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Indigenous Peoples: Local Impact of International Rights



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Indigenous Peoples: Local Impact of International Rights

Valedictory lecture given by

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Dear colleagues, friends and family,

It is wonderful to see you all here. Especially those of you who have come from far. And it is very special for me that we are here together in this great museum, where I attended my first lectures in anthropology all those years ago.

In my presentation today, I want to discuss a couple of themes and issues that have fascinated me professionally for the greater part of my life, the rights of indigenous peoples and, more specifically, how international rights impact on their lives locally. Some of the themes and issues have already been presented in one form or the other by the previous speakers today. I want to add to that discussion and provide some personal reflections.

Orang Rimba



Maritua and some of his relatives.

I first want to take you to Sumatra. Here, we see a group of Orang Rimba, traditionally hunter-gatherers. The little group of men and boys had come together to listen to Maritua, the man second to the right. He had just returned from his monthly visit to the logging company, to collect his payment in return for allowing the company to operate in the area that used to be his community's forest, his living environment. He

had travelled to the company's office on his motor bike, which was bought from the same kind of money from Sinar Mas, the company that planted rubber trees and oil palms on his land. On his way back he had done some shopping. He had bought cigarettes, sugar, coffee, and sweets for his relatives. Arriving back home, he went straight to his hut in a forest patch to change his trousers for his loin cloth. He distributed some of the goods among his family members and then it was time to sit down, enjoy a Gudang Garam cigarette and tell his story about his visit to the logging camp.

My colleague Tessa Minter and I joined the discussion during a field visit to one of our PhD students, Wardani. Looking around we saw a devastated landscape, piles of logged and uprooted trees and, in between, tiny seedlings of trees that were going to transform the landscape from a tropical rainforest into a rubber plantation in the years to come. Could the Orang Rimba survive in such a landscape, or would they increasingly become dependent on the handouts of these companies? While listening to Maritua and his relatives, we learned how difficult it was to hunt for wild animals that used to roam the forest or to collect forest products that they could sell or consume themselves.

One product however was still widely available in the logged-over forest and that was *damar*, a resin: large tree trunks and stems provided big quantities of *damar* even after they had been cut. *Damar* yields a good price. But soon this resource would no longer be available. Once again the future of the Orang Rimba looked bleak.

The visit made me think back to the first time I was among the Orang Rimba in the early 1980s. At that time they were still called the Kubu. I was asked to evaluate a particular development project and I was surprised to learn that the Orang Rimba were still surviving in the forest of Sumatra. Because even then their extinction had been predicted for a very long time.

Already in the early 1900s it was assumed that the Orang Rimba would soon be extinct or they would be swallowed up by the encroaching civilization (Hagen 1908). And this was at a time when powerful bulldozers and chainsaws were still to be invented. But the Orang Rimba have survived and shown more resilience than many people, including myself, thought was possible.

Recent research by Wardani shows how the Orang Rimba survive under difficult conditions. A number of them are at the mercy of the logging companies, even though some form of agreement may have been achieved between the companies and the local communities. Others survive in a National Park, also called a Cultural Reserve, where the Orang Rimba have received a special status (Persoon and Ekoningtyas 2017; Ekoningtyas in prep.).

4 A little over a year ago, Indonesian President Jokowi visited the area as the first president of the country to meet with the Orang Rimba in their own territory. During his visit he made promises about the protection of their area, but he also strongly suggested that the Orang Rimba should be resettled from the jungle to what he called 'decent villages with health and educational facilities'.

There are a number of ambivalences about this encounter between the president and the Orang Rimba. There were certainly elements of recognition of the Orang Rimba as the indigenous people of the area, who should have rights to these forests as stipulated in a decision by the constitutional court of Indonesia in 2013. The declaration of the National Park as a Cultural Reserve is an expression of this recognition. And in Jakarta, the president has pushed for a bill to provide more rights to the country's indigenous peoples in general. At the same time, however, the president's remarks about resettlement reflect a long history of state-controlled development planning in which local communities have had little say and which are not culturally sensitive (Persoon 1994; Elkholy 2016).

