Good to produce, good to share: Food, hunger, and social values in a contemporary Mentawaian community, Indonesia

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Muntei: The Ethnographic Setting of a Contemporary Mentawaian Community

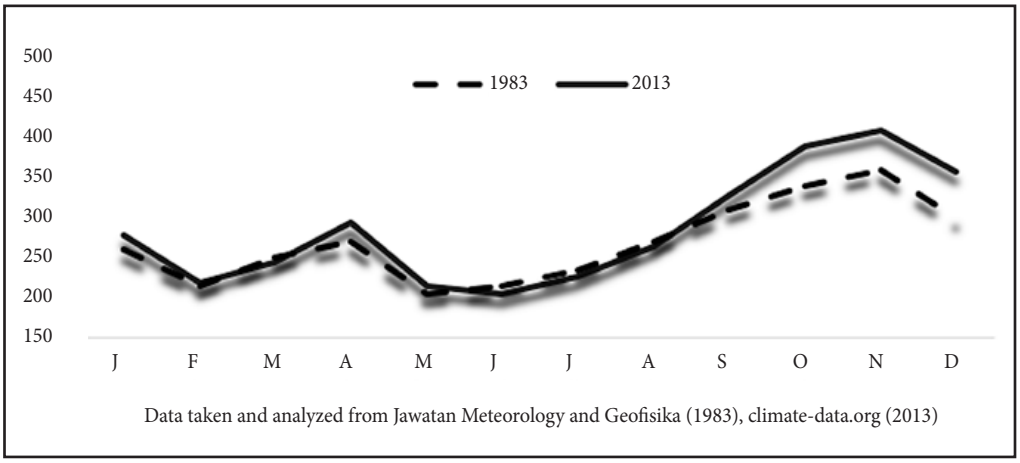
This chapter describes the ethnographic background of Muntei and is divided into seven parts. The first part provides the geographical and historical setting of the settlement. The second section reports on the population, its social organisation, and the physical layout of the settlement. It will be followed by a description of the basic principles of social relationships. This part also examines the modification of the principle amid social change. The fourth section explores the backbone of local economic relations, which is basically a combination of subsistence gardening and production of cash crops. The description on the indigenous religion and its relations with world religions will be the focus of the fifth section. The sixth section will provide a description of social transformation, especially after Muntei was established as an official settlement. This chapter ends with a short description of the rhythm of social life there during a typical day.

2.1 The Geographical, Historical, and Regional Context

Muntei is one of 82 official settlements scattered on Siberut Island (4.030 km^2), the largest of the 170 islands constituting the Mentawai Archipelago (7,000 km^2). The archipelago is considered to be the homeland of the Mentawaians, but only four, including Siberut, are inhabited. The other three occupied islands (Sipora, North Pagai, and South Pagai) lie to the south of Siberut. About 70,500 people inhabit the archipelago with ten per cent of them being categorised as migrants from various ethnic groups (BPS 2015). Siberut has half of the whole Mentawai Archipelago's population (35,725 inhabitants) with 3,320 of them being non-Mentawaians. The population density is nine people/km^2, which is extremely sparse by Indonesian standards. Administratively, Siberut consists of five sub-districts (*kecamatan*). Muntei is located in the southeastern part of Siberut and is part of *kecamatan* Siberut Selatan (Map 2).

Close to the equator, Siberut is ecologically part of the Southeast Asian humid tropical region, with a rainy season that occurs from October to April. The island is fed by a wet equatorial climate. Since the 1980s, the mean annual rainfall has been at least 3,500 mm (Figure 3): on average, rainfall dampens the land on more than half of the days of every month (WWF 1980). The wettest months are April and November, when the sky is cloudy all day and rainfall lasts longer than during the other months. The driest months are January and June, when the rain falls for about a week in total. Physically, Siberut is a sedimentary

Figure 3. *Average Monthly Rainfall in Siberut Island*



Data taken and analyzed from Jawatan Meteorology and Geofisika (1983), climate-data.org (2013)

island dominated by young and non-resistant shale, silts, and marshes. The high rate of rainfall gradually scrapes the surface of the land, resulting in erosion and the formation of a strongly dissected, uneven landscape, with many small rivers, streams, and a few flat-topped hills. The hills are at the centre of the island. In the west part, the hills descend abruptly into the Indian Ocean. Along the rugged hills, mixed forest is accompanied by a few major rivers flowing down to the sea, but this is replaced by beach forests, dominated by the *Barringtonia* species, in the narrow coastal zone. In the east, dipterocarp forest covers the hills but are gradually followed by mixed forests, gardens, swampy forests, sago, and further towards the coastal zone, mangrove forests. In the valleys between the hills and the main rivers are narrow strips of fertile flat land where people live and make gardens.

The landscape of Muntei represents the ecology of the eastern part of the island. Except where the land is cleared for houses and taro gardens, most of it is covered with fruit trees, tree crops, sago forest, and young secondary forest, traversed by many small paths. Moving away from the settlement and cultivated gardens is a mature rainforest. Muntei receives regular floods that occasionally harm the gardens and livestock, yet it is a very fertile area where humus and minerals from the surrounding valley are deposited through the process of siltation.

The settlement's territory measures approximately 1,200 hectares and is located on the southeast coast of Siberut, in the lower reaches of the Siberut River, the most important river in this area (Figure 4). A half-hour walk to the east of the settlement is the village of Maileppet, which is located along the sandy strip between the estuary of the Siberut River and Maileppet Bay. The inhabitants of Maileppet identify as *Sasabirut*, with a population of approximately 1,700; they share their identity and cultural characteristics with Muntei residents. To the south are resettlement hamlets called Puro. The residents of Puro are originally from the area around the Silaoinan River and are slightly different culturally to Muntei people. In between, there is a swampy area consisting of a mix of sago and cacao gardens. To the north is the former settlement (*pulaggaijat*) of Siberut Hulu, now mostly occupied by pig huts, sago, and fruits gardens. Further to the north, along the Silakoinan River, are the settlements of Magosi, Salappak, and Bekkeiluk, which form part of the village of Muntei but recently have been trying to establish an independent village. To the west, beyond a swampy area consisting of sago gardens, pig farms, and secondary forest, is a compound of *orang ulu*'s (upstream people) settlements, situated along the Rereiket River.

Until 50 years ago, the area around Muntei was largely uninhabited. Instead, it was used mainly for keeping pigs and for sago gardens. The residents of Muntei initially settled in Siberut Hulu, presumably created prior to the arrival of colonial Dutch, which is about an hour's walk from the present settlement. Oral history suggests that Siberut Hulu was built as a shelter for different *uma* against an enemy from North Siberut. There, each *uma* built their longhouse some distance away from the others. The short period of the Dutch presence (mid-1910 to 1942) led to the eradication of headhunting and the establishment of new concentrated settlements. Initially, Dutch soldiers prohibited clan feuds and would punish anyone who committed headhunting. This pacification was successfully and quickly achieved and the inhabitants of Siberut Hulu abandoned their headhunting practices. The eradication of headhunting contributed to feelings of safety and encouraged the local population to establish contact with Dutch officers and traders from the mainland. The elders recall that their parents paid a tax of sago flour to Dutch officers posted to Muara Siberut.

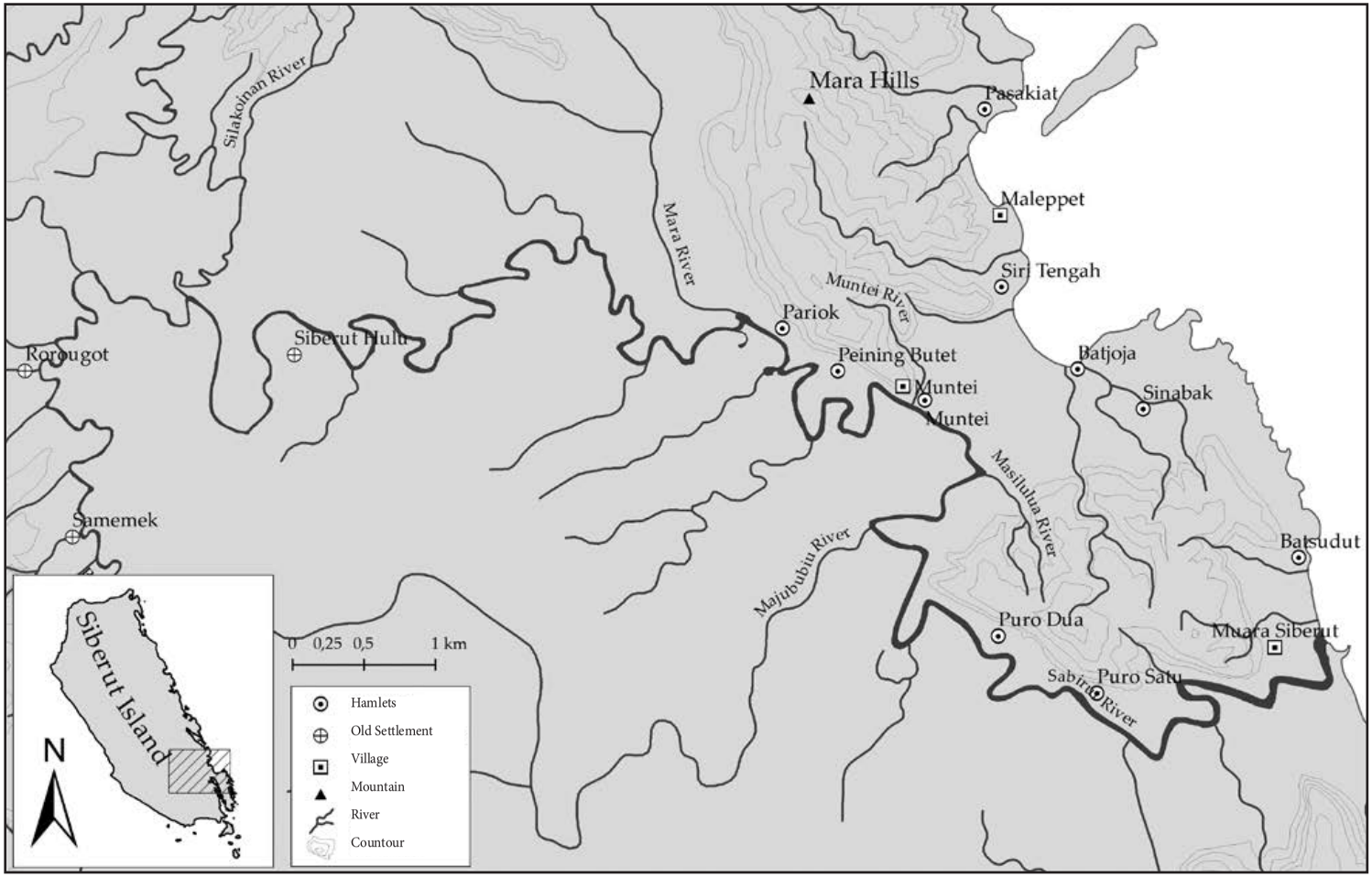
The presence of the Dutch persuaded people to congregate in a larger settlement, while the pacification process allowed the intensification of trade. The settlement was called a *kampung*. Each *kampung* had a local leader (*kepala kampung*), who was appointed by Dutch administrators. The leader was largely ineffective, working only with the support of external authorities (Persoon 1988). Nonetheless, the arrival of the Dutch and the establishment of *kampung* generated a sense of security. Prior to the Dutch administration, the traders and the inhabitants of Siberut were involved in occasional fights as the latter felt they were often cheated. Older people remember the period of the Dutch administration as 'the good old days' (*siburuk simaeruk*) as they felt safe travelling to other settlements or visiting traders on the shore. They also got good prices for their forest products from traders, as the presence of Dutch officials ensured a fair exchange and resolved any conflicts between the people from Siberut Hulu and the traders. With the protection of Dutch soldiers, some of the traders, especially those of Minangkabau origin, eventually stayed for a few months to fill their ships with fresh and dried coconut (copra), rattan, and other forest products before bringing their cargo to Padang (Persoon 1994; Asnan 2007).

These 'good old days' changed soon after the Japanese occupation forces arrived. My informant, the oldest member of the Sabajou clan, told me that when he was eight, he saw Japanese soldiers in Siberut Hulu. He also said that the Japanese were seen as less friendly and did not encourage people to trade. Instead, when his parents and uncle went looking for traders in Muara Siberut, the soldiers forced them to work for them—clearing the grass and bushes around the Japanese military offices. Some young people, he continued, were trained as policemen, with little salary or compensation. His father and other people from Siberut Hulu were afraid to go to Muara Siberut.

