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

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Food, the Production of Persons, and the Perpetuation of the Community

The previous chapters showed empirically that Muntei residents have no substantial problem with availability and access to food and that they consume more than enough meals. Yet, there is often the claim that they are hungry, as described in the first chapter. The phrases *malaje* (being hungry) and *sitakiba* (people without meat) are presumably culturally conceived statements. This chapter and the next are devoted to understanding the cultural and social role of food in order to comprehend these terms. This begins with answering the basic question: What is the role of food and activities related to producing food resources (gardening, hunting, fishing, eating, exchanging, and sharing)?

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is divided into four sub-chapters, all describing the importance of producing food for the construction of social actors. The first sub-chapter examines the way in which producing food, gardening (*mumone*) in particular, influences how people assert the idea of being humans and qualify a social person. The second section explores how the production of food relates to the lifecycle of a social person through the family institution. The last section describes the relationship between producing food, the collective identification of being Mentawaians, and the identification of others. The second section is also divided into four sub-chapters, all describing the importance of sharing and eating together in the perpetuation of social institutions, specifically *uma* and family. The fifth sub-chapter examines why eating food alone, especially meat, is prohibited. Keeping food for yourself is the ultimate social transgression. The two sections thereafter examine two major contexts in which food is shared and consumed together: a) at the household level through everyday family meals; and b) at the *uma* level, on special occasions, through communal ceremonies. Sandwiched between these two sections is a description of the role of women in the reproduction of family through cooking, serving, and preparing food. The main point of this chapter is that producing food is not merely producing material substances for basic needs, but a part of a total process of producing social persons and institutions.

At the beginning of my research, I tried to ask people about the function of and relations with the edible items in their lives. Often, they simply replied: food is to fill your stomach. When I asked

about the qualities of food they loved to eat, the answer was monotonous: everything that humans can eat is good. Some claimed that clean and white sago flour is better than dark or brown flour. People differentiate many banana and taro varieties according to colour, texture, sweetness, or other properties. Some durian trees are seen as bearing better and more fruits than others. The size of pigs is an important consideration in any social exchange. These attributes are certainly attached to the producer and bestow social pride on those who cultivate the food item in question. The properties of food, however, do not always impart value upon the person who cultivates, owns, or processes it, or symbolise something beyond the materiality of food. The properties of food (size, colour, smell, texture) are not overtly used as a symbol of salient relations. Every time I asked about the cultural association of certain foods or certain qualities of types of food with its role or importance, the answer was always short and direct. For example, when I asked "why do you not consume raw food during *punen* (rituals)?," the answer was mostly "that is what our ancestors did and passed on to us," or "we would have an accident after the ritual'. Few people were able and willing to provide interpretations of symbols or analysis of my queries on the relations of food.

Instead of continuing to prepare and carry out elicitation techniques, I eventually decided to simply follow people's daily activities and concentrate on the daily pattern of food production and consumption. The importance of food was not explicitly articulated and verbally expressed, but it infused everything. I discovered that food is a basic but a special item, not merely because of the symbolic quality or the nutritional value. I found patterns and consistencies that hint at the importance of food in people's idea of human beings, social persons, and society. This ethnographic necessity became the platform for both the description and analysis of this dissertation. By understanding patterns of concrete food-related activities and implicit ideas, I could generate a systematic description and interpretation of the importance of food in the construction of personhood and social values. People do not always inform me about the importance of food explicitly. Indeed, sometimes, I could not elicit an explanation or opinion about the role of food in their life. Thus, in the analysis that I present in the following chapters, I blend what people say about their food in their terms and in their view with my own understanding and interpretation of what that means. Nonetheless, the description and analysis I present in this chapter systematically integrate the importance of food and social activities related to food with people's idea of being humans, being social actors, and being Mentawaians.

5.1 Making Gardens, Defining Humanity

The residents of Muntei carry out various activities to obtain food from the surrounding environment: gathering, fishing, foraging, and, in the recent past, hunting. They have specific terms for these activities. For example, fishing with a hook is called *pangabli*. Collecting small fish, crustaceans, and frogs with a hand net in daylight is termed *paligagra*. Gathering fish at night with the help of a torch or lamp is called *pangisou*. Hunting animals with arrows or spears is called *murourou*. Casting a seine net for turtles in the sea is termed *mujarik* or *muiba*. While there is a specific term for certain ways of obtaining food, there is also a general term for cultivation activities that produce food: *mumone*. The term is a verb derived from two words: the noun *mone* literally meaning 'an area of cultivation' and a prefix *mu* meaning 'doing something'. *Mone* also refers to any object of cultivation (durian trees, banana, sago, coconut). In short, *mumone* is a kind of forest cultivation comprising activities ranging from clearing forest, slashing weeds, planting fruit trees, raising pigs and chickens, cultivating taro, growing coconut trees, and so on (Picture 39 & 40).

When Muntei residents are asked 'what do you do for a living?', *mumone* is the immediate answer. They call themselves *sipumone*, which can be translated as 'he/she who cultivates forest'. *Mumone* is often referred to as *pangurep siboboi* (cultivating everything), involving a diversity of annual and perennial plants and animals through *tinungglu* and *mone* cycles. The result of *mumone* activities is *mone*, a cultivated area generally containing a combination of tubers, sago, and fruit trees. Physically, *mone* is a kind of forest garden that is closer to the Indonesian term *kebun* and the English term garden. Hence, I translate *mumone* as forest gardening. Essentially, everyone engages or has engaged in *mumone*, either in the past or the present.

The main difference between *mumone* and other food production activities is primarily the division of the spaces where the activities take place (Chapter 3). *Mumone* takes place in domesticated places (sago, taro gardens, etc.), while hunting, fishing, or gathering occurs in undomesticated spaces (forest, rivers, the sea). The division of undomesticated and domesticated spaces here is important. Sago, taro, and forest gardens are a bounded space where humans invest their labour and time in cultivation. With the regular presence of humans and constant cultivation activities, a forest or sago garden is not seen as a wild space. The garden is a place where humans socialise and interact. It is believed that unknown spirits may wander around and occupy a garden. However, the spirits would not be dominant entities there as the constant presence of humans would eventually make the spirits return to their places somewhere in the forest.

Forests, rivers, and the sea, on the other hand, are seen as infinite spaces and a limitless resource: a zone that contains a vast quantity of wild plants and animals ready to be collected, taken, and used for human purposes. While they are an important space containing valuable food resources, they are not human spaces. They are considered as the place of spirits and strongly associated with death and danger. Forests belong to *sikaleleu* (the spirit of the forest) while everything in the water belongs to *sikaoinan* (the spirit of the water). *Sikaleleu* possesses wild boar, deer, monkeys, and uncultivated plants while *sikaoinan* owns fish, turtles, dugongs, clams, mussels, and is strongly associated with the crocodile. All resources in these spaces may be taken by humans providing a ritual asking permission (*panaki*) from the spirits is performed.

Despite people appearing to divide their space dualistically into domesticated and undomesticated space, natural sites and cultural sites, the space of humans and the space of spirits, these spaces are defined not by a static dichotomy but in relative terms, according to the opposition and dynamics between the elements of each space, and, crucially, the degree to which the spaces are transformed. The difference between domesticated and non-domesticated spaces is the human actions and social activities that transform them. Undomesticated spaces are defined as realms that have not yet been transformed by human activities. Constant human intervention into undomesticated spaces transforms the natural world into a domesticated one.

The transformation of undomesticated into domesticated spaces is related to the two principal modes of human appropriation of the environment: making/creating something (*mugalai*) and taking something (*maalak*) from the natural environment. *Mugalai* is derived from the word '*galai*' (making/creating something) and the prefix *mu* (doing), as in the statement '*sibajakku mugalai saponia*' (My uncle is making his house). *Mugalai* is associated with intention, self-conscious activities, and something that will eventually provide a certain result that has already been imagined, taught, and expected. It requires planning and a longer process to provide this certain result. In contrast, *maalak*, derived from the prefix *ma* (doing) and *alak* (taking), is actions/activities that appropriate something without much meticulous planning and take a short time. As such, the result of *maalak* can never be predicted with certainty.

The idea of *mumone* as essential work can be seen in how people see the difference between *mugalai* and *maalak*. *Mugalai* sago and fruit gardens require a set process of thinking, imagining, and transforming spaces. A man does not come to the forest all of sudden and slash giant trees and all shrubs. He must plan

which part of the forest they are going to turn into a garden, how large the plots should be, and predict how much effort this will require. The creation of a garden requires activities that are carried out for years to yield end products. A man will certainly talk and discuss with the others before deciding to make a new garden. A series of rituals is also required. Large cooperative labour is not common, but a Muntei resident making a garden needs the cooperation of others, at least his wife, if not other members of their clan, to realise their imagined garden, as the land he will cultivate belongs to the group.

Hunting and fishing require the acts of thinking and imagining. In particular, planning and cooperation are important aspects of hunting rituals. In most cases, however, hunting and fishing are carried out over a short time and in opportunistic ways. Moreover, even the result of a well-prepared hunting expedition is unpredictable and unreliable, i.e. the result is not solely dependent on human intentions and planning. Even in a hunting ritual, the expected result is not always achieved and the expedition may differ from what was meticulously planned. More importantly, hunting and fishing are about taking something from nature without the need for much transformation of the environment. The act of transforming undomesticated space into domesticated space is crucial. In the words of Aman Reju:

> We are human (*sirimanua*) and do not simply take something (*maalak*) from the forest and eat it. We are thinking about how to open the forest, how to cut the big trees before we actually cut the trees, slash the shrubs, and clear grass and weeds. We imagined everything

TEOFILUS SAMEKMEK

Picture 40. A Samekmek man cuts a tree and opens the forest in the early stage of gardening (2018)

> (*anai kapatuatmai*). When we make gardens, we think about our grandchildren and grand-grandchildren. We anticipate what happens in the future. We think about knives, axes, and other tools. After that we plant banana and sago. *Sikaleleu*, *sikaoinan*, and other spirits did not do gardening. We do not know. The spirits have their own livestock. Deer, wild boar are theirs. But they do not feed them with sago and coconut. We are not like animals. Animals do not cultivate things. Chickens and pigs wander around forest taking grass and *leitik* (worms). It is important for humans that we eat what we produce.