UNDRIP 10 Years (2007 – 2017)

This ambivalent situation in Indonesia reflects, to some extent, the changing status of indigenous peoples the world over. This can partly be explained by the international discourse on indigenous peoples' rights. Last month, September 13 marked exactly 10 years since the United Nations' General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2007). This Declaration embodies a global consensus on their rights and it sets minimum standards for protection of their territory, their culture and their well-being. The UN Declaration is used as a key reference for other policy documents and guidelines for dealing with the 400 million indigenous people. This holds for all major UN bodies like FAO and UNESCO, and international NGO's (IGWIA 2017).

Some of the organizations have made real progress in developing assistance to indigenous peoples by providing training and guidance on how to make these declarations actually work in terms of rights and obligations (Charters and Stavenhagen 2009). The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) for instance provide guidance and practical tools for protection of indigenous rights and for documenting knowledge and traditional cultural expressions and for preventing illegitimate patenting and even piracy (ILO 2009; WIPO 2017).

At the same time, indigenous peoples still suffer disproportionately from encroachment, logging and mining operations and loss of resources. They suffer in particular from low standards of health. In terms of the indicators of human development, indigenous peoples in most countries do not do very well. This is evident from the so-called Indigenous Navigator, adopted at the end of the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples in 2014, which monitors the implementation of the UN Declaration and other instruments against poverty and injustice among this part of the population (Indigenous Navigator 2017).

But what has been the influence of these rights at the national or even the local level? Some countries, particularly in Latin America, have made constitutional reforms, including Bolivia, Ecuador and Costa Rica. Others are on their way to doing the same. In numerous countries national leaders have, in one way or another, apologized for historical injustices done to them and called for reconciliation. This has happened in Australia, Canada, and to some extent also in the United States, under the former president.



Taiwan's President Tsai Ing-wen apologizes to the country's indigenous people (August 2016)(Image from Tsai Ing-wen's Official Facebook Page).

In Taiwan, President Tsai Ing-wen apologized in August last year on behalf of the government to the country's indigenous peoples for the discrimination, pain, mistreatment and neglect over the past 400 years. The discriminatory name for them was changed from 'mountain people' to 'indigenous people' indicating that they were really the country's original inhabitants before the arrival of the Chinese in the 17th century.

Interestingly, she also apologized for actions by the previous colonial powers starting with the Dutch in the 17th century, the

Koxinga Kingdom, the Qing Empire and the Japanese colonial government. She called for reconciliation via a process that will be guided by the country's Indigenous Peoples Basic Law of 2005 (Focus Taiwan 2016).

But these moves and apologies are not always followed-up with real reparations (Lenzerini 2009). The UN Declaration is quite explicit on this issue. It states for instance in articles 20 and 28 that 'indigenous peoples deprived of their means of subsistence and development are entitled to just and fair redress'. They should receive restitution or compensation for lands, territories and resources that they have traditionally owned, but that were taken from them without their consent. Many countries however struggle with what this actually implies in terms of reconciliation. How should they redress or repair the historical injustice?

But progress is not happening everywhere. The English newspaper The Guardian with Global Witness even devotes almost daily a special section to this type of news from around the world. There are many places where resource extraction, construction of hydropower dams, pipelines, roads, or mining concessions are prioritized over indigenous rights over territories (The Guardian 2017).

It is even happening in countries that previously signed international declarations and in some cases even have national legislation in place such as Brasil. Often we hear of such events from various parts of the world or we see images of people protesting and resisting these interventions.

Identity Politics

One of the most important aspects of the international discourse is that it generates 'identity politics'. The term 'indigenous' is not self-evident and it has different meanings in different contexts. In Max Forte's interesting book, *Who is an Indian?*, he deals with what he calls 'the cultural politics of a bad question'. He calls it a bad question because it is

usually asked for administrative purposes. It forces people to explain who they are and on what terms the person asking the question is willing to accept the answer (Forte 2013).