While the residents of Muntei have experienced relations with Dutch and Japanese people, and, to a limited extent, missionaries from German and Italy, the most intensive contact with external agency has been with other ethnic groups from mainland Sumatra, especially Minangkabau people. Over many centuries, but more intensively after colonial intervention in the early 20th century, the Minangkabau mediated the trade of forest products from the Mentawaians' homeland, and desirable goods from the mainland, such as clothes and metal tools. In the mid-1930s, a small group of Minangkabau fishermen and traders started to settle in the coastal zone with the help of pacification carried out by colonial officers and missionaries. Eventually, the Minangkabau established themselves as middlemen in the regional economy.

The Mentawaians in Muntei generally have a mixed perception of the Minangkabau, who are viewed as intelligent and very good entrepreneurs. The combination of intelligence and entrepreneurial spirit are also seen as the main reason why Muntei residents feel they are always being cheated and exploited by them. Older generations claimed that they work hard, hiking or paddling canoes to bring heavy rattan, timber, and numerous other forest products to the marketplace. In return, they have to spend all their earnings

Figure 4. The Map of Muntei and Adjacent Settlements



from this labour-intensive work buying essentials from the Minangkabau, such as clothes, salt, metal tools, and a few imported goods. Older people still complain heartily about the asymmetric condition of working hard, producing lots, but earning little. They feel that their relations with the Minangkabau are asymmetrical and unbalanced.

This asymmetrical relationship was reinforced when the central and provincial government policies categorised the Mentawaian as isolated people after Indonesia independence. The Mentawaians' homeland is seen an isolated place and Mentawaian cultural and social life as backward, isolated, and in need of development (Persoon 1994, 2002). There was an notion that Mentawaian cultural practices were seen as a handicap to development and that the people must be modernised. The modernisation project effectively touched the lives of Muntei people in the early 1950s. In 1954, they were forced to abandon their religion and then were obliged to embrace one of three official religions during what was popularly known as Rapat Tiga Agama (The Meeting of Three Religions) (Sihombing 1979; Coronese 1986). Soon, Siberut Hulu was established as *kampung* and had a *kepala kampung*. This reinforced the Dutch policy as it had been difficult for the predominantly Minangkabau provincial officials to exert authority.

The modernisation projects have made Muntei a target for development and they give legitimacy to the Minangkabau in terms of implementation. Indeed, the projects placed the Minangkabau at the centre of development and decisively pushed the Mentawaians to the periphery, creating the image of Muntei people as a marginal society. The state marginality is a social process in which the entities of 'margin' and 'centre' are constructed using power relations (Tsing 1993; Li 1999). Like other Mentawaians, Muntei residents have come to see themselves in largely negative terms (backward, undeveloped, primitive, pagan) while the Minangkabau consider themselves culturally superior in all respects (Persoon 2002; Eindhoven 2007). Many aspects of daily social relations – language, food, etiquette, gender, sexuality – are implicated in this asymmetric inter-ethnic dialogue. Together, these factors create a hierarchy of social relations in ethnic discourses at a national level as well as in administrative practices and the regional economy.

Religion is also a factor in the asymmetrical relations between Muntei people and the Minangkabau. The Minangkabau are renowned for their strong Islamic tradition and see religion as an integral part of Minangkabau identity, along with *adat* and Indonesian citizenship. In contrast, state discourse on religion did not recognise Mentawaian beliefs as a religion. As a result, the Minangkabau viewed Muntei people as people without a 'proper' religion. Being unable to show affiliation to a formalised religion is a cause for formal harassment. It was not uncommon for Muntei residents to be denied development and related state services when they resisted embracing formal religion. The conjunction of state policy and ethnic domination of the Minangkabau compels Muntei people to judge their beliefs and practices against Islam. The choice for Catholicism has helped them to maintain their tradition of food production and consumption, an integral part of their self-identification as Mentawaians (the subject of Chapter 5).

Longing for Cash Crops and State Services: The Origin of the Settlement

Apparently, the residents of Muntei have welcomed government authority, the missions, police, and compulsory schooling. Despite resisting any external control, Muntei people embrace the idea of being modernised. In the early 1970s, with the help of funds from logging operations, the provincial government of West Sumatra implemented the OPKM (Otorita Pengembangan Kepulauan Mentawai/Mentawai Islands Development Authority). The OPKM was the first concerted attempt to modernise Mentawaians by providing schools, establishing a larger official settlement, and encouraging people to cultivate rice and commercial crops. As the OPKM was about to be implemented, five *uma* moved to an area by the river that is now called Muntei. The primary reasons for the move was to avoid the annual flooding in Siberut Hulu, to be closer to the church and government services in the town of Muara Siberut, and to find a better place

for the cultivation of cloves and coconuts, popular cash crops at that time. In conjunction with the desire of the people to improve their economic situation, land was available for growing coconuts on the east coast. Later, the OPKM relocated all the people in Siberut Hulu and other families from further upstream to Muntei and provided them with schools and teachers.

When Muntei was officially established as a government village in 1981, the term *kampung* was changed to *desa* (village), following the new 1979 Village Law. The law and the village introduced other new sociopolitical institutions, such as the village head (*kepala desa*), village councils (Lembaga Musyawarah Desa), village secretary, hamlets (Dusun), *Pertahanan Sipil* (civil defence) and others. By the early 1980s, all 11 of the groups originally from Siberut Hulu were settled in Muntei, followed by a number of families and groups from settlements upstream (Ugai, Madobak, Silakoinan, and Rokdok). Officially, Muntei is a government settlement in the OPKM programme (OPKM 1978). Yet, most of the people, especially the elders, insisted they initiated the move. In particular, the pioneer *uma* strongly reject the idea that they were forced by the government to dwell in Muntei. They say that they intended to move to Muntei, even without the OPKM promises of housing and other forms of development services. A key proponent of this movement and the first *kepala kampung* of Muntei, Aman Bruno from *uma* Sagari, said:

> I organised five *uma* to move here two years before *telemen* (the OPKM) began. Long ago, the sub-district Head (pak Camat) sent me twice to Sumatra to learn how to become a proper farmer. I saw a very good settlement. The Minangkabau cultivated cloves and cinnamon. They had decent houses. Some went on pilgrimage to Mecca. I saw advancement. We were sick of floods in Siberut Hulu. Coconuts didn't grow. No hills for cloves. No road and church. No nurse taking care of ill people. Then we decided to move here. Look, we now have clove and coconut. We get closer to *pamerentah* (government services). We are closer to the market. We have health facilities.

Aman Bruno's words represent the general willingness of Muntei residents to be a part of the government's programme. Muntei residents said that moving to Muntei appealed to them as it gave them a school for their children, a church to pray in, electricity, a clean and stable water supply, and a tin roof, among other things, and it is a better place for cash crops. People moved to Muntei because they wanted to be closer to the market and state services. All these are symbols of development and being modern. Despite acknowledging and remembering the violent actions of state officials in the 1950s—the burning of traditional cultural materials and the ban on rituals during the establishment of the government settlement, the compulsion to embrace official religions—nobody in Muntei regretted being a part of the government settlement.

This makes Muntei rather different from other current government settlements on the island. Firstly, it was not previously an ancestral settlement (*pulaggaijat*). It was not the dwelling place of a particular *uma*. It had been, and is still, an area of sago gardens, pig and chicken huts. Only recently did it become a dwelling place. It was created out of the idea of having a place for growing cash crops and because it was closer to the government services. Most people insist that Muntei is a collective project built from scratch. Aman Paulus, an elder of *uma* Salakoppak succinctly pointed out:

> We were not told by the government to be here. We just wanted a better place to live. We left our chickens and pigs in Hulu, all were eaten by snakes or stolen. The first years we were struggling. We lived in a hut. Sometimes we begged for food from people from Maileppet. When *telemen* started out, we already had houses and enough taro and bananas. Had it (the OPKM) not been implemented, we would keep moving here. Do you know saying 'the flow

Table 1. A Brief Timeline of Muntei Settlement

Time	Period	Main Social Events
Prior to 1900s	Pre-colonial period	People living in their ancestral land around Siberut Hulu. Headhunting was still practiced. Clan's feuds occurred occasionally. Production was mainly subsistence. A small amount of forest products (rattan, resins, timber) was extracted and sold to migrant traders in Muara Siberut.
Mid-1910s to 1930s	Dutch administration	Pacification and the ending of headhunting practices. Creation of Siberut Hulu as an agglomerated settlement. Autonomous uma moved closer each other. Protection for traders and eradication of Malay traders-Mentawaian conflict. Trading flourished. People started to cultivate coconuts for copra. Forest and gardens' products were sold occasionally. Missionary post was established in neighbouring settlement of Muara Siberut.
Early 1940s	Japanese occupation	People in Siberut Hulu were afraid of going to Muara Siberut. Japanese soldiers forced people to work for them or be policemen.
1950s	Modernisation project of West Sumatra government	The establishment of Siberut Hulu as kampung and the appointment of kepala kampung. Enforced to embrace official religions (people chose Catholic). The abolishment of traditional practices and rituals. Catholic church and school were built.
1970s	The preparation of the OPKM project	Demand of copra and intensification of coconut cultivation. Clove was introduced and planted in the islets. Some families started to fish in the sea around the coconut gardens. Five Sasabirut uma voluntarily moved to Muntei.
1980s	The OPKM	All the people of Siberut Hulu (with the exception of uma Sagulu and Sakaliou) moved to Muntei. Sareriket joined and moved to Muntei. The OPKM provided houses. Muntei was established as a village. The peak of clove and copra production.
1990s	"Not isolated anymore'	Decline of coconut and clove production; nilam became an important cash crop after the 1997 economic crisis. Few young people were sent to higher education on the mainland. Saltwater fish were available from the market. The OPKM houses were modified and refurbished.
2000s	The expansion of the settlement	The establishment of Mentawai as a district. Muntei Hamlet is expanded into three hamlets (Peining Butet, Muntei, Pariok). Village and hamlets heads were elected through democratic process. Decline in nilam production. Cacao replaced nilam as the main cash crop. RASKIN was distributed. Significant conversion of onaja and sago gardens into cacao gardens. Migrants started to have interests in land and agricultural activities. Women sold food surplus to the local market.
2010s	Intensification of development project	Cacao booming. Intensification of development projects. Regular village funds from various government agencies. The intensive construction of road and other modern infrastructure. Muntei is designed as a model for a village tourist. The prohibition on pig-keeping around the Mara rivers area and Masilulua. The emergence of social differentiation.

> of the river goes to *monga* (estuary)'? We knew the signs at that time. Now, we are closer to *bakkat pembangunan* (sources of development).

Aman Paulus' claim reflects the general perception of people in the settlement. They claim that they were about to move away from Siberut Hulu when the plan for the village establishment was implemented. Indeed, a few clans had already bought land and cultivated cloves prior to the OPKM.

While people insisted the collective move to Muntei was voluntary, I do believe that their decision to move was not separated from the idea of development and modernisation introduced by successive administrations and governments—from the Dutch, the missionaries and the Indonesian government. Labelled as isolated and backward by all those external authorities, Muntei people have been marginalised by development discourses and practices. This situates them as underdeveloped and eventually, they came to see themselves in this light (Persoon 2002; Eindhoven 2007; 2019). Their 'choice' and 'free will' do not stand outside the existing and long-standing relations with the idea of development or modernisation, but are formed within it, and, in turn, are formative.

In sum, the present Muntei settlement has a long history and was largely created by both outside pressure and their internal dynamics. The desire of Muntei's residents to live in Muntei is, therefore, partly a perpetual desire to search for a better place to live and partly a way to escape being labelled backward and isolated by external actors. The residents of Muntei are not isolated people living in a closed community. Now, they are deeply integrated into the regional, or even national, market economy. They regularly trade their cash crops and buy groceries with migrant traders in the market in Muara Siberut. Village officers and young men travel back and forth to the district capital of Sipora to arrange paperwork or manage government projects. Men and women paddle their canoes to upstream settlements to visit families and attend communal ceremonies. A number of young men and women attend universities in mainland Sumatra or Java. Three or four times a year, a few men and some shamans visit Padang, Jakarta, or Bali to promote Mentawaian tourism by performing a ritual dance for national and international audiences. The most frequent contacts, however, are with nearby settlements, for social and ritual exchanges. Visitors come to Muntei for various reasons: attending family events; buying pigs; playing football; or selling cacao beans. Government officials, NGO activists, or missionaries regularly visit the settlement to launch development programmes. Recently, cultural tourists from other parts of Indonesia and from overseas visited Muntei to watch regular tourist exhibitions (Pualiggoubat 2018; Mentawai Kita 2019).