A garden and the objects in it are extensions of the person who cultivates it. This is the main difference between humans and non-humans: humans produce their food and gardens, other beings do not. Gardening forms the most basic schema in people's culture: activities that transform natural things into social products acquire value and define them as humans. The ability to engage in this transformative activity is the most valued human quality. The transformation of spaces, the importance of self-consciousness, and the amount of human actions invested in those spaces are three important aspects in the identification of becoming humans. It is the product of *mumone* and *mugalai* that contribute to affecting the changes and relations between domesticated and undomesticated space, natural and social, spirits and humans. Both undomesticated and domesticated spaces can be transformed by human actions. These changes are reversible. Just as a forest can be converted to gardens or a settlement, the settlement can become forest when humans abandon it.

The importance of gardening is evident in the similarity between the terms used to describe its products. Sago palms, fruits trees, pigs, and chickens in the gardens are generally called *purimanuaijat* ('livelihood'). The term *purimanuaijat* is a noun related to the words *murimanua* ('to live') and *sirimanua* ('human beings'). The products of cultivation activities in the gardens (*purimanuaijat*) are an extension of *sirimanua*. Hence, plants and animals in gardens are not only seen as a source of livelihood for the human beings who cultivate them, but as an integral part of their lives.

People value their gardens highly and the food they produce reflects the importance of gardening activities. Because gardening generates value, and nature can only be dominant in its absence, people consider any food in the garden to have a higher value than any food just taken from the surrounding environment. Fish and shrimp from the rivers are desirable. Collecting and cooking them for family meals are valued activities. Yet, *iba-t-sinanalep* are considered inferior and are only consumed in the domestic sphere. Small fish or shrimps are never displayed on public occasions or offered during a lifecycle ritual such as a marriage or funerals. The low status of *iba-t-sinanalep* is due to the absence of space transformation and *mugalai* activities. Fresh water animals are obtained in undomesticated spaces whilst other *iba-t-sinanalep* such as sago grubs and are not really cultivated and do not require the constant labour investment required for pig and chicken husbandry. *Ibat-t-leleu* (primates, deer, wild boar) and *iba-t-koat* (turtles, dugongs) are culturally and symbolically important. However, the value of hunted game does not lie in the quality of the meat, but in its symbolic worth. The most valued food are pigs and chickens which require complicated social processes.

The different values attributed to different food explains why people does not eat raw things (*kop simatak*) during religious ceremonies, the most important socialised and culturally elaborated events, as taboo. Only cooked foods from domesticated spaces are eaten together in the ritual. It is not difficult to see that the prohibition of consuming unboiled water, fresh shrimps, or unripened fruits are associated with the absence of space transformation and elaborate social relations. Raw foods are easily consumed individually in undomesticated spaces while cultivated and cooked food are processed and consumed collectively in social spaces and require elaborate work. Harvesting, preparing, and bringing food from the

garden entails a series of social processes. Hence, people say that the best meal is a meal that is shared and consumed together with families (*kom simakere*).

Producing Food and the Quality of Persons

The importance of *mumone* is linked with how people define the socially perceptible qualities of themselves as human beings. Muntei people commonly identify themselves using phrases such as '*kai, si mattawai siurep sagu*' (we, Mentawaians, are sago cultivators) or '*kai sipumone*' (we are forest cultivators). Muntei residents believe that, as Mentawaians, they are primarily characterised by their engagement in social relationships and productive labour to make a garden and produce food (Picture 41).

Mentawaians proudly define themselves through activities such as being in the garden, extracting sago, harvesting fruits, and gathering non-domesticated animals and plants. Any person or *family* that does a combination of gardening and pig keeping is referred to as *mattaoi siburuk*, ('an old Mentawaian'). This term implies a degree of social prestige and recognition. However, this term is not applied to everyone. Younger generations living in the settlement who spend much of their time at school and then work in government service offices, and others who invest their creative energy solely in cash-crop production, are not referred as *mattaoi siburuk*. Instead, they are labelled *mattaoi sibau* (new Mentawaians). The term does not necessarily refer to an older person. Aman Santo (described in Chapter 4), for example, is a relatively young man. He is categorised as 'an old Mentawaian' as he raises pigs traditionally and processes his own sago.

DARMANTO

Picture 41. A respected person from *uma* Sakaliou visits and tends his new garden (2018)

The phrase 'old Mentawaians' is perhaps more accurately translated as 'people who are living with old customs', or 'people who are practising old activities', and has the figurative meaning of a 'genuine Mentawaian'. 'An old Mentawaian' has special attributes, such as a strong body, skills, and knowledge required for gardening and making food. The quality of the body is the most perceptible quality of an old Mentawaian. A strong body (*kelak tubu*) is a common qualification used to refer to a good gardener. Gardening or pig raising is strongly associated with physical properties. *Kelak tubu* is achieved through years of clearing forest, planting tubers and bananas, and grating sago starch. Indeed, almost all substantial Mentawaian food production requires hard labour and physical effort. *Kelak tubu* is a product of active and continual work in the garden. The term *kelak tubu* is also associated with a healthy body (*marot tubu)*. A person with a healthy body *(simarot tubu)* eats good food and therefore is rarely attacked by disease or sickness. A healthy person is a person who has been up in the gardens doing productive things and is always consuming good things.

For women in particular, physical quality, which is considered the result of activities related to food production, is important. Women with a stalwart body (*badagok*) are considered to be of good quality. This quality is the cause and result of food production activities. Planting and weeding taro, collecting firewood, and fishing requires a strong body and constitutes a *badagok* woman. There is also an association between *badagok* and reproductive ability and quality. It is believed that active and industrious women can give birth more easily than inactive or lazy ones. *Badagok* women are preferred as wives because they have the qualities for both biological and social production.

Aside from a strong body, an 'old Mentawaian' possesses certain knowledge and creativity. Making a new garden and raising pigs, for example, not only requires heavy physical exercise, but also skills and knowledge to enact rituals and communicate with the spirits. Gardening requires experience and ability to know the quality of soil, the terrain, and to transcend the perspective of the spirits. The process of clearing forest requires the knowledge and skills regarding cutting giant trees, the correct timing, ritual offerings, and asking for the blessing of the spirit of the forest. The process of pig keeping, for instance, requires a series of rituals on the day the piglets are separated and brought to a new place, when a pig hut is erected, when a boar is trapped, caught, and killed for ritual purposes and so on.

The perceptible qualities of a body, knowledge, and gardening skills are intricately intertwined with the qualities of a person. A very good person (*simaeru*) is referred to as a person whose body is continuously moving (*majolot tubbu*). A *majolot tubbu* person (*simajolot tubbu*) is active, independent, doing something, and making his/her own decisions. A *simajolot tubbu* is always doing productive things, either in the house or in the gardens. Another term used to refer to a good person is *mamoile kabei*, which means 'having hands which are always doing something.' A *simamoile kabei* is a person who acts and does something without another person's direction and is always busy making something; they never return home from the gardens empty handed.

The residents of Muntei differentiate between the quality of *majolot tubbu* and *mamoile kabei* with *mangamang* (diligence). *Mangamang* is attributed to a person who is willing to work or is working hard. A diligent person (*simangamang*) is considered to be a good one. However, *simangamang* does not always entail the quality of doing something voluntarily. *Simangamang* can be working hard when under supervision or when there is another person who sees or watches you. The person in question does not always have the initiative or the creativity encompassed by *simajolot tubbu* or *simamoile kabei*. The idea of carrying out a productive act of your own will is the definition of a good quality person. Here, willingness to do productive things independently is the quality that define the difference between a very good and a good person.

In everyday conversation, the positive quality of a very good person is expressed in terms that related

to gardening. *Simajolot tubbu* and *simamoile kabei* are referred as *simategle*: those who always use their machete. They are also called *simakbokbok*: those who always have wounds or a sore body after working hard in the garden. Furthermore, *simajolot tubbu* is also referred to as *simasabaet*: he/she who is always looking for a new place to cultivate. Social judgements about a person revolve around their ability as a food producer. The way Muntei people qualify the quality of persons can be seen when they talk about the bride-to-be. Bai Reju, the wife of Aman Reju has a say when her grandchild is about to marry a young man from a Sakukuret family: "Julius (Sakukuret) is a good person (*simaeru*). Even though he is educated, he has a large garden. He is a prospective husband because he spends most of his time in the garden. My great grandchildren will not be hungry."

By contrast, a bad person is someone referred to as being *takmei tubbu* (a still body/inert) and with an inactive body (*mabeili*). *Takmei tubbu* persons (*sitakmei*) is perceived as inactive, always sitting (*mutobbou*), eating (*mukom*) and sleeping (*merep*), all of which are associated with passivity. Someone who is *sitakmei tubbu* prefers to stay in the house and does not go to the gardens to do something productive. They have a soft body (*mamekmek tubu*) because they do not work hard or use their body for productive purposes. A *sitakmei tubbu* is not only associated with physical inertia but also with the deactivation of will. Being inactive involves a minimisation of social activity and will, a condition that often results in subordination to others. Moreover, being lazy is considered shameful as it connotes a constant dependence on others.

People have a popular joke for a lazy person. Once I heard people gossip about a pretty but lazy girl who was compared to a pretty nail.

> The new type of nails you buy from the shop is very shiny and pretty. The problem is that they need a very strong hammer. The nail did not work unless we have to hit the hammer hard. The girl will not give her parents a high bride-price since people knew that she has little initiative and will. She does not go to taro gardens and is afraid of being dirty. Her husband will have to be hard as a hammer. Her children and family will be suffering. The girl would be waiting for directions from others and will have no drive to do things on her own initiative. She is not a high-quality-person. Her parents-in-law will not be happy.

