion.

Whatever the origins, *ketuk ketampi* used to be fun as a kind of physical exercise and at times a form of mild punishment.

It is safe to assume that practically all the mischievous among us have been asked to *ketuk ketampi* at some point in their lives in schools.

And it was mostly carried out with a giggle; for some reason it was funny to be asked to do this, even as punishment.

Still, *ketuk ketampi* has somehow retained its subtle message that some rule has been breached.

It is a gentle reminder not to repeat the same mistake again. Many learned to behave the *ketuk ketampi* way.

At no time has it got to do with the attempt to dislodge things from any body cavity. In any case the person doing *ketuk ketampi* used to be fully dressed to start with.

The male students were the favourites for this form of punishment, or rather exercise, depending on how one looks at it.

The female students were usually asked to kneel down on the floor, somewhat less fun and nothing to giggle about. Kneeling is punishment, plain and simple.

On several occasions, *ketuk ketampi* was used as a routine, at least in the early days of PE (physical exercise) in schools.

One PE teacher even explained which muscle is affected during the exercise.

And why must one hold the ears with the hands crossed? Well, it helps to keep the balance during the up-down movement.

Try doing it without holding the ears, or holding them the wrong way.

For those who feel sleepy at work or in the office, a few *ketuk ketampi* can refreshen you.

So when was the fun taken out of *ketuk ketampi* and turned into an instrument of interrogation instead?

Worse, when was it associated with a torture of sorts? Aren't there other ways of interrogating without resorting to *ketuk ketampi* in such a dehumanising way?

What is even more surprising is that this seems to be universal practice and an acceptable procedure as it were.

In other words, given the adverse publicity about *ketuk ketampi* a.k.a. squats today, no teacher is likely to call for this punishment or use it even as an exercise for fear of someone screaming about the abuse of human rights.

In these days when caning is no longer an option, *ketuk ketampi* could have proven handy. But not anymore, or so it seems.

Isn't it strange how simple things in life get twisted and transformed into something monstrous? Whatever it is, it looks like *ketuk ketampi* will never be the same again.

The conjecture of a wise owl, if ever it is associated with the action of *ketuk ketampi*, has been tarnished. So where do we go from here?

For sure, *ketuk ketampi* has acquired a new image as something that is demeaning and dehumanising, no thanks to the recent nude-squat video clip.

Although this is the first time the public is aware that ear squats are being done in police stations, this certainly is not the first time this has happened, even to fellow Malaysians.

And not seeing it before does not make it all right or less dehumanising.

Indeed, it has nothing to do with the question of nationality, gender or ethnicity, neither is it about the place, institution or nation or even the person(s) who executes the orders.

It is rather all about offending the woman (or man) when she is threatened in a subhuman way or worse still inhumanely by stripping away her dignity.

Some call it a violation of human rights but what is clear is that it violates the very essence of human conscience. Framed in the context of *Islam Hadhari*, there is much more to answer for.

So an independent commission is working to restore human dignity and conscience to its rightful place.

Kudos to the Prime Minister for taking a swift and stern decision.

Meanwhile, for those who long for the days of the untainted *ketuk ketampi*, you can watch P. Ramlee's comedy *Labu Labi* and the encounter with bossy Haji Bakhil.

[Terms & Conditions](#)