2.2 Population and Settlement Pattern

The settlement began with 48 people in 1979; today it has a population of 632 people in 144 households, including 43 non-Mentawaians, who mostly occupy positions such as local traders, teachers, and Christian priests. The 588 Mentawaians in the settlement belong to several *uma*, small, autonomous, patrilineal, and exogamous groups that are the most important social organisations and land-owning units. *Uma* is a general term in Mentawai that equates to the concept of 'kin-group' or 'clan'. It connects the members of the *uma*, both living and dead, to each other, through bonds of bodily substances, most notably by blood. Traditionally, each *uma* had and lived on its own land, which was associated historically with its traditional place of origin; though during the last six or seven generations, most *uma* have lost any geographical autonomy they once had. Internal feuds and migrations, exogamous marriage, or searching for unclaimed places resulted in each *uma* and its members dispersing and ending up in other clans' territories. All the *uma* and their members now live in government settlements while still retaining considerable ritual and political autonomy.

Table 2. Composition of Muntei Residents (2015)

***Uma*/Clan**	**No. of *Uma*-Factions**	**No. of Families (*Lalep*)**	**No. of Ind (M)**	**No. of Ind (F)**	**Settle (Year)**
***Uma* from Siberut Hulu**					
Sabajou	-	5	13	8	1978
Sabulat	-	3	10	7	1981
Sagari	3	11	17	32	1977
Saguluw	-	1	1	1	1980
Salakoppak	3	16	37	38	1978
Saleleggu	-	1	2	4	1980
Sarorougot	-	3	9	12	1978
Saruruk	3	23	48	42	1978
Satotottake	-	2	4	9	1980
Sauddeinuk	-	1	2	2	1980
***Uma* from *Rereiket* Valley**					
Samekmek*	-	13	22	24	1981
Sailuluni	-	2	4	6	1985
Sakakaddut	-	8	26	18	1985
Sakaliou	-	5	8	11	2012
Sakukuret	3	13	33	16	1981
Salemurat	-	3	8	8	1982
Samapopopou	-	3	8	6	2003
Samatotonan	-	3	6	4	1995
Satoleuru	-	1	2	0	2001
Siritoitet	-	5	10	4	2011
***Uma* from Other Area**					
Sabattilat	-	2	7	1	1985
Sakerebau	-	1	3	5	2009
Salabi	-	2	5	2	2002
Saleilei	-	1	2	1	2003
Samalaibibi	-	1	3	0	-
		129	290	288	
Non-Mentawaians					
Javanese	-	2	4	3	1990s
Minangkabau	-	5	7	6	1990s
Nias	-	5	7	6	2000s
Batak	-	5	5	5	2000s
		17	23	20	
Total		**146**	**319**	**308**	

** Uma Samekmek are genealogically considered as Sarereiket. Their ancestral land is located in Rokdok Hamlet and they share ancestral stories with people now living upstream in Rokdok and Matotonan. Yet, they had lived around Siberut Hulu prior to Indonesia's independence (1945). In this table, I categorised them as people who were originally living in Siberut Hulu but are culturally referred to as Sarereiket.*

Currently, there are 26 *uma* in Muntei; each *uma* consists of anything from one or two to more than ten nuclear families called *lalep*. Within the *uma*, genealogical relations between living members can be traced back between five and seven generations. All the *uma* in Muntei, however, consider themselves as descendants of an eponymous ancestor who once lived in Simatalu, a village on the west coast of Siberut. Each *uma* is separated from the others as a result of temporal formation such as migration from an earlier common location, or the genealogical segmentation of a previous unit. Every version of each *uma's* ancestral stories, however, introduces the idea of differentiation from an original whole. Each *uma* possesses extensive knowledge and stories concerning its own genealogy and traditional territories in the forest and the localities of former settlements are still known. *Uma* can be interpreted as temporal formations of identity and socially independent units. The identity of an *uma* is virtually articulated in its genealogical story, physically represented by its land claim, and reproduced continually through communal rituals. Its land, genealogical account, and ritual feast signify the economic and political self-sufficiency of the *uma* as an autonomous unit.

Among anthropologists such as Schefold (1973) Nooy-Palm, (1966), Reeves, (2001), Tulius (2012), there is an on-going discussion as to whether *uma* or other terms (*suku*, *samuntogat*, or *rak-rak*) should be used to refer to the most relevant social unit. Instead of complicating this issue, I will use *uma* as a term to refer to a collective autonomous group that shares a common ancestor and a tract of land. Moreover, as this dissertation will describe later, *uma*, *suku*, or other terms for collective social organisations are manifestations of an egalitarian value, a pattern of actions for which sharing food and rituals feasts are the principal mediums. In Muntei, a few of the larger *uma*, which consist of members connected through shared common ancestors, no longer consider themselves to be a group that shares communal rituals and feasts. For example, the Sagari, Salakoppak, Saruruk, and Sakukuret divided themselves into several groups that I call *uma*-factions (Table 2; Figure 6).[2] The emergence of an *uma*-faction is the result of past and recent disputes. Consequently, members of *uma*-factions will not eat together if the meal is organised by another *uma*-faction.

Outside of the *uma*, people have another major identification. Of the current *uma*, 11 of them are regarded as Sabirut people (*Sasabirut*), who once dwelled along the Siberut River and speak the *Sabirut* dialect. *Sasabirut* distinguish themselves from *orang ulu*, who arrived at the settlement later. *Orang ulu*, also known as *Sarereiket* (the people of Rereiket) are mostly those who once dwelled along the Rereiket River, and can be identified by their settlement's origins and their language. The cultural differentiation of *Sarereiket-Sasabirut* has persisted and recently become important due to political dynamics at the hamlet level. *Sasabirut* claim that they are pioneers, because the first settlers of the settlement were the members of five *Sasabirut* groups (Sagari, Salakoppak, Saruruk, Sabajou, Sarourougot). Both the *Sarereiket* and *Sasabirut* consider themselves as essentially *si toi* (those who came later), a term that refers to people who settle in another clan's territory. This is true for nearly all the people in Muntei, who are living on what was originally the land of the people now living in Central Siberut.

While the *uma* is certainly the most important unit of social organisation, the basic unit of production and consumption is the family. Generally, each family has its own gardens and house. The Muntei family is, by definition, composed of a man and his wife, and their unmarried sons and daughters living in their own house (*sapou*). It is organised around the relations between men and women from different groups and relations between parents and their children. The core relation of the family is a couple working together to assert their political equality within their *uma* and to produce their own children. The domestic processes in the family have dual functions. The formation and expansion of the family produces not only that family itself, but also the most important products of the family, children, and food, for their *uma*. The family is, therefore, the most elementary social unit that constitutes the Mentawaians as a whole.[3]

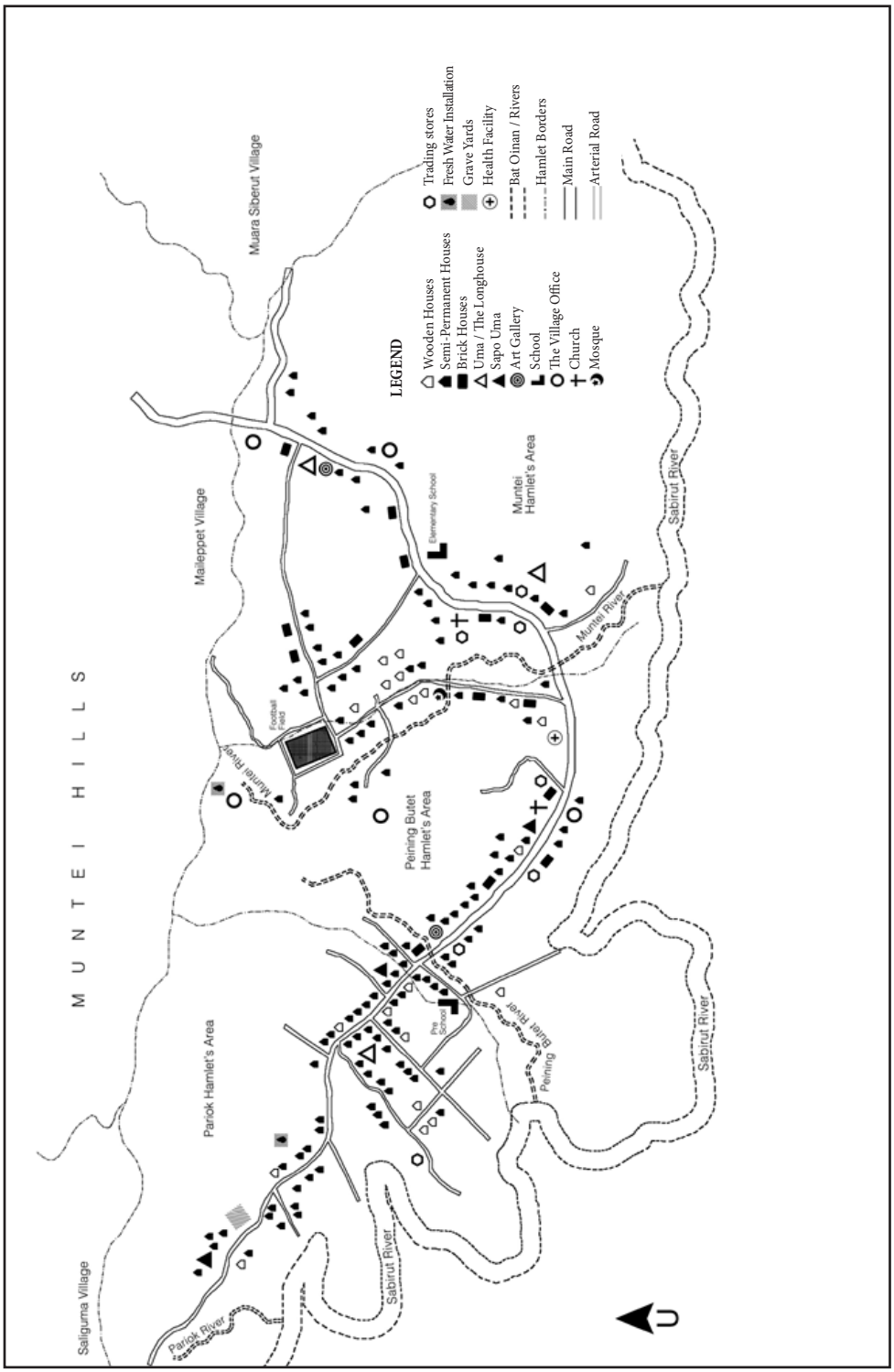
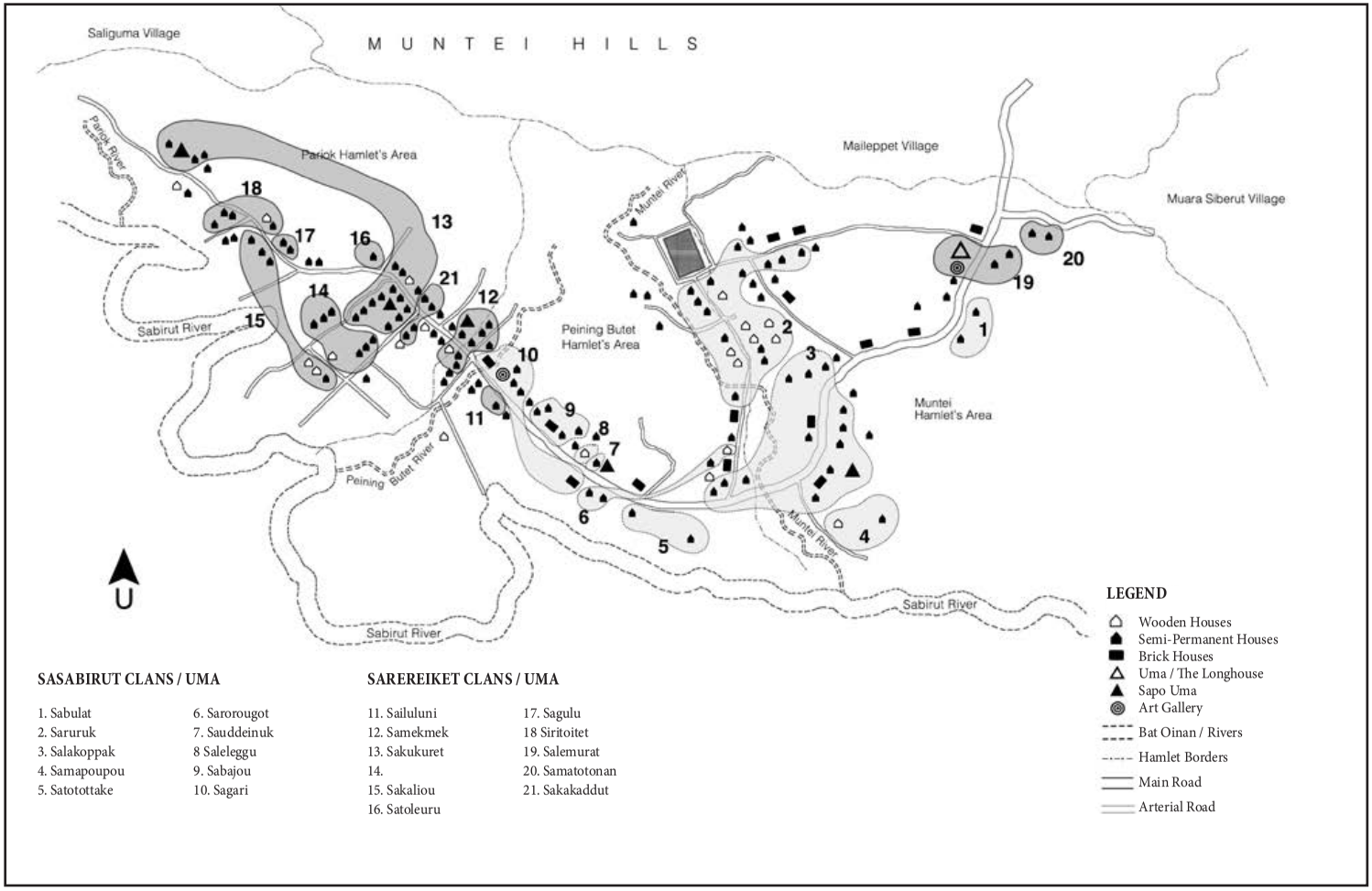