(Re)producing Men and Women

In Chapter 3, I described how the types of gardens are divided along differentiated gender lines. Sago gardens are for men, taro fields for women. However, the importance of food in the (re)production of women and men is not limited to the cultivation of taro or sago. The categories of men and women are continually produced through food production over the course of a lifetime, both symbolically and concretely. It starts when a human is in the womb. As a foetus, people say, there is no specific gender differentiation. All foetuses are commonly called *suruket*, those who are in protected places and who must be protected. A foetus has no gender until it is born, when it is referred to with gender-specific terms: a baby boy is called *kolik*, a baby girl is called *jikjik*.

An infant is believed to be a weak creature (*tak pei marot ketcatnia*). The infant is considered human (*sirimanua*) but it is not a fully-fledged social actor yet. Its body and spirit are soft and not familiar with the surrounding environment and the entities which have emanate power (*bajou*). For example, the infant is not strong enough to encounter the powers of the spirits of the lights, rain, or wind. If the infant encounters strong powers of those entities, it could be aghasted. Its body becomes warmer than usual and can become sick. To familiarise the spirit of the infant with surrounding environments, a few days or weeks after a baby is born, there is a minor ritual called *nemnem kabei*, which literally means 'soaking hands in water'. Figuratively, this ritual helps infants to adapt to the environment outside the house. In Muntei, *nemnem kabei* is carried

out to prepare and to introduce the spirits of the infant into a new environment outside the house.

The ritual is not particularly fastidious and elaborate and is sometimes part of a larger, more important ritual. During the *nemnem kabei* ritual, women in the group but particularly aunties and grandmothers engage in *paligagra* (fishing with net) in nearby rivers. Any small fish, shrimps, and clams caught are soaked in cold water, which is then sprinkled on the *jikjik*. If the infant is *kolik*, the men in the *uma* go to the gardens or forest nearby to catch a bird (*musiaggau*). Then, the carcass of the bird is soaked in water, which the *kolik* is then sprinkled with. The different versions of the *nemnem kabei* ritual provide a platform for gender differentiation in terms of productive work. A *kolik* is given water from hunted animals and introduced into the men's world; a *jikjik* is given *iba-t-sinanalep* and introduced to the world of women.

When the babies start to walk, their parents take them into the surrounding environment. They may be brought to nearby gardens and begin to understand their position in society. As a toddler, a boy is called *situt amanda*, a person who follows his fathers. The boy spends most of his time with his father and observes what he is doing. At the same age, a girl is called *situt mamaknia,* a person who follows her mother's steps. Girls stay close to their mothers and spend most of the time observing and watching what women do. Until the age of four or five, boys and girls may still sleep with their mothers, but from about this age, they look for their own sleeping place although some boys still sleep next to their fathers.

The gender difference becomes explicit around 6-10 years of age. At this time, girls are taken on a fishing expedition around the settlement but they do not necessarily fish by themselves. Boys accompany their fathers in the gardens. Once the children have been familiarised with the different activities of men and women, a ritual may be enacted to mark and distinguish these gender roles. In Muntei, this initiation ritual is called *eneget*, which is usually part of a larger ritual. This is the first time boys and girls are given *manai*, a kind of ornament that is worn by all participants in a religious ritual. *Manai* signifies that the children are strong enough and can fully participate in all stages of rituals. The most important feature of *eneget* is that the head of the ritual gives a speech and the boys are permitted to touch a bow and the girls touch a fishing net. This symbolic act pronounces them as a male and female subjects. A boy is expected to hunt and be a provider of ritual meat. A girl must be a good gatherer and a provider of daily meat. From the day of the ritual onwards, boys can go to gardens with a small machete and engage in male activities. The girls follow their mother's to the freshwater areas for fishing and gathering. They start to repair broken fishing nets.

The *eneget* ritual is the basic template for gender roles for the rest of their lives. Men tend to be hunters and engage in activities around the forest and the sea, including gardening and pig keeping. They go to the forest and garden with a bow and machete. Opening the forest, cutting sago, fishing, performing rituals are all male activities. Men lead all cultivation projects and initiate the harvesting of food. Today, they spend more time managing cash crops. Women, in contrast, tend to be gatherers. They go to their taro gardens with fishing nets to obtain small fish, clams, shrimp. They collect sago larvae and worms. Women may prune sago leaves or plant sago shoots but only the men are allowed to cut down a sago stand, chop it into pieces, remove the bark, grate the flesh, and extract the flour.

While there is ideal template for men and women, in reality, the relationship between gender and food production is more complex. While women tend to be symbolically associated with the domestic sphere, their activities are not limited to this area. In fact, women's productive activities extend beyond the binary of domestic-undomesticated space. They go to the margins of the forest to collect wild vegetables or firewood and paddle their canoe to mangrove forests to gather crabs and fish. They also plant sago and feed pigs and chickens. Some strong women can pick up coconut or fruit trees. The role of women beyond the domestic sphere is recognised, but not always explicitly, as will be discussed in sub-chapter 5.7.

5.2 Producing Food, Producing Social Persons

Muntei people, and Mentawaians in general, emphasise that all humans are equal, with an equal voice and equal rights. Each person is made up of the same elements: a body (*tubbu*), spirits (*simagre*), emanating powers (*bajou*), and a mind (*patuat*). Yet, in my observations, it became clear that not all persons have political equality. Young people usually follow the decisions taken by adults in the family. Unmarried girls' decisions and activities are occasionally directed by adult females, while young men's decisions are guided by male and female adults. Women and young people evidently have less of a voice and less decision-making power than men. Apparently, the main locus of political equality is the family, with the adult men as representatives of the family.

One of my informants told me that men have decision-making power because they have the responsibility as the head of family (*utek lalep*) and, thus, would take the consequences of decisions on behalf of the family. The patrilineal system means the man is the head of the household. It was also said that men represent the voice of the family as they inherit and gain access to ancestral land where they can garden, produce food, and sustain their lives. The ability to claim the property of the family (a house, gardens) enables each adult man in the family to assert their political equality and resist any subordination from other fellow male residents. Just as adult men represent the family, they represent the independency and autonomy of the family. A family's political equality is obtained through material independence, particularly in relation to food: the product of joint labour between a man and a woman. Understanding the social relations within the family provides a picture that reveals the role of food in the establishment of the family as an elementary social unit, and in the production of social persons.

Family, Food, and the Development of Social Persons

The family is, by definition, composed of a man and his wife, and their unmarried sons and daughters living in the same house. The core relationship of the family, therefore, is a couple working together to assert their equal position within their *uma* and to produce a person for the next generation. It is organised by the principle of mutual dependency and co-productive work and relations between men and women from different groups and relations between parents and their children.

The family is the core of domestic production and has dual functions. The formation and expansion of the family produces not only the family itself, but also the most important products of the family, i.e. children and food, for the *uma*. The temporal form and spatial relations of the process of social production in the family thus relate to two cyclical processes of transformation: the natural cycle and social cycle. Naturally, the unity of men and women in the family initiates the process of natural production and reproduction—sexual intercourse, pregnancy, birth, parenting. Socially and economically, the *lalep* is the starting point for a married couple to initiate a relationship as a coherent productive unit. Only through the family can an adult engage in structured and productive work and acquire properties (a garden, a house) to sustain and maintain the family institution. In the family, adult men and women are producers of natural products (children) and social products (mainly food) as a means to transform the former into fully fledged social beings.

The connection between the social function of the family and the development of a social person lies in adult men's and women's abilities as producers. Having several gardens with food plants and animals is a fundamental means for adults to retain their independence and for to raise their children as capable social actors. In turn, the children will eventually take over the position of their parents through their own marriage and the family institution, becoming social actors in the process. To be a full and proper social actor, a person must experience a series of social stages and a succession of physical and cognitive

developments over time through various social processes within the family and they must have a family of their own.

The production cycle the social person starts with natural relations, beginning when humans are inside their mother's womb. A foetus is not an independent social being, as it gets liquid food from its mother. The behaviour, words, and activities of the parents are important for the protection of the vulnerable foetus. The parents are expected to have at least a *tinungglu* with sufficient food crops. The bride-price in the form of taro or sago garden is important. There are also some food-related taboos applied to parents during pregnancy. When the baby is born, it draws sustenance from the mother's milk. A mother with a new baby has the privilege of the best food available for daily meals, including the best available meat. Muntei people recognise a connection between the quality of a family's food and the quality of milk and the condition of the child.

Physically and mentally, an infant is not a fully independent person despite the Mentawaian emphasis on autonomy in the early stages of life. The baby is continually dependent on its mother. It is not strong enough to adapt to its environment. People say that his or her soul is not yet strong enough ('*tak pei marot ketcat nia*'). The soul of an infant is not used to the surrounding environment and its body has little *bajou*. If it is taken out of the house, its spirit and body will be distressed as the infants are not familiar with the spirit and power of trees, water, and any object outside the house. The previously described *nemnem kabei*, together with nourishment from the mother's breast milk and good quality solid food will enhance the power and strength of the infant's soul and body.

After five months, mashed taro and banana are gradually added to the infant's diet to help them develop their muscular coordination and movement. At the age of around six to ten months, the infant develops skills and coordination. The infant will learn to turn their body, to sit, and to crawl. People believe that infants crying a lot at this stage, partly because the infants feel hungry and also because they are developing the ability to move their body. They are fed chewed sago *siokbuk*, pigs' liver and mashed taro (Picture 42).