There are different schools of thought. One refers to a kind of indigenous essentialism: the essence of being an Indian or being indigenous is in cultural traits and traditions or in what is called 'authenticity'. It is about how people look, what they wear, what they believe, what language they speak or the way they behave. It assumes a kind of continuity with times past.

Another school of thought rejects this kind of indigenous essentialism as, in most cases, indigenous peoples have redefined themselves in the course of history through adaptation and incorporation of cultural elements they have accepted from elsewhere. So they do not need to be 'traditional'.

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And then there is a school of thought that refuses to accept any categories like indigenous, aboriginal, or first nations, because there is no valid identity that permits ideas of commonality and historical continuity. This school would like to do away with the entire movement (see for instance Kuper 2003).

These considerations aside, the international discourse has proven to be a powerful instrument in the cultural politics of identity. Often colonial and national governments have provided labels for ethnic unit classification.

An interesting case here is the Philippines. During the early American colonial government under Dean Worcester (the man on the right) so-called types of peoples were classified on the basis of race, culture and civilization. Later, these categories were used for administrative purposes and they have since become 'realities' and are still used by the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples under the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act of 1997 (Hutterer 1978; Hutterer 1991; Rice 2015; NCIP 2017).



Negrito man, type 1 and myself, to show relative size' (Marivales, Bataan) (Dean Worcester, 1901)

Many government agencies dealing with indigenous peoples are using the same type of criteria to classify them. These agencies find it difficult to deal with indigenous peoples' desire for more loosely defined self-determination and self-identification.

At another level, indigenous peoples around the world have adapted to the requirements and essentialist aspects of this

external categorization. To that end traditional elements may be revived or even be invented.

Ever since 'indigenous peoples' became the preferred term internationally, the term has had a strong unifying impact. Prior to this, indigenous groups were generally known by their ethnic name. But with the introduction of the term 'indigenous peoples', an additional and new type of 'imagined community' was created across nation states and national boundaries. In Dorothy Hodgson's book, *Being Maasai, Becoming Indigenous*, she describes how the Maasai in Tanzania have created new forms of belonging and political action on the basis of this new 'indigenous' identity. Through involvement with the international indigenous rights movement, they have been able to seek political and economic empowerment in the face of a long history of marginalization (Hodgson 2011).

Trickledown effect - Timber and FPIC

The impact of these rights can also trickle down in an indirect manner. This is the case with the social dimensions of international trade. The rights of indigenous peoples have been incorporated in the principles and criteria for social sustainability of particular products. This counts for all products that enter the market under the Fair Trade label or for certified palm oil and timber, which I will focus on now.

In the late 1980s, Bruno Manser published pictures of Penan resisting loggers in Sarawak. Public awareness of the violation of their rights led to a European boycott of Malaysian timber. That publicity was the ignition for the debate on the production of sustainable timber.

Partly as a result of the strong and furious reaction of the Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir, the discourse on sustainable timber was re-contextualized and it no longer referred just to tropical timber. Over the course of many years, indigenous rights became integrated into various certification

schemes related to timber from all climatic zones in the world, such as PEFC and FSC.

In the Netherlands, the discourse on sustainable timber has quite a long history. In 1991, the Dutch government adopted a tropical rainforest policy that eventually led to guidelines for the certification of sustainable forest management and the trade chain of timber from such forests (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal 1991). The Netherlands has adopted or ratified all major declarations and conventions in this field, such as the CBD, ILO Convention 169 and the UN Declaration.

Recognition of rights of indigenous peoples is one element of this policy, for instance the right to harvest non-timber forest products like rattan. In June 2008, the Dutch timber procurement criteria were adopted by the Dutch parliament and a special committee, TPAC, was created to see whether certification systems were actually fulfilling the criteria (TPAC 2014). This was necessary as the Minister for the Environment at that time, Jacqueline Cramer, had decided that by 2010 only certified timber would be allowed to be bought with government money. So, in this way, the UN Declaration has trickled down into trade-related regulations. The same line of reasoning also holds for the production of palm oil, which is produced under RSPO regulations, the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil.