Figure 5. The General Lay Out of Muntei Settlement

Figure 6. *The Map of Clans/Uma in Muntei Settlement*



The Settlement Layout

One of the most fundamental factors affecting the siting of Muntei is the accessibility and availability of sweet water. Muntei is situated on the bank of a major river (Siberut River) and the stream (Muntei) that flows all year round and is named after it. The Siberut River is required for transportation, storing sago, tethering canoes, and has a large swampy area for sago and tuber cultivation, while small streams provide a source of sweet water and recently mark the boundary of hamlets (Figure 5). The availability of a flat, solid area that is free from flooding (*suksuk*) is another consideration. A *suksuk* is a narrow area between the major river and the hills near Muntei. Another major environmental factor in the selection of Muntei as a settlement, indicated above, is the availability of nearby hills for clove cultivation.

The residents of Muntei refer to their settlement as *barasi*. This is not an indigenous term, but comes from a Minangkabau word *barasiah* (clean). *Barasi* means a cleared space where humans build dwellings and keep them clean. The use of the term *barasi* began after the 1970s resettlement project that was implemented by West Sumatra's government. *Barasi* is now commonly used to refer to a social space where people dwell and socialise (a hamlet or village), as opposed to the not-so-clean spaces (*bakkat seksek*), such as forests, sago gardens, and settlements closer to the forest. *Barasi* is, however, just one of the elements that make Muntei a proper settlement. The residents of Muntei have manipulated and classified their surrounding environment into several categories of productive zones, which I will describe at length in the next chapter.

Initially, the layout of the settlement was designed by the OPKM (OPKM 1981). All houses were built in row on a plot according to the project design (Picture 1). However, the people eventually decided to modify and adapt the design to their own particular needs (Picture 2). The settlement's layout is shaped by the limited availability of *suksuk* and the attempt of each *uma* to maintain their distance. The absence of a wide and spacious *suksuk* means that it was physically impossible to create a centralised settlement of the type projected by the OPKM. Socially, the layout represents a visible paradigm of some crucial aspects of the autonomous social relationship between groups and families. The structure of the settlement imitates and maintains the traditional pattern of dwelling places in which each house is clustered around a ritual house. This suggests that the social reference and identification around the *uma* remains strong. The layout of the settlement also reveals the *Sasabirut-Sarereiket* identification (Figure 6). Muntei's south is predominantly populated by *Sasabirut*, who arrived earlier and built their houses downstream for easier access to fresh water from Muntei's stream. To the north are the *Sarereiket*, who came later, and built their houses closer to their gardens and sago stands, upstream from Muntei.

The settlement comprises two types of residences: the communal house (the *uma*) and the family house (*sapou*). Both the *uma* and *sapou* are generally built on piles, so they are off the ground, have the same conspicuous swallow-tailed gable, numerous solid hardwood supporting posts, and roofs of sago-palm thatch. But the two structures differ in several respects. The longhouse is a grand and imposing structure. Not only is it larger, wider, and higher than a *sapou*, but the longhouse has certain areas that are used for communal purposes (Picture 3 and 4). The longhouse is an arena of social space that functions as the locus of life's major transitions for all the members of the group. Lifecycle events such as the initiation of new *uma* members, marriages, and mourning rituals require all members of the *uma* to return to the communal house.

The longhouse has three sequential spaces: an outer room (*laibok*); an inner room (*tenga-n-uma*); and the back room (*bat-n-uma*). The *laibok* is a common area for socialising, where visitors sit and talk with their hosts. It is almost completely open, with benches along both sides and an open entrance with a small gangway and a stepladder. The *tenga-n-uma* is where the men sleep, store their personal belongings, and work on projects such as making rattan. It is also where singing, dancing, and other aspects of communal ceremonies are performed. The inner part of the *uma* is also where the *bakkat katsaila*, the heirloom,

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Picture 1. The layout of Muntei settlement in the early years of the OPKM (1981)

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Picture 2. A bird view of Muntei settlement, showing the different types of houses and development of the settlement over the years (2014)

TEOFILUS SAMEKMEK

Picture 3. The new longhouse of a faction of *uma* Sakukuret. The structure is larger and more imposing than a common house (2015)

TEOFILUS SAMEKMEK

Picture 4. The outer room (*laibok*) of the *uma* Sakukuret's longhouse used to socialize, to perform a ritual offering or to put all sacrificed animals (*iba-t-punen*) (2015)

consisting of the most important magic herbs (*gaud*) are stored, specifically on the wall adjoining the *tenga-n-uma*. *Bat-n-uma* is where the women sleep, store their belongings, and work. Behind the wall of *bat-n-uma*, there is a fireplace for cooking and a wooden stand for washing dishes. A longhouse, which is under the guardianship of the leader of the group, also differs in certain other aspects from ordinary houses, namely, the presence of *bakkat katsaila*, some slit-drums, the skulls of hunted animals, and its decorative carvings are more ornate. The *uma* is undoubtedly the most salient feature not just of the settlement but its entire social and ritual organisation. The symbolism of the Mentawaians' longhouses and their variations has been described and discussed widely (Loeb 1928; Schefold 1991, 2003; Reeves 2001). This section will only describe the general picture of the transformation and continuation of the longhouse in the settlement.

Among the 20 *uma* in Muntei, only three (the Salakoppak, the Salemurat, and the Sakukuret) have a proper longhouse. Each of those communal houses conserves the principal design of a traditional longhouse and is built off the ground. However, the longhouses in Muntei have a variety of shapes and forms. The largest and newest, owned by *uma* Sakukuret, measures seven metres by 14 metres and stands some seven metres from the ground to the roof-peak. The smallest version, owned by *uma* Salemurat, is only seven metres by ten metres, standing six metres from the ground to the roof. All the longhouses are easily identified as *uma* as they have all the features of a standard longhouse, but they do not quite meet the ideal version, which, it is said, must be an imposing structure and is often referred to as the *uma sabeu* (the great *uma*/the bigger *uma*). In the distant past, the great *uma* is said to have had as many rooms as there were families in the group, while the current *uma* are constructed and occupied by the leader of the group and any unmarried children. Given that the resources and labour required to build great longhouses are limited around the settlement, the communal houses in Muntei are not much bigger than a proper house.

There is another house in the settlement that is similar in size and structure to the longhouse and performs a similar function as a ritual house, but is not always referred to as an *uma*. People often call it the *sapou-uma*. The *sapou-uma* is somehow incomplete, it lacks the features of the *uma*, for example, it lacks a wooden ladder, a veranda, and the main post (*uggla*) is not made from a specific type of wood. The *uma* Samekmek is a very imposing and grand construction, built off the ground on four-metre-high supports (Picture 5). The building has a large and wide *laibok* and a proper *tenga-n-uma*, although without a gangway in front of it. The owner has compartmentalised the middle room into two larger rooms, as in a common house; more importantly, it does not have an *uggla* penetrating into the soil. Furthermore, it is occupied by two families, the family of the leader of the group and his youngest son, indicating that it is used as a *sapou*, i.e. where sexual relations are allowed. Two other *sapou-uma* were built, one by a faction of the Salakkopak and the other, more recently, by a faction of the Sakukuret. Both of these *sapou-uma* have *uggla* penetrating the soil but lack a wooden ladder, a gangway, and a proper *tenga-n-uma*. The Sakukuret's *sapou-uma* has a shiny blue tin roof. The reason why the *sapo-uma* is sometimes called *uma* is because it houses the ancestral heirloom (*bakkat katsaila*) and is used to enact communal ceremonies. Any *sapou-uma* with such objects and having gone through the relevant ritual event is occasionally called an *uma*. Thus, what distinguishes the *uma* from ordinary houses is the store of ancestral heirlooms kept within, in particular the *bakkat katsaila*.

The second type of residence is the *sapou*, best translated as a residential house. A *sapou* is often referred to as *lalep*. A *sapou* is actually the house, a physical entity, where a family lives. It is a confined space within which the most intimate care and protection of a person takes place. The houses both mirror and contrasts with the *uma*. Typically, a house consists of three continuous spaces: a front space (*laibok*) containing a small veranda; a middle room (*tenga-n-sapou*) consisting of a family room or living room and one or more

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Picture 5. The *sapo-uma* of *uma* Samekmek, built during the *nilam* boom in the early 2000s (2013)

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Picture 6. The humble house of a Sabulat family (2013)

compartments (*bilik*) for sleeping and having sexual intercourse (forbidden in the *uma*); and a back space (*bat-n-sapou)* where the kitchen is located. The *laibok* is a platform of varying width and length, used for relaxing on during the day. The essential feature of the house is the kitchen. A house may have two sleeping rooms and no proper veranda, but it must have a hearth. The kitchen is a place for cooking, eating, and participating in innumerable minor domestic tasks. I will discuss this issue later in Chapter 5 to show the importance of food and the presence women in the perpetuation of the family.

Table 3. The Number of Residential Buildings in Muntei

Residential Building	Number
Ritual/Communal Houses	
The *uma* (the communal house)	3
The *Sapou-uma*	3
Residential Houses	
Wooden huts	19
Semi-permanent	123
Brick houses	11
Total	**153**

Initially, houses in Muntei were of a very humble construction. Some of the pioneers remember their first houses literally being a hut, made from bamboo and *ariribuk/nibung* palm (*Oncosperma* sp.), used for sleeping and cooking in and without separate rooms. The OPKM provided a five metre by five metre planned house. A construction contractor was appointed by the project to build the houses and the settlement. The OPKM participants received a very humble house, consisting of a narrow veranda, a sleeping room, and a kitchen. For the most part, the resettlement houses were inhabited for few years. Gradually, people began to expand them as their families grew. As the government took a more relaxed attitude, the resettlement houses were unpacked, moved, or modified. The houses were demolished but their parts were re-used to build new ones. In 2013, the original OPKM houses had entirely disappeared, although some old materials (tin roofs, signs, wood) could still be seen as part of the present houses.