Infants become children (*satoga*) at around two or three years old. A child starts to use their physical and mental apparatus to actively socialise with other children or adults other than their parents. Young children remain in the vicinity of the house, watched over by their parents or siblings. Gradually, they learn spatial and mental orientation, and can thus visit and play at their peers' homes. Occasionally, they eat the food of their peers, though most parents sternly remind their children that they must eat their own food. The common reminder is 'Do you want to be member of x clan?' or 'You no longer want to be our family?' when a father finds that his child ate at another house. This socialises children in the proper attitude towards food-family relations. The characteristic of food as socially nurturing means that parents can assert their authority over their children. Parents are givers and producers, while children are consumers and receivers.

The process of feeding and caring for a child over time results in the gradual growth of the child, both as a physical being and as a socialised person. Through socialisation, children experience the adult world. The *eneget* ritual marks the child's entrance into the domain of independence, where they can follow adult activities to obtain food and gain individual prestige among their peers. Beyond this age, no notice is given to puberty in a classificatory sense. Physical developments such as the growth of breasts and the change in a boy's voice, of course, mark the transformation from child to adolescent. Boys are referred to as *silainge* (the beautiful one) and girls as *siokkok* (the well-nourished one). However, this is not used to mark a definitive transition. The onset of puberty does not initiate any new phase of the lifecycle and is not ritually celebrated. In the past, tattooing and teeth-cutting were arguably rites of passage for teenagers, marking the entrance into adulthood and/or the eligibility for marriage. However, in Muntei these traditions are no longer practiced and have lost their cultural significance.

GERARD PERSOON

Picture 42. A woman feeds her infant baby with chewed sago and taro in Muntei (1981)

Adolescence comes with a gradual increase in both work and responsibility. The teenagers may work in the gardens and be encouraged to plant their own sago or raise their own chickens. Boys and girls are already productive workers, but they are not yet responsible for their own family. They still eat daily from their parents' food. The boys may be called upon to contribute to heavy work (opening forests) or the girls may be asked to prepare daily meals. They also learn to make a chicken cage or a fish net. Yet, as they are not yet independent, they work and produce something in the garden for their parents not for themselves. Adolescence is commonly said to be a 'beautiful life' (*malainge*) as boys and girls may still walk away from work and responsibility to have a good time on their own. During this phase, they are engaged principally in lateral relationships with their peers across clans, and more recently in attending school or working for cash. The only sign of independence is their reluctance to work for their parents and the fact that they are busy expanding their friendships and networks. It is at this time that their relationships are at their broadest and most varied.

Adolescence is in stark contrast to the next phase: that of marriage and having their own family (*pukebbukanan*). Married people enter the phase of linear reciprocity—repaying their parents for what they have previously given and producing food and looking out for their own children. Marriage is a moment of transition and the most important rite of passage before death. It is the shift from a position of a cog in the natal family household to that of an initiator and responsible actor in a new family unit. In the early stages, a new couple may still depend on the production of a man's natal household, occasionally eating at their homes. The bride-price may help the couple to have their own food. However, they are not able to produce the wide range of garden products necessary for a proper

family. Crucially, they do not yet have any children to feed. In the meantime, they are expected to be independent as quickly as possible. They are encouraged to have their own garden and house and prepare all necessities if they are about to have children of their own. They are expected to prepare themselves as fully independent social actors.

Food Sufficiency and Independent Social Persons

Generally, Muntei boys and girls marry in their mid or late-teens or early twenties. Recent generations may marry later as they undertake university education on the mainland until their mid-twenties. In the early years of marriage, young married men and women still tend to spend much of their time in the same-sex group. They may not have enough gardens and sufficient food. The husband's extended family may support the newly married couple and both sets of parents are constantly involved and devoted to the young couple's needs.

Only after having children do men and women gradually spend less time with their same-sex group and more time with their family. Over time, a couple begins to do almost everything together. The couple spends much of their time together in gardens to provide food for the family and cultivate cash crops for exchange. Men and women are most active in productive and reproductive terms for about 20 years after marriage. At this stage, the couple normally have several children, a few gardens, and construct their own house. As the child grow up, the family becomes a more united and cohesive unit. Meanwhile, sago and fruits trees they have cultivated are ready to be harvested. People often say this is a stage in which men and women would be ashamed of playing around (*maleak*), watched by their growing children. It is time to realise that they are getting older and must be wiser. As time elapses, with middle age and grandparenthood approaching, the couple becomes a truly cohesive productive and social unit. Sexual activity becomes less important as biological reproduction wanes in significance, and there is a growing emphasis on unity.

The gradual process of the development of the family as a cohesive social unit generates social status for adults. Among Muntei residents, parenthood is the source of social status. Only when they have their children and grandchildren do the men and women acquire status as fully respected social actors. This normally occurs around the age of 40. A man who has grown-up children and is about to be a grandfather can be called *sikebbukat* (the older one). The term is derived from the word *kebbuk* (older brother) and has the figurative meaning 'the wise one'. The female partner of a *sikebbukat* can be called *sikalabai* (the adult woman). The term is derived from the word *kalabai* which has the figurative meaning 'the experienced one'. *Sikebbukat* and *sikalabai* are reserved for adult men and women who have attained the social age and family status of a parent, at which stage they are considered to be 'in the know' and able to perform with the necessary level of mastery and influence, especially in terms of the socialisation of their children.

The status of *sikebbukat* and *sikalabai* connotes two domains at once: food sufficiency and status differentiation. *Sikebukkat* and *sikalabai* are a married couple who have children and who are able to run a household, cultivating and in possession of food and cash crops, and feeding their co-resident descendants. Producing children as a natural product and transforming them into social beings requires experience in producing food and maintaining reciprocal relations with kinsmen, and, to some extent, establishing a social exchange with members of other clans. *Sikebbukat* and *sikalabai* are persons who can make good decisions for their own life. Their independence means they are able to express themselves freely and do not have to live constrained by other members of the *uma*. They are expected to play an important part in the affairs of the group, to be the sort of person others listen to as a voice of moral authority, and to ensure that their children may also reach the same level one day. They have personal qualities that are associated with being independent, developed and manifested in the specialised performance of a variety

of ritual actions, leadership, gardening, and other respected behaviours. All these experiences teach a man to assert their decision-making and their perspective (*patuat*) in relation to others and to attain a sense of completeness, marking a man as a full social being and an independent social actor.

5.3 Food and Intersubjective Relations

The importance of food and gardens in the production of the social actor, however, is not just located in the family sphere, but also in interpersonal relations. When people show off the importance of their food and garden, they do not announce the number of sago or taro gardens they have cultivated or the number of meals they consume; instead, they tell of how, where, when their living trees and plants were acquired and with whom they were exchanged.

Sago palms and fruit trees are important not only as comestibles, but also as living property that can be exchanged and circulated with others to develop intersubjective relationships. As the product of an individual's or a household's labour, sago, taro, pigs, and durian trees can be deployed to establish personal and familial exchange beyond their group. Individual trees or animals are seen rather differently from land, which is communally claimed by the entire *uma* and (ideally) cannot be the subject of individual sale. Individual sago or fruit trees can be used to establish new social relations and be sold to acquire imported goods and obtain social prestige for the cultivator. They are individually owned but occasionally used by the group. Therefore, food resources owned by a family are important assets both for the individual family and for the *uma*.

People often say that they must have more than enough garden to both strengthen existing relationships and, furthermore, to anticipate future social events. Adult men always talk about the next few years when their son might get married. They have to be ready to hand over sago, pigs, and other valuable plants in the garden to the bride's family. They also tell me that they must be ready for potential conflict with others or, in the event that their children make a mistake, they must be in a position to pay compensation. Hence, almost all people have more than one plot of sago, taro, or orchard. These gardens are kept, despite the fact that some of them may not be being exploited. Despite having more than enough to sustain their needs, they are always making new gardens and cultivating new crops. This preparedness for social exchange with others in the foreseeable future is called *anai kakabei* (we have it in our hand).

The importance of food resources is linked to the basic principle of intersubjective relationships highlighted in Chapter 2: *paroman*. To achieve *paroman*, a social actor must be able to assert their intention and affect the other person's attitude, perspective, or orientation. The judgement about whether the relation is *paroman* or not depends on a specific kind of relationship between the actors. It requires social actors to form inter-subjectivity by influencing and/or accepting another's *patuat* (mind/perspective). However, any attempt to form inter-subjectivity is uncertain, not least because the mind is invisible and cannot fully be grasped. There is no guarantee that an act will yield the desired outcome from others.

A successful *paroman* exchange happens when two parties converge their minds and perspectives and agree upon the objects involved in the exchange. An unsuccessful exchange is when the actions and objects do not match the perspective of both parties. The term *isese* means that the relation involves both proper actions and proper objects of exchange; that they accept or to act according to the desires of the other person who has moved their mind. People say a successful *paroman* exchange happens when two social persons are 'having same mind' (*makerek patuat*) or when the intention and the will of two persons' match each other (*tuguruk patuat*).

A person with many pigs or gardens has a greater chance of a successful *paroman* exchange. Possessing garden products generates social status and results in the power to influence the mind (*patuat)* of others

and expand a person's space and time. A man who owns many pigs and fruit trees enjoys greater social status. He can acquire social prestige and authority, and expand social influence when he contributes his food during clan affairs. He can take on many social transactions, making him well-known throughout the region. People say that those with large gardens and many pigs are both wealthy (*makayo*) and have swagger (*magege*). The ones with swagger are not afraid to initiate social relations and make mistakes as they are always ready for social exchange, either *paroman* or *tulou*, because they have enough sago, taro, and pigs. In contrast, persons without sago or fruit trees usually avoid social relations. The lazy one is ashamed and embarrassed (*maila*) since he/she has nothing (*tak anai sibabara*) to start a new social exchange or to strengthen old ones. When he/she is invited to attend a ritual feast, the lazy person does not always attend because they feel shame at not being able to contribute a chickens or piglet.