However, this is not to say that this system of certification is perfect. As long as there is still a market for timber, palm oil or minerals that are being produced without the application of the requirements for sustainable production, uncertified products will continue to enter the market. As the certification schemes are still voluntary, the application of these collective human rights will remain problematic. And there is also a limit to what an international trade label can do in a country that is reluctant to really support the recognition of such rights (Royal Haskoning DHV 2016).

One aspect of the rules and regulations is particularly relevant, and that is the Free, Prior and Informed Consent, or FPIC. This can be considered a cornerstone in the rights of indigenous peoples. It is present in all policy statements. The idea of FPIC is a straightforward one: indigenous or local people should be well informed about the interventions that are being planned in their forests or territories, like logging or mining. The same requirement also applies to interventions like, road construction and the establishment of cultural and natural heritage sites. The people involved have a right to negotiate about their rights and responsibilities and in the end say 'Yes' or 'No' before such interventions take place.



Orang Rimba in Jambi discuss forest management with officials.

Over the years, extensive procedures have been developed to guide agencies in this FPIC process. Beyond the good intentions of FPIC there are numerous complexities, as is evident from detailed case studies made in the field. Relevant questions not only refer to the legal aspects of the FPIC process itself, but also to social issues, such as who is to give or withhold consent in a particular situation, or what happens when a party does not live up to the conditions that were stipulated. There is always a risk of manipulation and intimidation in the process (Rombouts 2014). Detailed

ethnographic studies in the Philippines by my colleagues Tessa Minter, Jan van der Ploeg and PhD student Mayo Buenafe-Ze illustrate the complexities of this process and how this FPIC requirement does not always achieve its intended goals (Minter *et al.* 2012; Buenafe-Ze *et al.* 2016).

It is evident that in many cases local or indigenous peoples have not had a say in what happened in their territory and in some cases even with their own cultural landscape and heritage, like the Ifugao Rice Terraces in the Philippines. There are examples such as access to caves with rock paintings, made by the ancestors of current populations, being denied once an area is declared a World Heritage Site. This happened at various places in Africa and also in the case of Bhimbetika, a World Heritage Site in India (as was recently indicated to me by PhD student Shekhar Kolipaka). In these cases local rights to cultural heritage are simply overruled (Disko and Tugendhat 2014). Sometimes people try to renegotiate the FPIC process on the basis of new laws and regulations, such as the UN Declaration. UNESCO has recently changed its policy to make sure that communities' FPIC is a prerequisite for nomination as a World Heritage Site.

To mention just one example: in Nepal, the Tharu people living around the Chitwan National Park have recently obtained the right to manage the buffer zone, to collect forest products and graze their animals, which was initially not allowed. Fortunately there are many more cases like this.

Indonesia

I now would like to shift my focus to Indonesia. For a long time, Indonesia has been one of the countries that adopted the UN Declaration but claimed that it was not applicable domestically. It stated that all Indonesians are indigenous but that part of the population belonged to what were called 'the isolated communities' who were in need of a special development plan.

However, things have been changing since the first manifestation of the country's indigenous peoples in March 1999 and the establishment of its organization AMAN, *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara*. AMAN is usually translated as the Indigenous Peoples' Alliance of the Archipelago. This movement was certainly inspired by the IPRA law in the Philippines (1997). One of the demands was that the sectorial laws for forestry and mining would be revoked and replaced by laws that would recognize the rights of indigenous peoples. It was argued that these rights actually pre-date the claims of the Indonesian state itself. At the same time, there were calls for an explicit law on the rights of indigenous peoples.

The prospect of such a law became more real when, in 2006, President Yudhoyono gave a speech on the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, August 9, in which he expressed the need to recognize and respect indigenous peoples because their rights were not covered under the existing laws. He stated that a new law on the *Recognition and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* needed to be drafted. The next step was to lobby for its inclusion in the National Legislative Programme.