The present houses in Muntei reflect considerable variations in style and design (Figure 6); with three general types recognised in Muntei. The most modest houses are constructed from a mix of bamboo and wood, raised on stilts, with a roof made from sago (Picture 6). This type is built off the ground on supports penetrating the soil. The walls and floor are mainly made from wooden planks, but part of the kitchen floor and walls might use bamboo or *nibung* palm. Most of these houses still feature wooden walls, poles, or flooring and a tin-roof taken from the OPKM houses. The majority of the Saruruk clans and some of the *Sarereiket* in the northern part of the settlement have this type of house. At the other end of the spectrum is a large and more elaborate dwelling, which may be partly built at ground level, with concrete and ceramic floors, brick and wooden walls, a metal roof and glazed windows. In such houses, the visitor's room and veranda usually accommodate a plastic table and chairs and there is a private bathroom inside the house. The family room and kitchen tend to be spacious areas featuring a large table and cabinets for cutlery; the sleeping room is private and contains a large foam mattress and a cupboard for clothes. There are only a few houses like this and generally they are only owned by the wealthiest Mentawaian families and migrants. The largest house of this type has recently been built by a family of senior high school teachers

from *uma* Salakkopak in the western part of the settlement.

Most houses, however, fall between these two extremes and are what I call semi-permanent. The third type is generally built on piles, so it is off the ground, although the supports do not penetrate into the soil but rather are placed upon concrete cornerstones. The floors and the walls are made entirely from wood. The roofs are zinc or asbestos-based materials, although a few houses employ sago-leaves. The veranda is an open room and may have a wooden bench attached to the half-wall. The family room and kitchen are slightly larger than those in the first type, while the kitchen has a combination of a fire pit and a kitchen stove. The basic structure is fundamentally created so it can be improved at a later date and this is the distinguishing feature of this type of house. Most large houses in Muntei departed from the six by ten metres structure expanding into various forms. The flexibility of the semi-permanent house is related to stages in the developmental cycle of the family, their slow but steady economic improvement, and also a combination of the traditional impermanence of the traditional house's structure and the influence of Minangkabau-style housing construction.

Other than residential places, many of the other important features in the settlement are foreign infrastructures: churches, a handful of trading stores, a village office, schools, a football pitch, and a small mosque. The Catholic church is the most important and the largest public building in the settlement, constructed on a large patch of ground in the middle of the settlement (Picture 7). Almost all individuals and families in Muntei have been involved with the church and its activities at one time or another. The church is seen as a collective institution due to its ability to accommodate secular activities. Not only does it host the congregation for Sunday Mass and other special Christian events, but the church is a venue for meetings convened to discuss matters about the hamlets and village. It is also a convenient place for large social gatherings. The youth group uses the church for sporting and recreational activities. The church has the ability to accept traditional activities and practices such as shamanic practices and even supports indigenous beliefs, including the existence of important communal rituals. It is not uncommon on Sundays to see a shaman substituting his daily loin-cloth (*kabit*) for a good pair of trousers, shiny shoes, and his best shirt to attend Mass.

Local shops are another important public venue. Muntei has seven trading shops, all but one owned and run by outsiders. The smallest is owned by a Minangkabau resident who married a local woman. The largest is run by a couple of Niassan and Batak descent. The only Mentawaian who has a store is a member of *uma* Sagari. The number of shops in the settlement is uncommonly high compared to other settlements relative to its population. Muntei is geographically convenient and the shops have made it unnecessary for upstream people to make journeys downriver to Muara Siberut. People can now buy sugar, tobacco, chili, tea, and coffee in Muntei at the same prices as in Muara Siberut, but without paying the extra transportation costs. Recently, the shops have been increasingly important as many government programmes, particularly infrastructure-related projects such as clean water installations, use the stores as a kind of local sub-contractor that provides loans, materials, and credit. The projects help to reinforce the position of shop owners in their capacity as an employer of local people to carry out maintenance and development projects.

Both the elementary and pre-school school buildings are another important focus of daily life in the settlement. Most school-age children (four up to 15 years old) attend classes fairly regularly. The schools are a place for daily formal socialisation among the children, providing learning tools for reading, counting, drawing, colouring, and other basic skills. In particular, the schools introduce the national language and culture under the common Indonesian state elementary school curriculum. Most parents encourage their children to go to school and education is seen as important for the future of the next generation. People see the benefits of a formal education, which provides an awareness of

the wider context in which their lives are lived, as part of the modern Indonesian state, a world beyond the settlement and beyond the Mentawaians' homeland, a world which they perceive as increasingly presenting them with challenges. There is also a prevailing view among the parents that to obtain a better job, or to attain a good life in the future, their children must have as high an education as possible, starting with elementary school.

The village office was built recently (2011), in the middle of the settlement to provide administrative services. It is a small, semi-permanent construction (24 square metres) divided into a room for the officials and a meeting space (Picture 8). Once a week, the village head organises an official meeting with his staff to discuss current government projects and policies. As village funds have significantly increased and the number of government projects has risen after the 2014 Village Law, the village office has become a vibrant place, as people come and go to get official permits, make financial arrangements, or submit complaints. The office is a venue for meetings convened to discuss public affairs, the hamlet's administration, or domestic disputes requiring the mediation of village officials. While there are always one or two village officials in attendance at the office daily, most people prefer to go to the house of the village head or village officials to arrange their paperwork. Most of the time, the office is used as a melting pot for passers-by wanting to have a chat and a cup of sweet coffee with the officials and it offers shelter for people caught in heavy rain or hot sun at midday. Occasionally, it is also deployed as a temporary storage for piles of RASKIN rice or other government hand-outs before distribution.

The mosque is the least important locus for public activities. The number of Muslims in Muntei is small, with only 12 per cent of the 650 people adhering to Islam. This is perhaps because Islam arrived in Muntei later than Catholicism. It arrived via the OPKM. Initially, two or three families from the Salakoppak clan converted during the project. Then, a major shift occurred in the mid-1990s, as two thirds of the members of *uma* Saruruk (nine families) suddenly converted from Catholicism to Islam. The catalyst for this was a bitter dispute between a Saruruk leader and the leader of *uma* Sagari about the position of the head of village and church. The Saruruk men proposed a larger mosque and asked an Islamic organisation in Muara Siberut to rebuild the current one. Initially, at least, the establishment of the mosque provided a focus for the Saruruk clan and other families who did not get along with the Sagari clan. Yet, the mosque is rarely used. Daily evening prayers in the mosque are usually only attended by a Minangkabau cleric posted to Muntei and his family.

The football ground is a minor but regular social space for adult and young men. It is used weekly, on Saturday and Sunday evenings, for playing football and is considered to be an exclusively male arena. The football ground is a lively place around Independence Day, when an inter-village football tournament is organised, and at the end of the year when the settlement has an inter-hamlet football competition. On these days, hundreds of people might stand around the pitch watching a game and socialising with relatives and friends from other settlements enjoying a rare day's entertainment. More recently, the ground is sometimes converted into a big stage for shamans to perform singing, dancing, and ritual offerings.

More than just buildings or sites, the church, local shops, village office, and the football pitch are important loci for socialisation that encourage Muntei residents to engage with their modernisation process, identify their settlement as a collective space, and thus feel a sense of collective belonging. From being initially bound to vertically structured relationships (genealogy) with their *uma*, people have gradually extended to horizontal relations (*Sasabirut-Sarereiket*). Living in Muntei introduces a sense of a community and inserts the distinct principle of locality into genealogy. The principle of locality adds kinship relations and establishes a new and unifying identity as a villager of Muntei and this has expanded residents' self-awareness of being part of a larger regional (part of Mentawai District, West Sumatra

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Picture 7. People attend a Sunday mass in the Catholic Church, the most important public building in Muntei (2018)

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Picture 8. The village office in the centre of the settlement (2019)

Province) or national, identity.

2.3 The Community and Social Relations

The settlement generally lacks any superordinate centre of authority, because traditionally political leadership is non-existent. All decisions related to internal affairs within and between *uma* are made by consensus. Influence and authority accompany age and seniority, but these factors do not necessarily convey greater political powers. For example, the *sikebukkat uma* (leaders of the *uma*) are prominent figures. The leaders coordinate the *uma's* affairs, lead rituals, and vocalise internal decisions. However, every decision is organised through collective processes in which the *sikebbukat* have no final say. Charismatic people and those who are wiser may be given respect and acquire prestige, but no one makes decisions on behalf of the *uma* or represents the *uma* in negotiations with external parties. Political equality is the rule.

The egalitarian principle *within* a social group can only be maintained by unconditional cooperation: all are expected to contribute both their labour and the fruits of their labour (food, money, valuable objects) to the group, particularly during communal ceremonies. The seemingly radical egalitarianism, however, has its loopholes. Some individuals may try to gain social prestige at the expense of the collective interest. This creates ambivalence: cooperation and unconditional solidarity are always accompanied by attempts to seek individual glory. If the two are unbalanced, tension may result. When tension results in a disagreement, communal discussions spanning hours or even days, take place. If the situation cannot be resolved amicably, the group may split. Between *uma*, social relations are similar to those between individuals: dependency and mutual respect are required, and peaceful co-existence is the norm, but there is also a regular attempt to boast one group's prowess and to generate rivalry.

To maintain the balance, people developed non-ritualised and ritualised social relations. Non-ritualised social relations occur daily. Individuals of different *uma* encounter each other to exchange necessities such as chickens, a bunch of taro, or mosquito nets. Such relations are less amicable, more utilitarian, and happen among individuals who consider themselves close in that particular space/time but do not involve *uma* as a whole. Such relations are not passed to subsequent generations. Less frequently, there is also a collective cooperation called *sinuruk*, when a person requests assistance from others to complete a project: erecting a house, transporting canoes from the forest, or enacting healing rituals (*pabetei*). *Sinuruk* is derived from the word *duruk* (together), with a figurative connotation of 'helping each other' or 'working together'. *Sinuruk* always involves the exchange of pork or a communal feast for the assistance. Yet, *sinuruk* does not oblige a reciprocal relation in the future and is not passed onto the next generation.

Ritualised social relations occur between two *umas* and consist of four principal social institutions: marriage (*putalimogat*); on-going alliance (*paabad*); rivalry (*pako*); and brotherhood (*pasiripokat*) (see also Reeves 2001b; Hammons 2010). These relations also demand labour and a labour-products exchange, but all four involve the whole *uma*, require specific rituals, and are inherited by successive generations. The marriage ritual bonds two *uma* in an exogamous setting and, as a result of this bond, the *uma* involved become *saraina* (relatives) and individuals from these clans can cooperate, which prevents rivalry (Schefold 1991; Hammons 2010). People from Muntei tend to marry with others who live within the settlement or in nearby settlements: about 63 per cent of Muntei men and 76 per cent of women married within the settlement, and 57 per cent of men who married outside of the settlement married a woman from the nearest settlement.

Pako (rivalry) occurs when two *uma* each publicly boast about their own abilities, with the explicit aim of humiliating the other. The subject of the boast can be anything from skills, possessions, and knowledge,

to social networks. Such boasts are accompanied by gossip and accusations that devalue the other *uma's* prowess and declare one's own superiority. The most well-known medium of *pako* is a *tuddukat*, which is a set of three slit drums used for a coded form of communication. *Tuddukat* used to be involved in another medium that is now obsolete: a clan involved in *pako* would slaughter many pigs in a religious ceremony (*punen*). After a successful hunt, clan members would hit the *tuddukat* loudly enough to be heard by their rival clans, to communicate the message of their superiority. The *tuddukat*, it is believed, cannot lie because it has spirits that transmit particular messages to rivals.

To end *pako*, the clans involved in the feud must enact a peace ritual (*paabad*), which establishes and perpetuates peaceful co-existence between the two clans. *Paabad* usually occurs after a spontaneous bout of violence that can be triggered by the recent *pako*, but is more commonly triggered by past bloodshed among members of the two clans during a feud involving physical altercation or headhunting raids. Although nearly all the clans in Muntei have a history of rivalry, not all the clans there have alliances (*abad*), mostly because the pacification process during Dutch administration did not promote *paabad*. Many *pako* were also abandoned without *paabad* because of the fear of official punishment, resulting in a sense of resentment about unresolved conflicts and rivalries that leave the existing generation in each *uma* lacking certainty regarding their predecessor's relations with specific *uma*.

I did not encounter a *paabad* in Muntei but participated in the ritual between Samongilailai and Sakalio groups in the neighbouring village of Maileppet. *Paabad* is enacted exclusively by the members of the affected groups (no affines or friends), and consists of two identical rituals, on separate occasions, conducted within each clan's communal house. Each ritual lasts for two days, although in the past, it was said a *paabad* ritual would take a week to several weeks to complete. Despite this change in duration, the *paabad* rituals were one of the largest and most complex rituals I encountered. The structure of the ritual was similar to common communal rituals (*punen*), with the exception of a lavish and enormous communal meal at the end of the process. On the floor, piles of food consisting of pork, chicken, sago, and taro are displayed and consumed animatedly. Luxurious and imported food such as rice, sugar, syrup, biscuits, and bread are subsequently served. While the meal is consumed, men sit facing members of the opposing *uma* and play a game of provocation. If there are no physical repercussions, the ritual is considered successful, and each man establishes a form of ritualised social relationship: friendship (*pasiripokat)* with the former opponent opposite him (*talipok*).