The amount and the quality of garden products and other food resources, as well as the act of persuasion in any social exchange are important since they are subjects of the intertwined processes of remembering (*repdeman*) and promising (*janjiake*): the objects involved should not only reflect the past *paroman*, but also stimulate a new one. In the case of a new relation or the re-establishment of an old *paroman*, each party will enthusiastically recall the sago, fruit trees, or machetes of their predecessors in past social exchanges and promise their own possessions to ensure their next exchange. People frequently remember special events or specific social relations in terms of the food resources involved in the transaction. Men speak of remembering their allies as regular donors of certain kinds of gifts or as partners of *paroman* exchanges. By remembering and promising food resources involved in social exchanges, people are obliged, in turn, to produce their own food for future exchanges and prevent sago, durian trees, and taro gardens from disappearing.

Producing garden products and having food resources symbolise a person's capacity and potential to assert political equality in the web of intersubjective relationships. Thus, garden products have an invisible potency because they can become many other things in the future. Food resources allow an individual's identity to be distributed or expanded, as individual property is constantly circulated throughout the exchange network. Furthermore, exchanging sago palms or langsat trees constructs and maintains inter-subjective social relations, constructing and renewing social relations on an ad hoc basis. By exchanging these high value items, people create the web of social relationships that defines and binds them as a community.

5.4 Producing Food, Producing 'The Others'

Producing food and gardens is not only important for maintaining familial or intersubjective relationships, it is crucial to interethnic relations. Muntei residents have been in contact with non-Mentawaians—Minangkabau traders, Batak Priests, and Javanese teachers—for centuries. These migrants might spend a few years in Muntei doing teaching, trading, or both, but then move to the migrant village in Muara Siberut or return to their natal home. Between 2013-2015, eight per cent of the settlement's population was non-Mentawaian (Table 2; Chapter 2). Most of them started life in Muntei as traders when cacao was booming in the early 2000s. A few of them have married Muntei women and bought a plot of land.

Sasareu: Those Who Do Not Cultivate Sago and Have Pigs

People call non-Mentawaians living in and around settlement *sasareu*, which literally means 'those from afar'. *Sasareu* (*sa* is a prefix for a collective subject and *areu* means afar) refers to people who have no genealogical, land, or language relations with certain *uma* in the Mentawai archipelago. *Sasareu* is a broad category and can refer to a Niasan shopkeeper, an Australian surfer, or a Dutch anthropologist. However,

the term *sasareu* has specific connotations and narrowly refers to the Minangkabau people. Minangkabau people are occasionally referred to by their ethnicity, *sai minang* (Minang people) but frequently they are called *sasareu*. Other *sasareu* are identified by their places of origin or the name of their ethnic group. A white foreigner is a *sareu*, but he/she is normally called *sai turist* (a tourist) or *orang barat* (Western people). When he/she is specifically known to come from the Netherlands or the US, the distinction of *sai belanda* or *sai amerika* is used. This same applies to other Indonesians. A Batak priest is called *sai batak*; a Javanese teacher is called *sai jawa*. People frequently assign a specific or family name to Batak traders or a Javanese priest. 'Pasaribu has cheapest price for pork', a man would say about a Batak shopkeeper. This is rather different when people refer to the only Minangkabau shop owner in the settlement. People always use the terms '*sasareu*' or '*saiminang*'.

The use of *sasareu* specifically for Minangkabau people is part of a cultural and political repertoire in an asymmetrical ethnic relation I have described in chapter 2. Muntei people insist that the Minangkabau are different *sasareu*. In contrast, most Minangkabau with whom I have talked to about this, particularly those who are officials or government employees, reject the term *sasareu*, insisting that they are not 'faraway people'. This perception was clearly stated by the Minangkabau shop owner in the settlement:

> I am living more than half of my life here. We [Minangkabau] people are in the same island and living together for a long time. We have shared the same place, the same food, the same water, and the same air. I am in this settlement for years. I married a Muntei woman and have children. How can they still call me a man from afar (*sareu)*?

In contrast, his wife's uncle from *uma* Salakkopak uses the very same reason to reiterate the difference with *sasareu*. Here, I present the uncle's perception of the Minangkabau trader:

> He has been around for a long time. Yet, he does not do what we do. He and his family in Muara Siberut bring their own *arat* (practice and belief). He is living here for years. He does not cultivate sago. He does not do pig keeping. He could not cut or climb a tree. He does not eat sago. Always rice with chili. He is living side-by-side, but he would not share the same food with his parents-in-law. He is very close but at the same time he is afar. That's why we call him *sareu*, not only because he is from afar but also because he is far away. All *sasareu* are the same.

From the quote above, the uncle's wife identifies the *sareu* trader primarily by the kind of food he produces, and the substances and practices that constitute and form the body. The trader is seen as a rice producer and belongs to people who have cows, goats, and buffaloes as livestock. This is in contrast to Muntei people who are sago producers and pig keepers. Minangkabau people living in Muntei have mostly been traders, teachers, or, in one case, a Muslim cleric. They all do not cultivate sago and never set their feet in the forest. Other Minangkabau people in the area are mostly fishermen and traders, teachers, or government officials. Indeed, some of them produce rice fields in a narrow strip of land in Muara Siberut and keep cows and buffalo around their settlement. A handful of Minangkabau people in Muara Siberut have clove gardens and cultivate cacao in the islets but people claim that Minangkabau people do not entirely cultivate undomesticated spaces by themselves and instead pay Mentawaians to do the opening, clearing, and cultivating of these crops. This is rather different to other migrants. A handful of Javanese teachers who had been living in Siberut Hulu are remembered as very good gardeners and for their love of cultivating things. Batak and Niasan people are not particularly fond of gardening but a few of them have planted their own sago and recently cultivated cacao.

Muntei residents believe that the way people practice cultivation and carry out labour corresponds to the perceptible quality of their bodies. They quickly identify that *sasareu* are dark skinned (*makotkot tubu*) and have a soft physique (*mamekmek tubu*). These qualities are the result of specific work. *Makotkot tubu* is the result of working in the coastal zone as fishermen or constant work to protect their paddy fields from pests. The cycle of rice cultivation and fishing requires the *sasareu* to work under the sun. It is also associated with the colour of *rendang*, a famous Minangkabau dish made from beef and coconut curry. People associate *makotkot* with the colour of spices, especially chilli (*daro*), in the dish and the long process of making it. *Mamekmek tubbu* is associated with a lack of physical movement. Minangkabau traders are seen sitting all day long in their shop and no taking physical exercise. They do not paddle canoes, clear forest, or harvest fruit trees, so their bodies are not working hard.

This is in contrast to the muscular and strong (*makelak*) and light-skinned (*mabubut*) bodies of Muntei people. Cutting giant trees, clearing bush, and cultivating forest produces a strong body. In particular, a strong body is believed to be the result of gardening and pig keeping activities. Nearly all people, including those who were born in the settlement and spend most of their time at school, claim that they have experience with pig keeping and forest gardening. They are brought to the garden by their parents in early childhood and have the ability to use their body in any food-production activity. Sago cultivation and pig keeping is a critical attribute to the identity and definition of a Muntei person and the bodies of Muntei people are bodies that produce and digest sago and pork (see Delfi 2012). The bodies of *sasareu* are not. Mentawaians' strong bodies and light skin are also believed to be the result of a combination of production and consumption habits.

Aman Joni, a young father (28) from *uma* Samekmek once told me when I asked him what the main difference is between the Mentawaians and the people from Sumatra and Java:

> […] we are sago cultivators and pig producers. From birth to death, in health and in sickness, we need both of them. Before we were born, we ate sago and pork. Our mothers eat sago and pork and feed us when we are in their tummy. Before we have teeth, our mothers feed us with hewed sago and pig' liver. When we are *silainge* (teenager), we learn everything on sago gardening and pig keeping. Our strong powers are always used to cut sago palm, grate the pith, and bring pigs from the hut. When we marry, we eat pork. When we die, we need pigs and pork to release our souls. Our bodies are developed by producing sago, pigs and eating pork. Our bodies are always asking for this food. This is different to those *sasareu*.

The identification of the self and the 'other' in terms of sago and pig production, however, is not one-sided. Influenced by Islamic beliefs, the Minangkabau generally view Muntei residents as polluted and dirty like their swine. There is also a widespread belief among Minangkabau people that not only Muntei but all Mentawaians are irrational and undeveloped because they raise pigs and eat pork. In the settlement, the *sasareu* trader does not accept food-oriented hospitality from his wife's family, nor does he offer food to them, for this reason: her family members are dirty since their hands touch and their stomach digests pork, which is forbidden in Islam. He cannot use kitchen tools that have been used to cook and serve meals with pork, a perception is generally held by all Minangkabau around Muntei.

Sometimes Minangkabau teachers or nurses may request chicken or vegetables. Muntei people are never reluctant to provide this, especially when there is an equally valuable object (mainly money) exchanged. Yet, the exchange never involves processed food. If there is a public gathering in the school or village, the Minangkabau teachers or nurses bring their own plate or food. Otherwise, they usually ask the aforementioned traders' wife (who follows her husband's religion) to cook. They also prefer to eat in the traders' home, with his plates and spoons. This reiterates their perception of Muntei people as being

unclean or polluted. More importantly, it is a rejection of social relations.

In fact, *sasareu* is neither an ethnic category, nor a static identification; rather, it is a term defined through social practices. Muntei people always use food associations when they refer to *sasareu*. In everyday conversation, the *sasareu* social category simply refers to 'those who won't drink from our glass' or 'won't eat from our plate'. Equally, Mentawaians categorise non-Minangkabau migrants, even other Mentawaians, who reject food-oriented hospitality as *tubut sasareu* (*sasareu* par excellence). Alternatively, if a Minangkabau teacher receives an invitation to eat in a Mentawaian house and enjoys the meal, people will say, "You are from afar but you are not *sareu*" or "Your origin is *sareu* but your body is not." People respect any *sasareu* who accepts and invitation to a communal meal and are tolerant of those who are unable to consume pork. In such cases, they would offer fish, instant noodles, or chicken. Cultural identification is therefore seen as dynamic. It is highly dependent upon what a person produces and consumes.