In 2013 the Constitutional Court of Indonesia decided on a revision of the reading of the Indonesian constitution. The rights of forest dwelling *adat* communities were recognized (Rachman 2013). This was also based on a new amendment of the Indonesian constitution which calls for the state 'to recognize and respect traditional communities along with their traditional customary rights'. There is still much debate among legal scholars about what this means exactly.

The draft law on the *Recognition and Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* mentions three stages in the process of recognition of indigenous peoples: identification, verification and ratification. Though the process starts on the basis of self-determination, it is the government that ultimately decides on the official status of a particular community (AMAN 2016).

In the meantime various ministries have expressed serious objections to this law. Having said this, companies and international organizations working in Indonesia are forced to uphold the conventions and relevant policy statements in spite of the fact that Indonesia as a country has not yet fully embraced them. This often leads to ambivalent situations in the field. This ambivalence is also evident in the numerous court cases in which local communities contest the appropriation of their land with the help of committed lawyers.

In this context it is interesting to see that, at the end of last year, President Jokowi made a start of returning land to indigenous communities. Nine of them received their land back. And in the meantime a new task force is formed to speed up the handling of this law in the Indonesian parliament (Mongabay 2017).

Mentawai

Let me now turn to an example of an ethnic group whose position has changed in the last few decades as a result of them being classified as an 'indigenous people'. I want to talk about the inhabitants of the Mentawai Archipelago and the island of Siberut in particular.

In the late 1970s, Reimar Schefold initiated the Siberut Project that was adopted by Survival International, and financed by the Dutch government. Survival International, based in London, was one of the early advocacy organizations for the protection of rights of tribal peoples (Schefold 1980). Survival's background was in Latin America. But soon it became clear that the Indonesian context was radically different. The Indonesian government had a strong vision on bringing development and civilization to the so-called isolated and primitive tribes.

Almost at the same time, in 1981, UNESCO declared Siberut an official Man-and-Biosphere Reserve. This was done on the

basis of a strong lobby by foreign experts in biodiversity and some Indonesian policymakers. Mentawaians themselves were hardly consulted or informed about their island being declared such a reserve. Nor did they have any idea about its potential implications. At that time, the government officials at the provincial level responsible for Mentawai were of a different ethnic origin.

In the early 1980s, in addition to Survival International, WWF started to be active on the island because of the large-scale logging operations and the threats to the endemic primate species in particular. But the logging continued and relatively little progress was made in terms of real nature conservation or as WWF's report was called, in 'Saving Siberut' (1980).



Domestication of animals, such as pigs, was supposed to reduce hunting pressure on primates on Siberut.

Then, in the mid-1980s, all of sudden the island was 'discovered' by tourists who were attracted to the island because of its so-called Stone Age Culture. In particular, people were attracted to the traditional image of the local population with glass beads, flowers and extensive tattoos on their body. The desire to promote tourism meant reducing repressive policies and for the first time the island started to appear on provincial tourist maps.

Numerous documentary films and coffee table books helped to promote this image. To a certain extent this also had an impact on the people of Siberut themselves, who wanted to get their share of tourism. Some left their villages and established new communal houses to facilitate tourists and create a really traditional setting. This is a typical example of the 'indigenous essentialism' I talked about earlier. Then, more or less out of the blue, in the spirit of the Rio Summit on Environment and Development in 1992, it was decided that half of the island was going to be a national park. And the Asian Development Bank was willing to support the management and development plan with about 25 million dollars.

Guidelines for dealing with indigenous peoples such as those formulated by the World Bank were applied. And newly established NGOs were hired to implement local activities. And here for the first time the word 'indigenous' started to be used by the local people themselves, echoing the terminology used by the donor agencies and consultants.