During my fieldwork, the most common ritualised social relationship was marriage. The fierce rivalry and peace ritual were somehow absent. Seven *uma* have a *tuddukat* but I did not see two clans publicly declaring their *pako* and beating their *tuddukat*. It seems that *pako* and *paabad* are no longer practiced, despite some people still remembering unresolved conflicts and rivalries in the distant past. I also detected that certain old rivalries still linger for some clans. This can be sensed through either whispers or indirect competition, such as having a better house or children attending university. People are reluctant to talk about *paabad*, as it touches on sensitive issues such as headhunting and conflicts that involved insults and violence in the distant past. People are also concerned that raising such matters may result in having to pay compensation for their ancestors' mistakes.

While I did not see *pako* and *paabad* directly, I observed the basic principles of both ritualised and non-ritualised social relations. Muntei residents claim that all appropriate relationships involve *paroman*. *Paroman* is a noun used to describe both the act of mutual social relations and the items involved in the relations. The relations are *paroman* when all the parties involved feel that the relations are fair: for example, in a mundane relationship, a coconut tree may be exchanged for a hen and chicks or a mosquito net; time spent clearing a garden may be exchanged for some uncooked pork or boxes of cigarettes. Whether a relationship is *paroman* or not depends on the activity involved, the value of the items exchanged, and

both parties' subjective opinions and the history of the parties' past relations. For infrequent *sinuruk* and ritualised social relations, the items that define the value of the exchange and thus whether the relation is *paroman* or not depend on the item exchanged, particularly fresh pork.

For ritualised social relations, *paroman* always involves valuable objects, mostly in the form of food resources from the gardens (sago, pigs, fruit trees), together with commonly used items such as machetes and mosquito nets. Muntei residents would carefully calculate what a proper item should be in a *paroman* transaction based on the specific moment and the history of the relations between the clans. Hence, every single marriage or peace ritual has its own *paroman*. To achieve *paroman*, all persons and groups require a degree of knowing each other in a particular context. The quality of *paroman* defines and transforms social relations. A proper *paroman* maintains social relations while a poor one generates anger and resentment that can break a relationship and generate conflict. Social relations fail when a person or an *uma* feels that his or their autonomy is disrupted, and this can be described using the term *tulou*, the opposite of *paroman*. *Tulou* describes an unfair or improper social action, and refers to items involved in the payment of compensation after such a social action.

Incorporation into the state administration has complicated ritualised social relations. The introduction of institutions and external authorities beyond family and *uma* has created new hierarchal relations (Persoon 1988; Schefold 1991). The installment of the head of village or hamlets and other form of government officials introduced alien political forces and complicated any provisional equal relations that might have been achieved by a semi-autonomous customary regime. While state intervention intensified during the New Order regime and especially after the establishment of Kepulauan Mentawai district (Eindhoven 2019), the authority of government officials expanded, not only to facilitate development, but also to connect local people with external actors.

2.4 Gardening and Complementary Economy

Forest gardening, fishing, hunting, and collecting semi-domesticated plants and animals are the backbone of the local economy, supplemented by the addition of cash crops. People in Muntei prioritise gardening (*mumone*) over all their other activities. People go daily to the gardens (*pumonean*) for cultivating and harvesting staple food (sago, taro, and bananas), vegetables (cassava leaves, ferns), annual and perennial fruits (pineapple, durian, mango, jackfruit, etc.), and cash crops such as coconuts and cacao. Medicinal plants are also gathered in the garden. A Mentawaian garden is a kind of shifting cultivation system. The Mentawaian's forest gardens have been described elsewhere (Darmanto 2006; Persoon 2001; Darmanto and Persoon 2020), so this section will not provide an exhaustive account but only detail the general features of the garden in relation to food production.

Basically, a garden is cultivated by an individual family. The cultivation cycle of a garden is, for the most part, not seasonally determined. The establishment of a garden consists of two complementary cycles: *tinungglu* and *mone*. *Tinungglu* is the first stage, associated with the cultivation of tubers, vegetables, and spices, while the *mone* is the final stage, associated with the cultivation of fruit trees (Pictures 9 & 10). *Tinungglu-mone* is a cycle that produces a kind of integrated shifting cultivation system (cf. Conklin 1957) within the tropical rainforest of Siberut. The *tinungglu* cycle begins with the clearing of a small patch of forest or an old forest garden. The unique feature characterising the system is the absence of fire during the first stage of cultivation. Fallen trees, weeds, grass, wild vegetation, and other debris are not burnt; instead, people use unwanted vegetation as mulch, releasing its biomass into the land. The inhabitants of Muntei believe that felled trees contain and emanate an enormously dangerous power (*bajou*) that can

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Picture 9. A newly opened garden (*tinungglu*) is filled with banana and tubers (2013)

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Picture 10. The mature garden (*mone*) is full of a combination of fruit trees, staple food (sago, tubers, banana), and spices (lemongrass, ginger, sugarcane) (2012)

harm people, and the 'hot' element from the fire can trigger the release of *bajou* from the slashed plants, which may cause serious illnesses. From the ecological perspective, there is a clear reason why fire is unwanted. People are not seed cultivators and rely on sago, tubers, and bananas. These sources of staple foods compete well with the weeds and grass that grow quickly in the opened areas due to the high rainfall and wet climate and also lack serious natural diseases. Fire is unnecessary to dry and give additional nutrients for the crops.

Once the cleared vegetation has withered somewhat, the forest floor is further cleared to enable the planting of food crops. A low-lying area close to a creek or small flowing stream is fenced and reserved for a *pugettekat*. Various types of edible cassava (*gobik*) and banana (*magok*) are always the first crops to be planted, apparently on account of the fact that these plants can yield a harvest quickly. These are followed by several types of sweet potatoes. A few sago sprouts might also be planted in damp areas. Along with food crops, various useful species of bamboo, rattan, sugar cane, spices, medicinal and ornamental plants, and plants that produce various poisons used in hunting and fishing are also cultivated. The tubers and bananas mature quickly and can be harvested after about four to six months. The first harvest marks the fresh garden (*tinungglu*) phase. A small ritual is commonly enacted as part of the harvest, to mark the cycle of cultivation. In roughly the first two to five years, the *tinungglu* has been partially or wholly cleared and re-cleared. This is a period when productivity is almost negligible. During this time, attention may be paid to the gardens, e.g. cutting back undergrowth, transplanting of trees, and the planting more seedlings. Other rapidly growing species may be added at this stage, such as pineapples, chili, cucumber, squash, eggplant, and others ornamental plants.

The intercropping of a wide variety of food crops and other useful plant species during the *tinungglu* requires simultaneous efforts, though no specific sequence of planting is acknowledged. Ideally, the garden should be visited and tended each day. Since the gardens are scattered and rather far from the settlement (usually several hours by foot or canoe), people usually build a hut on site. The huts, which allow people to reside at their forest gardens semi-permanently, range from simple structures meant only to provide shelter from the frequent bouts of rain, to structures that resemble a humble wooden house. The hut is an important, albeit temporary, shelter since it provides a pivot for others subsistence activities such as fishing, searching for rattan, gathering wild food, making canoes, and other related projects. The hut is also strongly associated with the overall pattern of working during the day, which has been adopted through mission-introduced schema. With the exception of school-age children and young mothers, nearly all adults spend their weekdays in their gardens and return to the settlement at the weekend. Basically, there is no gardening undertaken on a Sunday, which is a special day reserved for church-going and socialising. Nonetheless, a few elders stay fairly permanent in their gardens, especially those who have pigs to tend to.

When production from the tubers and bananas begins to decline, the seeds and seedlings of various fruits are brought to the gardens. The progeny of fruit trees—tangy langsat (Lansium sp), creamy *jackfruit* (*Artocarpos integer*), sweet mangostene (*Garcinia mangostana*), sour *mango* (Mangifera sp), and rambutan (*Nephelium sp*)—are planted at the same time as three species of durian. The cultivation of fruit seeds is, for the most part, neither seasonally determined, nor rigorously planned. When fruits trees are growing, the gardens enter a semi-fallow stage. Certainly, some edibles plants are still being exploited but, in terms of structure, the garden is undergoing regeneration. After a few years, crops like cassava and bananas are gradually replaced by fruit trees. When the fruit trees, particularly durian, dominate the canopy and the vegetation, the cycle of *mone* is completed. This is when the *tinungglu* becomes *pumonean* (a mature garden). When the fruit trees are about to yield, a small hut might be constructed, complete with a pig hut (*pusainakat)* and chicken hut (*pugogoupat*).

Gardening in Muntei does not require the cooperative work that is a common feature of most seed cultivators in the forest ecosystems throughout Southeast Asia and beyond (Dove 1985; Ellen 2012; Cairns 2015). Collective work and the exchange of labour are unknown to people. The essential work in the gardens is done exclusively by the nuclear family. For the most part, there is no fixed labour division. Every woman and man knows all of the basic gardening skills. Both men and women participate in planting, tending, making fences, or collecting fruit—with men performing the heavier or more dangerous tasks, such as cutting big trees and climbing durian trees.

The average garden is no more than 0.5 hectares, yet every family has a number of gardens in various phases of development at any one time. Most families have at least four plots, typically consisting of different plants distributed over a wide geographic area. Garden produce (most commonly sago, banana, and taro), chickens, and pigs make up by far the largest proportion of people's diet. The garden is primarily a place for subsistence needs. Therefore, the people replenish their gardens before their food runs out: once a mature sago palm is felled or a bunch of taro is harvested, people immediately cultivate the sprouts of the sago or the stalks of taro to replace them. Food sufficiency is of the utmost importance, and a lack of food is shameful.

Integration of Cash Crops

Some people have incorporated commercial crops in parts of their garden. Traditionally, coconut was a subsistence crop equal in importance to durian, sago, or jackfruit. The palm is cultivated along with fruits trees around the settlement and used more as a cultural item, exchanged in ritualistic social exchanges and as a daily additional comestible item for livestock and humans. For centuries, coconut has been the most important small-scale cash crop exchanged with traders for imported goods from the mainland. Coconut became a main of cash crop after the demand for dried coconut (*copra*) arose and with the establishment of a Minangkabau traders' settlement during the 1940s. The demand encouraged other people from different clans to cultivate coconuts in the coastal zones in the eastern part of the island. A few families from *uma* Sagari, Sarorougout, and Saudeinuk joined together to establish coconut groves and were already selling copra to traders in the mid-1950s. However, political turmoil during the first two decades of Indonesian independence disrupted the export of copra. During the regional rebellion in West Sumatra (1955-1957), most of the traders were afraid to buy copra and the important ports and harbours were controlled by the central government. Indeed, most of the coconut gardens were abandoned during this time.

In the late 1960s, when regional politics were relatively stable, the demand for copra started to flourish again. This was the time when the Government of West Sumatra had a more coherent policy towards the islands and one symbol of being modern was cultivating and trading cash crops. In 1967, the representatives of the nine *umas* in Siberut Hulu were invited by the Head of the Sub-district (*camat*) of Siberut for a meeting in Muara Siberut. The meeting provided guarantees that land on the Islands of Masilok and Parakbatu could be used by people from Siberut Hulu and Maileppet for cultivating coconuts. The meeting also introduced cloves to them. Cloves were seen as a crop that would encourage stable and permanent cultivation, while being a less destructive alternative to the existing shifting cultivation system. Initially, Muntei people were reluctant to adopt cloves; however, in the mid-1970s, they saw clove growers from Katurei and Taileleu villages and a number of Minangkabau people earning a lot of money from selling them and soon began to adopt and cultivate cloves themselves. People realised that cloves produced good yields when they were exposed to sunlight, a dry wind, and when cultivated closer to the sea. Moreover, as stated above, searching for suitable sites for clove gardens was the main reason why people moved to Muntei.

The decades of the 1980s and the early 1990s saw the price of cloves and copra remain high and relatively stable. Pioneer families could make a significant fortune from a good harvest of seasonal cloves and perennial coconuts. During the first half of the 1990s, families were able to send their children to high school and universities in Padang and to renovate and expand their OPKM houses. Their success provoked newcomers from Rereiket to find land for clove and coconut gardens. Others followed them to *nusa* and devoted themselves to making coconut and clove gardens. However, when the latter began to cultivate their land, the price of cacao and cloves declined.