The *sasareu* identity, based on food production and food habits, explains why people see themselves as having more in common with Batak and Niasan people. These peoples have been a part of Mentawaian social life for as long as the Minangkabau. They also occupy a social niche as middlemen who mediate the relationship between the Mentawaians and the state administration and regional economy. Most of them are teachers, traders, government employees, and priests. To a certain extent, they are thought to be as cunning as the Minangkabau; however, Muntei residents insist that the Batak and Niasan people are not entirely *sasareu*. In their homeland, both are seen as pork producers and eaters. By ingesting pork and sago, the Batak and Niasan *sasareu* share a bodily substance with the Mentawaians. The Batak and the Niasan are people from afar, but their bodies and stomachs are not considered *sasareu*.

Food, especially sago and pork, is seen as an important constituent of people's body and identity that is produced, ingested, and digested. They become part of Muntei personhood. Being a Mentawaian means being a sago gardener and a pork producer and eater. People identify themselves as pork lovers while *sasareu* are pork haters. The story of the origins of *Mentawai-sasareu* identification and the stereotypical pork lover and pork hater are enmeshed in local myth. In this myth, food not only qualified social relations between the ancestors of Mentawaians and *sasareu*, but it also engendered their differences. Pork was the food substance that resulted in violence and the eventual separation of the two peoples' ancestors. The myth of the originin of the Mentawaians as pork lovers and *sasareu* as pork hater and recolected are important elements in constructing and manipulating ties with *sasareu*. The identification of *sasareu* is borne out of an acknowledged difference and contrasting values with respect to forest gardening and pork consumption.

Food and the Resistance Against Marginality

In Chapter 2, I described the asymmetrical and hierarchical relations between Mentawaians and Minangkabau. The feeling of marginality has been deeply ingrained in Muntei life. Yet, there is a way for villagers to resist this marginalisation. Sago gardening and pig keeping practices limit the marginalisation to the realm of political and economical relations. The role of pigs and sago production is important considering the ever-growing *sasareu* population on the island. In the last few decades, the Minangkabau population has gradually increased and they have expanded their settlement. Unlike the previous generation, the current migrants are not solely civil servants and traders. Recently, some Minangkabau, Batak, and Nias migrants started to look for and buy up vast tracts of forest and land around Muntei as potential areas for cultivation and investment (as described in Chapter 3).

The practices of pig and sago cultivation are quite problematic for *sasareu* cultivation practices such as rice growing or annual cash crop monoculture (vegetables, fruits). The presence of roaming pigs certainly makes the expansion of *sawah* almost impossible. From the Mentawaian perspective, pig rearing offers autonomy. Muntei is the only settlement in the South Siberut that has little interest in government rice

cultivation projects. During the OPKM period, in the 1980s, people were asked to create a block of paddy fields from sago or taro gardens near the Mara River. Most of the paddy fields were created on flood plains and in swampy areas along riverbanks, slightly separated from the forest gardens. However, much of this rice cultivation lasted for only a year after the project was implemented. The presence of pigs prevented the state's attempt to sustain an effective programme. During my fieldwork, the central and district governments re-launched the old programme of making extensive rice fields (*sawah*). In 2013, 'a thousand paddy fields' programme was promoted by the central government in a bid to convert 'unused' swamps into rice fields. While Puro and Maileppet villagers are eager to have their own rice fields, Muntei residents are reluctant to convert their *onaja* to rice. The presence of pigs, people claim, provides no incentive for rice cultivation.

The presence of pigs and sago around the settlement contribute to preventing Minangkabau from having intensive social intercourse in Muntei. In daily village life, the consumption of pork contributed significantly to the barrier in interethnic relations. The presence of pigs kept the Minangkabau at a social and spatial distance, prevented serious conflicts, and served as an important cultural boundary. Most of the Minangkabau living in Muara Siberut do not immerse themselves in daily Muntei life. Food production, particularly pig rearing, allows the Mentawaians to simultaneously negotiate political equality in the asymmetrical relations with their powerful neighbours (Persoon and Iongh 2004). The importance of pig keeping and pork consumption is a central problem for the Minangkabau, particularly those in government positions. Pigs symbolise the stubbornness and 'dirtiness' of Muntei people. Development projects have repeatedly tried to replace pigs with Minangkabau-oriented domestic animals, such as buffaloes, goats, cows, and ducks. The Mentawaians have never explicitly rejected the introduced animals; indeed, many of them accepted them and raised them alongside their pigs. This does not merely represent the unequal and asymmetrical relationship between Muntei and *sasareu*, but more importantly it maintains their autonomy within this asymmetry. The differing importance placed on the value of food, especially pigs and pork, establishes the Minangkabau as the other, the *sasareu*.

5.5 The Taboo of Eating Alone

Muntei residents do not completely avoid a particular type of food or food group. Food avoidance only happens in the period of communal ceremonies when people are strongly prohibited from eating raw food. This applies specifically to shaman who have a primordial relationship with the spirits and do not eat the flesh of certain animals (eels, Siberut macaque) and plants (fern). People told me that, in the distant past, their ancestors ate everything. During my fieldwork, however, it was clear that there are animals that people prefer not to have in their meals. I did not see people consuming lizards or snakes, for example, but, as far as I am aware, this has no particular symbolic or cultural reason. The only persistent food proscription is related to eating. When asked what the most important prohibition relating to food is, people consistently referred to eating alone, especially if the food item is meat.

Drowned in the River

Nearly everyone in Muntei links eating alone with events of people drowning in the river. Since they moved to Muntei at the end of 1970s, four villagers have died in the Siberut River. The first was a woman in 1987, the second a teenager in 1998, and the last were both young children in 2004 and 2009. The accidents are associated with the wrath of a particular water spirit, namely the *sikameinan*. It is believed that the *sikameinan* punished the Muntei residents for not sharing their food. People narrate these incidents as important events that reveal how harmful enjoying food alone can be for their society. When recollecting

the latest drowning accident (2009) in which a Sagari boy drowned in Sabirut River, Aman Reju, the leader of *uma* Samekmek, had a comment:

> Nobody drowned in the river when we were living for many generations in the old settlement. In less than 25 years of living here, four people died in the river. There has been something wrong with our community. Look, two of the four drowned people in the river are Sagari while the others were from Salakoppak and Sabajou. *Sikameinan* has certain reasons to be angry. The way people died conveyed a clear message. We do not share food today as much as we did in the past. We do not have as many *punen* [communal ceremonies] as we did before. We rarely eat together. We are not together anymore.

The notion of the *sikameinan* reveals the common belief in the connection between food, eating, and social unity. The belief is that when a person consumes food, especially meat, in secret, without sharing it with others, the *sikameinan* will punish the person and the community. The role of the *sikameinan* in society is to be a punisher of anti-social behaviour, especially not sharing and consuming meat in private. The story of the *sikameinan* reveals the origin of the taboo of eating alone. Almost all adults in Muntei know the story. Here, I defer to a short version of the story told by a Salakkopak elder:

> Once upon a time, there was a man living with a kid and a sister. His sister looked after the kid when he was away in the forest, making gardens. He had been furious as his kid was malnourished and had lot of wounds. The kid was always hungry and crying. Apparently, his aunty (*meinan)* did not take care of him. She kept food for herself and ate alone. One day, the man brought home a lot of meat and asked his sister to prepare food. He pretended to go away but he was hiding himself to observe what his sister did. The sister put all food and meat in a container away from his kid and consumed it alone while his kid was looking for food. He became really angry and killed her. He then threw her body into the river. From the water, the spirit of the sister spoke: "I died because I kept food for myself. Please look after your kids and your grandchildren and teach them to share food. If they do what I did, I will take them with me in the water." The spirit of the aunt (*simeinan*) became *sikameinan* and stayed in the water. She will cause sickness and drown those who do not share their food.

Ever since, the *sikameinan* punishes people who keep food for themselves. Two levels of punishment are meted: at an individual level, the *sikameinan* sends a message to a specific person. The spirit enters the house of the perpetrator and begins to reside in the beam. Its presence causes the person to fall ill (*pangoringen*). The illness is non-specific and there are no symptoms. When a person falls ill, seemingly without reason, people are quick to state, 'he/she eats meat alone' or 'he/she does not share meat with his/her family'. Typically, the illness lasts for a while. A healing ritual (*pabetei*) must be enacted to cure the ill person, during which a shaman makes an offering of a plate consisting of a pinch of meat and a magic charm (*gaud*) to persuade the spirit to forgive the transgression. All members of the group attend the ritual. The patient confesses his/her mistake and promises not to repeat the act of eating alone. The spirit will eventually leave the beam and occupy the plate. The plate is then brought to the river by the shaman to be set afloat and drift away with the current, returning the spirit back to its place in the water.

At the community level, the failure to share food has direct and drastic consequences. The absence of sharing and the act of eating alone are punishable with death. It is believed that the *sikameinan*

punishes the community for this anti-social behaviour by drowning one of them in the water. An elder told me that, in the past, an extensive ritual had to be enacted to heal the community after a drowning accident. The victim's group was entitled to go on a hunting expedition to *Bat Simaruei*, a small lake in the south part of the island. They took one or two crocodiles from the lake, killed them, and ate them together in a very elaborate ritual. Only after they had consumed the meat of the crocodiles was the social order restored. Despite the fact that people no longer practice crocodile hunting, drowning incidents are still strongly associated with an attack by the spirit in the water; the same is true for people who are attacked or killed by crocodiles.