Numerous foreign NGOs developed an interest in Siberut, each formulating its own project. Because of the availability of potential donor money many local NGOs were set up hoping to attract some of these funds. There was a strong focus on the combined interest of biodiversity conservation and protection of the traditional culture. One of the organizations that has sustained its interest in the island is the Norwegian Rainforest Foundation. It continues to support the largest and most influential Mentawaian NGO, called Yayasan Citra Mandiri Mentawai.

Then, in 1999, in the hectic period after the fall of President Suharto, the new government led by President Habibie decided that Mentawai could become a district in itself. It was separated from a larger district dominated by Minangkabau people. In her thesis, which will hopefully be submitted soon, Myrna Eindhoven spells out how an indigenous educated elite has exploited the political room that was created by the wave of

democratization and regional autonomy shortly after the fall of Suharto (Eindhoven in prep.).

This elite was strongly supported by external organizations. UNESCO's Man-and-Biosphere Reserve programme also started new activities soon after the Asian Development Bank project ended (UNESCO 2007). Thanks to the availability of external money, relatively well educated young Mentawaians founded their NGOs in Padang, secured funding from these external agencies, and claimed to represent the 'real and authentic' Mentawaians.

In the process of defining who is and who is not Mentawaiian the image of the tradition used to be crucial. It was exactly the visible aspect of traditional culture that was initially emphasized: the extensive tattoos, the communal house, the glass beads and flowers, but above all the image of the iconic traditional medicine man. In the late 1990s, Citra Mandiri started a journal called *Puailiggoubat*, which regularly featured a picture of a medicine man on its cover, even though subsequent pages were filled with all kinds of day-to-day news and events on the islands.

Since the wave of democratization, elections also became important and the issue emerged of who is and who is not eligible for the position of district head. It was stipulated that it had to be somebody of Mentawaiian blood and Mentawaiian culture. This discussion was an interesting example of defining locally who is indigenous (enough) to become a political leader.

In the short history of Mentawai as an autonomous district various problems have emerged. The leaders face new responsibilities in terms of generating income. They look for ways to tax the booming surfing industry and are seeking other sources of income. Sometimes local people don't feel represented by their leaders and time and time again there are new threats on the horizon. Even though Mentawai is

an autonomous district, Jakarta is never far away. Plans for plantations continue to pop up, but are met by protests in particular of the increasing numbers of Mentawaiian students studying in Padang.

There has been a lot of discussion in the indigenous peoples' movement about the concept of development and what it means in the context of a particular culture. Often the term ethno-development was used. Initially, on Siberut, it meant a strong emphasis on the subsistence economy and on the traditional culture; recently it seems to become more mainstream.

Over the years, new technology was introduced, new cash crops and fishery techniques have been integrated in the economic system. The Mentawaians have learned to appreciate modern devices like mobile phones, CD players, television and karaoke sets. A new road system is being built and motor bikes and cars are gradually replacing the dugout canoes and tracks through the dense forests. Improved connections to the mainland have intensified the contacts and the flow of people and goods.

One of the consequences of these recent developments is that, for more and more people, land is becoming a commodity for which there is a market. So, individual interests are taking priority over the security of collective ownership. Tensions within family groups are a logical consequence, as clearly shown in the PhD thesis of Juniator Tulus of a few years ago (Tulus 2012).

Though the Mentawaians themselves have had only limited participation in the international and national arenas, they have benefitted from the way the external world has defined them as indigenous, and they have operated accordingly. In retrospect, the external interest has certainly prevented Siberut from being completely logged-over or turned into a large oil palm plantation.

Looking back on what has happened in Mentawai over the past forty years, there can be no doubt that the international discourse on indigenous rights has helped to shape the current situation. The activities of individual scientists, international and national NGOs, but also, of course, Indonesian politicians have made it possible for this group of islands to become an autonomous district. And they have created conditions for an indigenous elite to become political leaders.

This has resulted in the development of a sense of pride and a renewed interest in their own traditions with options to redefine and change them according to their present-day preferences. Here you see an image showing the use of modern technology - a black marker - for traditional tattoo patterns.