When clove prices plummeted during the mid-1990s, patchouli oil (*nilam*) became a new favourite crop. *Nilam* is not an exotic plant; it is used for medicinal purposes. An alkaloid compounds is obtained from its fresh leaves through distillation and it has become a valuable exported item. The plummeting price of cloves and copra encouraged people to cultivate this crop intensively in their existing gardens. Patchouli became popular as it can be harvested within a relatively short period. Especially during the economic crises in 1996 and 1998, and the rise of the US dollar against the Indonesian rupiah (IDR), the price for patchouli rose exponentially and market demand was also high. In a couple of years, nearly all families abandoned their clove gardens and involved themselves in *nilam* cultivation. There was a rush to clear forest areas to plant this during that time. Families could sell a litre of *nilam* oil for 1.5 million IDR per week. This brought a significant fortune. The majority of the people would say that their tin roofs and permanent houses came from selling *nilam*. As with cloves and copra, the boom in *nilam* did not last. In the early 2000s, people abandoned their *nilam* cultivation and started to try cacao.

Cacao is the latest crop to be successfully introduced into Muntei's gardens. Initially, in the late 1990s, a handful of families from Puro bought and planted the crop in the shade of their fruit trees by the Mara River, but did not take care of it. They planted it alongside their existing sago gardens, coconut groves, and fruit trees. A succession of harvests coincided with good prices for cacao on the global market. The collapse of cacao production in Sulawesi and West Africa, due to civil war and disease in the late 1990s and early 2000s, changed the fate of cacao. In 2002, a handful of pioneers from the neighbouring settlement of Puro sold their first harvest, earned decent profits and began to enjoy significantly improved living conditions in the years that followed. Soon, cacao became a favourite crop and it was widely adopted in the mid-2000s. In fact, the impact of cacao was still obvious during my fieldwork and offered a glimpse of how a commercial crop can affect food production and social values. The cultivation of cacao contributed to the changing valuation of sago gardens and the decline in keeping pigs, as I will describe in Chapters 3 and 6.

Beyond gardening, there are few opportunities for earning cash. A small number of people obtain a regular income as government employees (teachers, nurses, or other roles) or work as house builders, carpenters, or drive motorcycles for hire. A few others work outside the village for NGOs, in the tourist industry, and for affluent families on the mainland. Having a salary or regular income is desirable and preferable. This is why most people send their children to school, hoping that, in the future, the children will become civil servants or secure regular paid jobs in the town. However, this preference does not necessarily shake-up people's orientation towards forest gardens. Most of Muntei's residents swing their machetes, harvest cacao, or gather taro and fruits in the garden on a daily basis. There has been a consistency in these gardening activities of gardening. That is not to say that Muntei's economy is unchanged, rather that the basic value of gardening persists.

2.5 Religion and Mission Influences

Statistically, all Muntei residents are either Catholic (82%) or Muslim (12%) (BPS 2015). The remainder

belong to other Christian denominations. In Muntei, Catholicism constitutes the major social identification. The Catholic Church goes beyond religion, performing important economic and social roles. The Church provided schooling and other social services long before the state administration did, sending people to the mainland to learn nursing, carpentry, farming, and teaching. This resulted in people acquiring skills that gave them the opportunity to earn a regular income. The Church itself is a new sociopolitical institution, providing social prestige for those who work with it. Physically, the church offers a venue and new opportunities for social interaction, such as the weekly Sunday service that is attended by most of the community. The other reason why most people chose Catholicism may be because of the persistence of their indigenous beliefs. Under the shade of the Catholic Church, traditional religion has not abruptly diminished and, to some extent, it has even been conserved.

The traditional religion is widely known as *arat sabulungan*. Most Indonesian writers and Italian missionaries call this the religion of leaves (Sihombing 1979; Coronese 1986, 36; Rudito 1999; 2013; Delfi 2012). This is due to the importance of leaves (*bulug*) in all rituals. A bundle of leaves (*gaud*) mediates between the world of humans and the world of spirits. However, most anthropologists argue that the word *sabulungan* is derived from *pasibulu*, a verb meaning to offer or to make an offering (Schefold 1973; Kruyt 1979; Reeves 2001; Hammons 2010; Tulius 2012). *Pasibulu* is aimed exclusively towards the spirits. It involves leaves, tobacco, or other *buluat* (special offerings) that have one or more of these functions: mediators; gifts; sacrificial objects; or offerings. *Arat sabulungan* is the belief in making offerings to the spirits. During my research, I witnessed the latter interpretation: my interlocutors sometimes offered a small piece of meat to ancestor spirits without the need for leaves, while others offered cloth, a pinch of tobacco, or coconut oil to the spirits of the forest. While leaves are an important part of *sabulungan*, they have only a superficial relation to the core concept of *sabulungan*.

The basic principle of *sabulungan* is that every entity has both a body (*tubu*) and a *simagre* (spirit), and emanates power (*bajou*). The spirit constitutes a subject and defines the essence of beings. The spirit defines the natural and invisible quality of a subject, while the body manifests the subject. The spirit indicates the movement of a certain subject that can be seen through the body. The unpredictable nature of a storm or the sea, for example, is because their spirits are moving. Between the body and spirit lie two different worlds: the visible world, the domain of the body and the invisible world, the domain of spirits. The two worlds are neither attached, nor separated but constitute a person, either a human or a non-human person (Schefold 1973). The existence of spirits creates a fundamental problem for humans. In order to live (providing food, garden, or shelter) humans have to confront the spirits. Humans will encounter a spirit when they enter a forest, cut trees, clear bush, or when they are at the sea. This leads to contact with non-human subjects, including their bodies and spirits. As each entity has its own *bajou*, it is dangerous for humans to have direct contact with these other entities. The *bajou* of any being can do harm and cause illness. Hence humans cannot use another's body as a simple object, but they must treat him/her as a complete person. This potentially generates a troubled relation because all spirits have their own perspectives and wishes.

It is, therefore, very important for humans to understand and take into account the wishes of their own spirits. A human spirit could be attracted to the domain of non-human spirits while hunting, fishing, or tending to forest gardens. Without a spirit, the body is in a miserable state. If the spirit drifts too far away from the body and has no appetite for life, it may move to the world of *saukkui* (good spirits) or the world of *sanitu* (bad spirits). When the spirit fails to be called back through a ritual, the person will become sick and eventually die and the body becomes a corpse. Activities and rituals have been developed to keep one's spirit close and fulfil one's spirit's desires, including indulging in good food, expressing creativity through decoration and ornamentation, singing and dancing.

The association of the spirits of ancestors with life and death makes them crucial. Ritual offerings are

required to ensure good relations and perspectives between living humans and ancestral spirits. Arguably the single-most important activity constituting *sabulungan*, rituals can be either an elaborate religious ceremony (*punen)* or a mundane activity. *Punen* and other rituals share the aim of communion between living human spirits and ancestral ones. The entire *punen* process is about achieving the communal communion of the living-human entity, ancestral spirits, and unknown spirits in undomesticated spaces (rivers, the sea, forests). *Punen* is kind of a social renewal, in which the connected entities (humans, ancestors, and wild spirits) re-establish and restore the balance in their relationship (Schefold 1973). Since this subject has been researched in detail (Loeb1928; 1929b; Kruyt 1979; Schefold 1973, 1980; Reeves 2001; Hammons 2010), I will not add anything further here, but I will describe the *punen* procession in Chapter 5 to highlight the importance the role of food in making, establishing, and strengthening that social renewal.

While *punen* is the most important event for making an offering to a spirit, it is not the only event. Everyday meals, especially when there is meat served (pork or chicken), always begin with a discreet ritual: the head of the family quietly places a small piece of meat under his feet and stomps on it until it disintegrates and falls out between the gaps in the floorboards. While he does this, he usually whispers an invitation under his breath '*ngemet*', (welcome) to please the spirits who enter the house. The piece of meat is considered the ancestral spirits' fair share (*otcai*). This practice is common, even for families that nominally and statistically belong to other religions, and even for those who explicitly deny their belief in spirits. Sometimes, people do mix this practice with a rather formal prayer (*panindou*) according to Catholic practice.

2.6 Continuity and Transformation

Forty years ago, the settlement's main road was a muddy footpath cutting across sago gardens and between fruit trees. Today, a two-kilometre-long and four-metre-wide permanent, concrete road spans the village from the south to the last houses in the north, while a two-metre-wide concrete road branches out from the main road and is continuously being lengthened (it is currently 4,000 metres). In addition to the housing developments I have described above, another significant change can be seen in the modes of transportation. Nowadays, it is common to see a number of motorcycles coming to and going from the settlement. At night, a line of parked motorcycles stretches along the main road, as the majority of the owners do not have a proper parking space at their houses. In 2004, there was only one motorcycle in the settlement, but in less than a decade, almost every house has at least one motorcycle (Table 4). Two decades ago, it was not imaginable that some people would have a car or truck. Recently, two public taxis, owned by the village government, a truck, and a private car can be seen on Muntei's roads. Another transportation device that shows the change is the number of outboard motors, either a lighter inboard motor (*pompong*) or outboard engine (*spit*). In the early 2000s, people were still paddling their small canoe to get to the small islets (*nusa*) to tend their cloves, coconuts, and pigs. During my fieldwork, paddling a canoe to the islets was considered to be work for poor people.

The other recognisable change is the number of entertainment devices in the settlement. Almost all the houses in Muntei have access to electricity and two thirds of them (109) have a television, including a CD/DVD player and parabolic antenna. The number is striking as the 2007 government census stated that only six families, including migrants and trading store owners, owned such a device (BPS 2008). A television set is not the only form of entertainment. It is not unusual to see young people walking along the road or going to school with earphones, listening to music from their smartphones. Since

2015, and the decision of the Ministry of Information to provide a free Wi-Fi hotspot in the settlement, a smartphone has been a 'must have' device.

Table 4. Some Indicators of Social and Economic Transformation in Muntei

Indicators	Number		
	1985[1]	2005[2]	2015[3]
Concrete roads	-	300 m	7,300 m
The communal house	-	3	3
Brick house	-	1	11
Motorcycle	-	7	142
Television	-	6	111
Outboard motor	2	13	73
Church	1	1	2
Car/truck	-	-	4
Trading store	-	3	7

[1 & 2] Oral history, [3] Fieldwork

A less visible transformation has occurred in the domain of social relationships. The establishment of Muntei as a government settlement and its incorporation into the global market has introduced new sociopolitical institutions. These installed institutions, such as the village head (*kepala desa*) or hamlet head (*kepala dusun*) have gradually intensified the presence of external power and authorities. Schools, churches, and other new institutions have become the most important places for socialisation, reducing the role of the ritual house. With stronger state intervention, the role of these installed institutions has significantly increased, and will likely increase further, particularly with the intensification of government projects.

The transformation brought by the market is not only represented by the number of shops, the market has also reconfigured the traditional schema of daily activities and social relations. Producing cash crops for the market has transformed Muntei's residents from subsistence farmers, processing sago or keeping pigs, into petty commodity producers. People now expend part of their labour on non-*paroman* social relations, since they have an increasing buy-and-sell relationship with traders. Cash-crop production has stretched existing social relations, because the time now spent producing copra or cacao for the market and conducting exchanges with shopkeepers reduces the time available for producing pigs, fruit trees, or other goods necessary for their ritualised social relations. Cash-crop production has also pressured the traditional mode of pig-keeping and forest gardening, which I will describe in Chapters 3 and 6. At the same time, the presence of the market offers a rare opportunity for women. The demand for vegetables, taro, bananas, and freshwater animal food (food associated with women) has been steadily increasing, encouraging Muntei women to earn an income and to expand their own social networks.

Social Variation and Differentiation

Living in a government settlement has produced internal social variations. *Sarereiket* tend to have an inland-oriented livelihood strategy, combining pig-keeping, traditional forest gardening, and limited

cacao production. In contrast, *Sasabirut* tend to rely on producing cash crops. They focus on coconut and clove production. The women of *Sasabirut* have more connections with the market through their selling of garden produce and by providing the traditional palm-roofs demanded by the surfing industry. In term of politics, *Sarereiket* rarely occupy new political positions and institutions, be it the head of a hamlet or village, a church or other village institutions. Most, if not all, of the positions created by the new sociopolitical institutions are occupied by *Sasabirut*, in particular *uma* Sagari and Salakoppak. Yet, *Sarereiket* take pride in their ability to maintain and practice certain aspects of their traditional culture. Shamans performing healing rituals and providing entertainment with their dancing and singing are from *uma* Sakaliou, Satoleuru, and Siritoited. The shamans are frequently visited and contacted by tourists, researchers, and government officials who want to know about their traditional practices.