The relationship between eating alone, the *sikameinan*, and crocodiles is telling. The crocodile is a special animal that embodies and is the companion of the water spirit (*sikaoinan*). In a series of the most important Mentawaian myths that tell the origins of the longhouse, the shaman, and rituals, the crocodile appears with a specific task. The animal appears as the saviour of the main protagonist, an orphan boy *Maliggai* or a prophet figure like *Pageta Sabau*, who tells and teaches people how to construct the longhouse and how to enact a ritual. The protagonist was then killed by the members of the *uma* as they worried that he would create a social hierarchy with his ability to establish individual prestige (by acquiring special skills like the ability to construct a house and to sing a song). The crocodile is the creature that helps the Mentawaians to attain communal solidarity. Anything that resembles a communal issue can be traced back to the spirits in the water, *sikaoinan* or *sikameinan*.

We can return to the direct quote from the shaman from the opening of Chapter 1. The unity of the community is strongly associated with the communal consumption of food and sharing meat. The dearth of occasions and opportunities to share food as a community can be the cause of social tension and misfortune. Interestingly, people do not link the drowning with the cultural or social failure of controlling gluttony and avarice over food. While there are strong social sanctions on consuming meat privately, drowning has never been associated with greed. In everyday meals, anyone can eat as much as he/she can. At ritual feasts, everybody is encouraged to eat food. The more food the ritual has, the more prestige the organiser earns. The fear of hunger does not stem from the perceived lack of food or an insatiable appetite. A person who does not share his food is not punished for his ravenous appetite and lack of gustatory control, they are punished for the act of failing to share.

Why Meat Must Be Shared

While eating food alone is generally prohibited, this taboo is particularly related to eating meat. Sago grubs or clams and mussels are often eaten by individual collectors on the spot or in the garden. Bananas or rice are sometimes consumed personally, especially when people are away from the settlement. This, however, would never happen with pork, chicken, and hunted game. It is clear that not all edible plants or animal food are considered equal. There is a clear hierarchy of different types of food. Where a food item ranks in this hierarchy depends on how desirable it is for all categories of persons in the domestic as well as public spheres. The rank is associated with how it is obtained, where and when it is consumed, and whether it can be categorised as natural or social, domestic or public, or for ordinary or ritual purposes.

At the bottom of the ranking is everyday meat collected by women and staples like sago, tubers, and bananas. Canned meat bought from the local market is also considered to be in this category. These food items can be eaten daily. Sago, taro, and bananas are important staples for a ritual meal, but these foods can also be consumed at any time and at any place, either individually or collectively. *Iba-t-sinanalep* is at the bottom of the hierarchy since it is predominantly consumed by women and children on a daily basis. This meat is typically sourced from undomesticated spaces. The kind of food that is largely produced by women is relegated to the lowest category despite its importance to daily meals. Next in the hierarchy

are fruits from gardens, which can be consumed privately but which are usually enjoyed collectively. The importance of fruits goes beyond their nutritional value. To have ripe fruits, which necessitates laborious work to gather, harvest and bring them home, requires cooperative work between the men in the group. The fruits are usually shown off in a public display, demonstrating that the clan is in a state of unity due to the cooperation that yielded this harvest. The top place in the ranking is reserved for domestic animals (chicken, pigs) and meat obtained from hunting game animals.

Pigs are the most important animals because they are the only animals—along with chickens and wild game—enjoyed exclusively during ritual feasts. The importance of pigs, however, goes beyond their flesh. Pigs are a unit of measure used to compare the value of different things. For instance, a plot of sago garden (*sangamata sago*) is worth the same as a few productive durian trees (*duangakajuk mone*). This can be determined by ascertaining that both are equal in value to a sow. In this capacity, pigs are a complete abstraction; there is no need for concrete animals. However, pigs also act as a concrete medium of exchange. To acquire a large gong or pay compensation after threatening someone or committing adultery, the accused needs to pay a few large boars. In both cases, pigs are simply a means of exchange. A pig is also inherently valuable. The most important thing is that pigs facilitate action; the animal is a means to an end. Pigs have become the embodiment of value, the ultimate object of people's desire.

Pigs are therefore the ultimate measure of a person's productive activities, and thereby his importance. In pigs, people see the meaning or importance of their own creative energies, their skills and knowledge, and their own capacity as social persons. Living pigs can be exchanged by the individual owner for valuable imported goods. In this capacity, pigs can produce social prestige for an individual in intersubjective relationships. Yet, when the pigs are slaughtered and transformed into pork, the meat must be consumed communally. Here, pigs represent and embody the ultimate social significance of a person's activities; they become the means of one's integration into his group. Pigs integrate people into a contrastive totality, the *uma*, during the ritual feast or a social exchange with other *uma*. Therefore, pigs are the concrete material means by which the unity of the *uma* and the equality of members of the *uma* are restored and realised. Having as many pigs as possible becomes the ultimate goal of individual actions, but sharing pork to enact the unity of the group is the ultimate goal of *uma*.

Pigs bring equality in a way that is perceptible to ancestral spirits, siblings, affines, friends, and other clans that observe it from a distance. This generates its own contradiction: since garden products are not all valued on par with the pig, pig owners can assert their autonomy by keeping their pigs for themselves. Therefore, any pigs needed for a communal ritual risk promoting conflict and disrupting the social order.

Such tension is particularly evident from the split of *uma* Sakukuret into three factions. The clan are renowned pig keepers in Muntei and beyond. In 2000, the clan held a large funeral ritual for its great shaman (*kerei sabeu*). The new leader asked every family to contribute at least two or three sows to this ritual to show the other groups that they could have the largest ritual in the settlement and to show that they were a solid and united group that pays respect to their important community figures. One of the families only contributed one sow after the family found out that the other sows were pregnant. The family decided to keep the sow as they did not want to lose a valuable pig that could produce more offspring. Out of anger and in order to avoid shame, the leader brought seven of his own sows and boars to the ritual. His action was considered right but not proper. The families who contributed less felt embarrassed. They consumed only a little of the pork and this created serious social upheaval. Instead of creating unity, the ritual generated tension, which caused the group to split.

The decision to give or withhold pigs from a collective event is an opportunity for a family and the adult male, as the family's representative, to assert itself on the communal stage. Hence, as mentioned before, a pig owner always has a dilemma: to keep the pigs for his own autonomy and individual prestige or to

give them away for communal meals for the sake of collective prestige and communal value. There are also points at which the process of value production becomes contradictory and the constituent values of giving clash with the decision to withhold. A family may be reluctant to contribute its own pigs at the cost of disrupting the communal harmony or end up giving more in an attempt to gain potency and power, making other kinsmen feel insulted.

The Danger of Not Sharing Food

There is a clear connection here between not sharing food (especially meat), the danger of individual prestige, and social unity. Muntei residents have a high regard for individual prestige but view equality as the strongest principle. The two principles can sometimes contradict each other. Individual prestige may enable a social person to do something for himself, like create new gardens and then give away the produce grown in the garden. However, this same prestige can be an obstacle to political equality. The pursuit of autonomy itself tends to subvert equality. The added advantages gained when one obtains prestige can easily instigate rivalry and a sense of competition that can pose a threat to harmonious coexistence.

By producing a lot of pigs and gardens, a person can acquire social prestige. To make individual prestige socially acceptable and recognised, one must share his valuable possessions. Typically, people who fail to share their food with others, upon obtaining wealth or fame, become the target of rumours, gossip, and, in extreme cases, accusations of sorcery.[14] A man with numerous pigs can have infinite potency. This can be dangerous. If someone has a lot of pigs, gardens, and sago, he can potentially commit malicious acts and harm others, simply because he can afford to pay compensation (*tulou*) for any misconduct. In the words of one of my interlocutors, 'a swagger person (*simagege*) with plenty of pigs can do anything and be very dangerous to others.'[15]

Keeping food and not sharing it can generate rivalry and lead to a malicious act, which, in turn, can lead to the destruction of the community. A person who excels in gardening, with a surplus of pigs or fruit trees, is both respected and terrified. He can be generous but also dangerous. There is a strong perception that a powerful person has an unknown perspective on things and an undetectable mind. He may gain certain social status, yet if his wealth is used solely for personal prestige, he is quickly accused of betraying his family and destroying the unity of the group. This is why people are prohibited from consuming the products of their *mumone* activities alone, without sharing it with family and relatives. There is also a strong association between the invisibility of thoughts and hiding food from others. Unwillingness to share food and a tendency to keep one's *patuat* hidden are both perceived as anti-social behaviour.

One of the principal ways to prevent social tension and disruption of the community is eating together and sharing food, especially meat. Eating together and sharing meat are a way to negate the negative value of selfishness. Communal rituals and feasts have to be organised in order to heal the person attacked by the *sikaoinan* and *sikameinan*, to acknowledge the lack of unity, and to recreate the moral order. The ideology of food sharing and the taboo against eating alone are inimically connected to the potential of an individual to attain social prestige, and the necessity of political equality in the group and beyond. Therefore, sharing food and eating together are a must, either in daily life at family level or in a ritual at *uma* level, which is the subject of the next sections.

5.6 Sharing Food, Creating Relatedness: Daily Meals in the Family

Muntei residents do not consume elaborate meals on a daily basis. Instead, they emphasise togetherness and ensure everybody has enough food. The family expects to enjoy all meals together (Picture 43 & 44).

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Picture 43. A dinner of a Sabulat family in Muntei. All members of the family participate for the meal (2015)

TEOFILUS SAMEKMEK

Picture 44. All members of a Samekmek family sit together and enjoy a lunch meal (2019).

There are clear unspoken rules governing how relations in the family should be sustained by consuming food together. Food is placed on the floor with family members sitting in a circle. Each person has his/her own plate, and each member of the family is expected to sit down together at mealtime. A person will rarely have a meal on his own, without the rest of the family members, even in informal settings. It never occurs that someone takes his/her portion and stands away from the circle. If a member of the family has not returned in time for a meal, the other members wait until he/she is back.

A family sitting down together to have a meal is a microcosm of the community (and social relations), established within the family. The process of putting a meal together fosters unity and togetherness. Parents contribute the material while children may help with their labour. The meal set on the floor of the house every day also requires a transformation of substances from one form to another. The amount of work that goes into producing one simple dish requires a level of coordination and understanding that can only be achieved through cooperation.