A black marker is used for traditional tattoo patterns
(@ Dedi Sakatsaila)

One of the aspects of the external attention has certainly been a growth in the interest in the art of Siberut. Though initially only intended for private and ritual use, a new market has emerged for artistic objects. The interest of Western buyers has led to a renewal of style and other innovations, some of which can also be seen in the new exhibition on Mentawaiian art by Reimar Schefold, which was opened in this museum just last Friday (Schefold 2017).

As a final example it is also interesting how Mentawaians are modernizing their traditional music. To illustrate this, I would like to show you how a traditional or 'authentic' song has been converted into a modernized version, both of which I would say are 'truly Mentawaiian', but that is certainly up for discussion (Persoon and Schefold 2009; Mateus 2008; Persoon and Schefold 2017).

(Two versions of the song *Teteu* played)

Closing remarks

I should come to a close now. I consider myself privileged to have been involved in interesting education and research activities. This holds in particular for the supervision of PhD projects dealing with indigenous peoples in relation to resource extraction, nature conservation, and cultural heritage. The projects were possible through a number of externally funded research projects, the Louwes Fund and the excellent collaboration with many people. In this context I would like to mention Reimar Schefold, Hans de Jongh, Merlijn van Weerd, Jan van der Ploeg and Tessa Minter in particular.

I sincerely hope that this line of research will be continued at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and hopefully in close collaboration with partners in Leiden, such as the Institute of Environmental Sciences, the Archeology Faculty, the Van Vollenhoven Institute, the Africa Study Centre and the KITLV.



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The yearly International Water Course in Cagayan Valley, the Philippines (2011) is jointly organized by Isabela State University, Leiden University and Mabuwaya Foundation.

I strongly believe in interdisciplinary cooperation. I also believe that research that spans a longer period is more meaningful in terms of building up a solid body of knowledge with potentially more societal impact. I hope, too, that the long tradition of research in the Southeast Asian region will be maintained. The same holds for long-standing cooperation with partner institutions. These partnerships, with mutual investments and benefits, yield long-lasting fruits. Thirty years of collaboration between Leiden University and Isabela State University in the Philippines has been a success and the same is true for our relationships with institutions or colleagues

from Indonesia, Cameroon, Taiwan, and other places (Persoon *et al.* 2009; De Iongh *et al.* 2010; Van Weerd *et al.* 2016).

Today, I officially retire from Leiden University. I have come full circle since I started my professional career at this Institute in the 1970s. In between, I worked at the Institute of Environmental Sciences for almost 25 years, before returning to the Institute Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology eight years ago. I am grateful for the opportunity that was given to me and I am also grateful to International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) for the initiative to create

a professorship for Environment and Development at that moment. I wish all my colleagues at the Institute under the leadership of Cristina Grasseni and the Faculty a bright future and hope to enjoy my status as a guest researcher at the Institute for some time.

In particular I want to thank the people who have made this day possible. Tessa Minter, Merlijn van Weerd, Louise van Gent, Renske Kok, Hans de Iongh, Reimar Schefold, Sissy Hofmeester, Willem Vogelsang and many others.

But at the same time I am glad that there will be some more time for family life, for hobbies like music and cycling and numerous other things.

Jes, it is great that you are here today and I am very grateful that you have travelled with me all the way!

I want to thank you all for your presence, your attention, your friendship and collaboration over all the years.

Ik heb gezegd.

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Gerard Persoon has worked extensively as an anthropologist in Southeast Asia and to some extent also in Africa, on issues related to indigenous peoples, nature conservation and environmental management. He has been involved in numerous research and education projects. He has been an advisor to the Dutch government on issues related to indigenous peoples, in relation to biodiversity conservation and sustainable production of timber. He particularly enjoyed teaching interdisciplinary courses, including fieldwork to students from various disciplinary backgrounds. In addition he has been a member of a number of supervisory boards of international NGOs like WWF and the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA).



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