Situated between the above two variations, a few families from *Sarereiket* and *Sasabirut* have combined their contrasting livelihood strategies in an attempt to strengthen their cultural and political importance in the village. *Uma* Samekmek have combined coconut production and traditional pig-keeping, but also their skills at making houses. The group has members who occupy positions in the village administration. At the same time, there are a number of *Sasabirut* families who do not follow their counterpart's livelihood strategy. Similarly, a few members of Saruruk and Sabulat are not involved in cash crop-oriented production or traditional gardening, but rely mostly on paid labour and seasonal jobs, such as being a carpenter or tourist guide.

The social transformation of Muntei residents has been accompanied by social differentiation. Among the clearest indicators are the development and the quality of the houses and the ability of families to send their children to mainland universities. The simplest and smallest houses represent the current socioeconomic status of the occupant and their lack of socioeconomic mobility. The newest and grandest homes symbolise the emergence of the new wealth brought by the government and access to the market and are a reflection of the introduction of mainland house designs and the increasing influence of migrants in the settlement. The increasing presence of brick houses is another indicator, demonstrating the socioeconomic status of the occupant.

'Always Those Uma Who Run the Settlement'

Social differentiation is frequently articulated when people talk about the most successful and dominant group in the settlement. The emergence of the Sagari and Salakoppak clans as the dominant *uma* in the settlement is perceived as symbolic of the social inequality in the community. The members of these two clans have dominated the positions created by the new, state-introduced sociopolitical institutions in the settlement, i.e. village officials, the school, and church.

The status of Sagari in the settlement started with the appointment of Aman Bruno Sagari as the Head of Muntei Village after the OPKM (Kawilarang 1976). His father was one of the first people living in the old settlement to accept the missionaries in the 1950s and was a host for Catholic teachers in Siberut Hulu. Aman Bruno was among the first Mentawaians to receive a modern education from the Catholic missionaries. He was a pioneer *guru katekis* (Catholic teacher) and in his youth he travelled around the island, accompanying missionaries proselytising Catholicism. He gained his authority from his ability to read and write the national language as well as having knowledge of the local customs, especially the genealogies and land stories collected during his duties as a teacher. Over time, Aman Bruno gained the skills to deal with various state institutions and acquired knowledge of development. His mediatory position enabled him to gain both support from state officers and credibility from his fellow residents.

Eventually, he was appointed as the village head in 1981, when Muntei was established as an official

village. He held this position for more than two decades (1981-2003). During his tenure, he profited from his relations with various government institutions in West Sumatra. The political authority given to him by the state enabled him to accumulate economic gains from delivering development projects and to expand his own social network and alliances. In the process, he gained experience and built his reputation, increased his public acceptance, and took the opportunity to establish his personal authority. Having gained a degree of power, he appointed his cousin to the post of village secretary and other social allies were appointed to positions in the new village's government. He was salaried, albeit infrequently and in a limited manner, and put in charge of all the development packages from the government. Using his network and influence, he and his extended family were the first to receive development handouts.

When Aman Bruno stepped down from the position of village head, his cousin Aman Paulina replaced him and administered the village for two periods (2003-2011). Other cousins of Aman Bruno were appointed as the head of a hamlet between 1997-2009. Currently, the position of village head (2015-) is held by Aman Bruno's second son. He won the election for village head for a five-year period (2015-2020) after being appointed as the head of a youth group (*ketua pemuda*). Another son who had a university education on the mainland became a teacher in a local senior high school and replaced his older brother as *ketua pemuda*. He quickly became one of the local church's officers. In short, from the football club, heads of hamlets to Mudika (the Catholic Youth organisation), Sagari men have always been candidates.

While the Sagari are prominent in political positions, Salakoppak men are renowned for their positions as teachers and church administrators. The Salakoppak consist of 14 households, divided into three factions. The leading figure is Aman Yan. He was initially a volunteer teacher for teachers who did not understand the Mentawai language. He was later chosen to be a teacher as he was one of only a handful of Muntei residents who could read and write in the national language. After years of dedication, he secured a permanent job and became the first Mentawaian civil servant in the settlement. This position allowed him to acquire knowledge of governance, expand his social network, and assert his local authority on the educational system.

The position of teacher and civil servant generates social status for Aman Iyan. He is also *bajak gereja* (head of a local church), largely responsible for Church's activities. He renovated houses and bought modern devices (motorcycle, outboard motor). Nonetheless, he spent most of his fortune on education and has been extremely successful. Six out of his seven children graduated from universities on the mainland, five of them becaming teachers and securing permanent jobs. Muntei's heads of hamlets and local teachers have always been Salakoppak men. The Salakoppak also have a reputation for frequent and large rituals, supported partly by their prowess in turtle hunting and partly through contributions of wealthy persons such as Aman Yan.

From the Sagari and Salakoppak, fellow residents learn about social stratification and inequality. Stratification is clearly visible from their houses. Prominent Sagari and Salakoppak men live in brick houses with zinc roofs and cement floors; most of their children attend universities on the mainland. Following the importance of kinship, the kinsmen of Sagari and Salakkopak are always the first to be approached by external authorities and to benefit from any development projects. Most non-agricultural jobs in the settlement are held by the Sagari and Salakoppak. The two clans dominate positions in the newly installed sociopolitical institutions and become state employees with high status, desirable positions, and influence among their fellow villagers.

People from a small *uma* and not-so-prominent family always have words for the Sagari and the Salakoppak. On the day of the election of Peining Butet as head of hamlet, Aman Tomas from Sabulat was mumbling:

> This is the settlement of Sagari and Salakoppak. We just have two candidates: one is from Salakoppak and the other is from Sagari. We could not promote our candidate as we would definitely lose the election. Sagari and Salakoppak are bigger clans and have more people to vote. They hold all positions in our village. Sagari are arrogant and want to dictate other people's lives while Salakppak are taking all government jobs in the settlement. They want to run the settlement.

While Aman Tomas complained about the domination of Salakoppak and Sagari clans, he also admired and respected their success and he aspires to be as prominent and important as the Sagari and Salakoppak people. He hoped to send his children away to be educated and, ultimately, to secure government jobs, as the Salakoppak and Sagari have done. Apparently, the domination of Salakoppak and Sagari have been a source of both admiration and envy. The success of these clans are seen both as an indicator of the possibility of becoming prosperous and as the sign of the emergence of social differentiation and inequality. Muntei residents have recognised that certain individuals or families have more power and authority, some have more skills and wealth, while others have less. As Aman Tomas, most of Muntei's residents feel that living in the settlement does not provide equal opportunities. The emergence of social differentiation is a key social element prompting people's claims that they are hungry and no longer eating together, the subject of further analysis in Chapter 7.

Despite significant changes in the physical appearance and social variations and differentiation of their settlement, Muntei residents try to maintain the basic aspects of social life. While the state and the market have brought significant changes, ritualised and non-ritualised social relations have survived in a variety of forms. A significant degree of ritual and political autonomy at clan level is visibly preserved. Pigs and durian trees might not be as frequently exchanged as in the past, but *paroman* and *tulou* have remained basic principles that encompass all social relations. People may no longer have open *pako* by boasting about their pigs and rituals, but they quietly compete in the realms of education, jobs, and positions in the hamlets or Church.

2.7 Daybreak to Darkness[4]

A typical day in Muntei starts before the first light of dawn: people slowly awaken as birds start chirping and roosters begin crowing. The women are the first to begin work: burning firewood, preparing to cook. One woman selects a coconut, cracks open the shell, and grates it on a simple electric machine; the rhythmic grating sound reverberates throughout the settlement. She sets aside some grated coconut for use in the afternoon meal's curry, and gives the rest to the chickens. A group of women transport bunches of taro, bananas, and vegetables to the market on a push-cart—their giggles can be heard from the main road nearby. Men stroll across the river to feed chickens and pigs with grated coconut and sago pith, throwing shadows upon the houses that they pass. As the sun rises and the sky grows pink, men and children languidly settle on floors or benches on their verandas, while reluctant young girls clean the dishes and pots from the last evening's meal.

The sun rises higher and filters through the canopy of durian trees in the hills. By now, inside the houses, women have begun to cook: some put sago flour in sago leaves (*kapurut*) or bamboo (*siokbuk*) and roast it over a fire, others peel and chop taro or cassava to boil or fry, sprinkling them with grated coconut. School-age children and teenagers shower in simple bathrooms behind houses or bathe in a nearby stream. When the tubers and sago are ready, young girls put them on the veranda along with

a pot of sweet tea. One unfortunate family does not have any taro or bananas today, which triggers the children to hurry to a nearby trader for some biscuits or instant noodles. Another family chooses to breakfast on leftover rice from the day before. Men prompt all the family members to sit, and the morning meal is enjoyed together.

The school-age children and teenagers walk towards their schools soon after breakfast. Some adults head toward their gardens: the women bring a small machete, a paddle, and a small rattan basket containing snacks and a bottle of water. The men carry a rattan basket containing roasted sago, rice, and sugar. A group of young men, swinging machetes, go upstream to clear the way for the planned road's construction or to do some work on a government project. Other women go in a group to the rivers or estuaries with small baskets and big nets to fish or gather mollusks in the mangrove forest. Later, some meander through the gardens around the settlement, quietly inspecting their coconut trees and discussing this year's upcoming durian season. An older woman brings her grandchildren to collect sago grubs from an over matured palm. Others, with one or two chickens in a mat, stroll off to the settlement upriver to visit family or friends and attend a communal ceremony. Mothers with young children remain in their house to watch their children. Still others remain at home to dry or guard areca nuts or cacao beans.

The settlement seems deserted during the day. The sound of chainsaws cutting down big trees resounds from *leleu* somewhere beyond the settlement. One or two Minangkabau fishermen can be heard touting their catch around the village. Village officials and their entourage from town inspect a freshwater installation project: they ride their roaring motorcycles up and down the road and make occasional stops to ask adults for feedback about the current development project. The voices of children at the elementary school and the bustle of commerce at the local shops provide the only regular hubbub at this hour of the day. People from upstream bring cacao beans, rattan, low-quality agarwood, and live pigs to trade with the shopkeepers, and keep the shops humming until late afternoon. In Mara River, a number of men check the boundary of disputed land and invite shamans to perform a ritual asking the ancestor to pronounce who the true claimant is.

In the late afternoon, the settlement comes alive again. Women return, their heads bent under the weight of bamboo poles or baskets loaded with food harvested from their gardens. Their husbands accompany them, carrying heavy fruits, dried coconuts, fresh cacao beans, or a sack of cloves. Others transport bunches of bananas, sago leaves, rattan, or heavy timber by canoe to build a new house. As the sun sinks behind the sago trees, an orange dusk settles over the village. Tardy teenagers return home late to avoid the housework. When darkness falls, people light their houses and play pop music on a video player. In the kitchen, women prepare an evening meal. Young girls help their mothers, sweeping the rattan mat that covers the floor, place plates on the mat, and set out roasted sago. Children are dispatched to find or call for missing members of the family. The men soon come into the kitchen, breaking a bamboo pole containing steamed fish and shrimps that were gathered in the river near the garden. Others in the family consume the leftover pork from a communal feast. After dinner, young girls swiftly set aside the plates.

As night falls, men enjoy smoking on the veranda. Children watch television or do homework. Two men walk in the shadow of the banana trees, seeking catfish or hunting bats. Other men separate clove flowers from their leaves or smear their arrows with new poisonous concoctions. The women sit with the men to perform separate tasks: fixing their fishing nets or weaving rattan mats. A supper of chopped pineapple may be served. A group of men and women go to the head of the hamlet's house to attend a meeting. Unmarried girls finish their tasks quickly so that they can ask permission to go to the church and learn a new song. Soon, their giggles are accompanied by the twang of a guitar and

young men singing. The ringing of a bell and the singing of a shaman marks the beginning of a healing ritual in a house near the river, together with the howling of sacrificed pigs. A few friends may gather to sit on the veranda, sipping coffee and chatting animatedly about their canoes or gardens, gossiping about marital infidelity or rumours of corrupt village officials. Elders prefer to exchange stories about their ancestors' land claims, headhunts, or past migrations. Everyone exchanges stories deep into the night, until the late moon slowly climbs up over the hill. As people retire to their houses, the settlement becomes peaceful and still.