Mundane communal meals both represent and constitute equality in the family. The equality is evident from the absence of any privilege enjoyed by the parents, as the producers of the food, in relation to the amount and type of food they get to eat. A very young child can sit closer to a desirable item (especially fish/meat) and have as much of it as an adult. A pregnant mother may receive the best portion and consume more meat but, in general, anyone is free to take any served food. The togetherness represented in such family meals forms the family relation. Eating is not only an activity performed by all family members together; a family member is also not allowed to eat a meal away from the house. Thus, there is a great reluctance to eat meals in other people's houses. Eating everyday communal meals with another family is strongly discouraged, even for children. This commensality is a prime focus of what it means to be an autonomous family. When visitors come to the family during a meal, they are automatically invited to join in and eat. Usually, the visitors refuse. The invitation is a gesture of hospitality and inclusion; the refusal marks the boundaries of the family.

Eating together forces family members to be equal and united. In the highly exceptional case that a member of the family cannot join the meal, he/she is given their portion of the meal (*musibla*) separately. The head of the family invokes an uttering to call the spirit of the absentee and tells the absentee's spirit not to be sad. The absentee is remembered and given an *otcai* (fair share) of the meal. The practice of *musibla* is not only relevant to living family members, but also for those who have already died. Especially when there is pork or chicken meat, there must be a fair share of the meal reserved for the spirits of the ancestors, which is often served in a ritualised but inexplicit fashion. The head of the family commonly throws a small portion of meat between the floorboards at the beginning of every meal[16] as an invitation to the ancestral spirits. This offering signals to the ancestor spirits that the family is remembering and thinking of them. It is an *otcai* that cheers up the spirit of the ancestors and reiterates the point that they belong to the household.

Food, Daily Meals, and Kinship Relations[17]

Eating together in the family has structural significance for Muntei practices of kinship. To Muntei residents, kinship is formulated firstly in biological terms. They have an elaborate terminology to describe their consanguine and affine ties. I will not repeat the usage of terms and the description of analysing kinship relations (see Loeb 1928; Schefold 1980). Instead, I am more interested in observing the importance of food in the daily process of kinship relationships.

In Muntei, the marriage and the family are the institutions that initiate and produce kinship ties. A marriage starts with an emotional relationship between a man and a woman. A couple will figure out the relationship long before they inform their parents. Forced or planned marriage is almost unknown. When the relation is serious and becomes a public affair, both parents may intervene. Otherwise, a couple

may approach their parents and inform them of their intention to marry. When both the couple and the parents share the same view, both of the bride and groom families prepare the marriage. A proper marriage requires elaborate rituals and the complex arrangement of the bride-price payment. The entire process is complicated and takes several months, even years, to complete.

The most important step of the marriage process is the formal induction of the woman into the man's *uma*. The induction is organised through a ritual called *paruruk simagre* (inducing the spirits). The ritual entails informing the ancestral spirits of the man's *uma* that the bride is now a member of their *uma*. The central feature of the induction ceremony involves the groom and the bride eating together from the same wooden plate (*lulag*). This is the first time the couple shares a meal in public. In the ritual, the bride and groom are given a chicken and a big taro dumpling. Eating the food together causes the spirits of the couple to converge, meaning that now they have their own family and must eat together. The person administering the rituals gives a speech, suggesting that the new family should be like chickens. Much like chickens, they have to eat together, know when it is morning and evening, become wise parents, and rear lots of children. Once the ritual is complete, the pair is expected to go to the garden or an equivalent space and collect shrimps and crabs. It is believed that these creatures will give the young couple the power of transformation due to their ability to change their skin. The creation of a family by a new couple is a transformative process, requiring two people to share their belongings to create a new family of their own. It also marks the transformation of their young single lives into adulthood.

In marriage, sexual relations and eating are intimately connected, as indicated by the importance of eating and the social permission of having sex. Immediately after the ritual, the couple is socially married despite the fact that they might not have completed the marriage ritual (*pangureijat*) yet or the payment of bride-price (*alak toga*). They are referred to as people who are 'eating together' or 'eating each other', which are euphemisms for having sex. Intimacy and food sharing are strongly emphasised. From this moment, it is taboo for a married couple to eat separately and spend too much time with other people. Breaking this taboo is considered to be a serious mistake (*masoilo*) that will anger the spirits of the house. When a couple commits *masoilo*, the spirit of the house may inflict illness upon them.

Sexual intercourse of a married couple, for Muntei residents, is believed to be a transaction and sharing of substances. It is said that both father and mother contribute equally to the creation of a foetus (*suruket*). The mother contributes to the blood of the foetus while the father's semen (*suat tigei*) produces the body. After the woman ceases to have periods, her blood will flow to the foetus. Marriage and sexual relations enable a pair to produce persons through transacting substances (semen and blood) and transforming substances (milk and food), through which they are now related physically and socially to each other. The importance of the blood in the production of familial ties is palpable. Blood is believed to be generated inside the body, primarily from food. This is why pregnant women and women with infants are given the best available food, especially meat. The quality of food is directly related to the quality of blood of the mother, which in turn is directly related to the quality of the milk and the blood of the foetus. With good food, mother and child can build a strong emotional bond. Blood, milk, and food are more than sources of physical strength.

The womb is regarded as the first house and home of human beings. In the womb, a foetus is not alone. It belongs to a set of 'friends' whose existence precedes birth. The foetus and the placenta are seen as befriended (*paalei).* The placenta is a friend (*alei*) and has the power to protect the foetus. Later, the *alei* can cause sickness and mood changes in the foetus so it has to be well guarded and treated. When a baby is born, the *alei* is washed and wrapped in clean and warm clothes. Then it is placed in a bamboo tube and given the mothers' breast milk (*suatottotnia*) and freshly-cooked sago, before being buried along in the ground, with an invocation performed by the father in a manner that recalls the burial of a human corps in the graveyard.

The quality of a baby depends on the quality of the mother who takes care of her own food (*pasikeli kokopnia*) and the baby's food. If the mother does not eat well, the baby will be sick and unhappy. Interestingly, it is prohibited to compliment or comment using the term 'healthy baby'. People believe that the healthy baby would eventually become sick, inactive, and unhealthy. Calling a baby healthy is considered arrogant and invites bad spirits to persuade the spirit of the baby to join them. To ensure that the baby is mentally and physically healthy, the mother ensures that she always eats fresh food, and, if it is possible, meat. Feeding the baby with good food will ensure that the child will have the ability to develop its mental and physical strength as described earlier part of this chapter.

Indeed, people clearly state that kinship is primarily formed by sexual relations through marriage and family institution. Yet, they show it also has a lot to do with consuming food together. Sex initiates the relations but food, then, is a constitutive part of the production of a person. Subsequent feeding within the womb, after birth, and throughout life, is vital in the production and sustenance of the person. The ties that bind different generations together in the family are just as dependent upon providing the right kinds of food as engaging in sexual relations and giving birth. Kinship in Muntei, therefore, is a process, created firstly by biological relations but maintained and reproduced through social processes. Sharing a place to live in and consuming the same food in the family is at the core of these processes.

Food and women are two basic elements that produce kinship and relatedness. Daily communal meals are largely the product of women's labour. The quality and quantity of food in the family are strongly associated with motherhood. In everyday meals, sago, tubers, bananas, and women's meat (*ibat-sinanalep*) define a proper meal. Women transform raw food into a meal and this transformation is only completed when it is consumed by every member of the family. The day to day sharing of food in the family cooked by the same women defines who live as family. If people consume meals together in the family, they are considered kin. Those who sit together and share a meal on a daily basis can be defined and considered as one family (*sanga lalep*), in the same way as those who share the blood and milk of the same mother.

By seeing it as a process of becoming, kinship has to be maintained and nurtured. Sharing substances and collective consumption lies at the core of this process. Almost all parents in Muntei regularly send a bucket of sago, taro, banana, and, during fruit season, sacks of durian or *langsat*, and smoked fish to their children who are living away from the settlement. Even those who have already married and settled elsewhere regularly have food delivered to their doorstep. The packet is usually welcomed enthusiastically. Young Mentawaians who attend education in mainland Sumatra regularly flock to the harbour in a group. The packet normally consists of sago flour, taro, banana, or smoked fish. The food they receive is shared in a large communal meal among themselves. The delivered food is a significant way to materialise commensality in the absence of physical presence in the family.

5.7 Women, Kitchens, and the Reproduction of the Family

The relations between women, food and kinship constitute the unity of the family. Women are identical to the family so that the word for women (*sinanalep*: those that are in the house) derives from the word for house or family relations (*lalep*).[18] A house without an adult woman is not a proper house because it does not have a *sinanalep*— mother of the house (Picture 45 & 46). This is partly because women spend much of their time in the house, especially in the kitchen, while men are absent during most of the day doing something outside the house. The unity of the family is maintained by the ability of women to have reproductive powers, both natural and cultural. Through their body, women naturally produce children. This ensures the continuity of the family and the continuity of the *uma*. Through their relentless activities

TEOFILUS SAMEKMEK

Picture 45. An adult woman makes *subbet* (taro balls rolled in grated coconut) in her kitchen (2015)

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Picture 46. The term for women (*sinanalep*) literary means the guardian of the house. The locus of women's space in the house is in the kitchen. The hearth and cooking are integral to the status and role of women in the house (2014)

in the house, producing food, feeding the family women socially contribute to the perpetuation of the family institution.

The kitchen and the food are the important locus of women's power and authority within the family. The kitchen is a special space that is integral to the role of women. The unity of the family is reflected in the number of kitchens in a house. A house has never more than one *sinanalep*. A house also never has more than one hearth (*abu*), no matter how many people live together there. The importance of the single kitchen for the mother of the house generates authority and autonomy for an adult woman, practically making her the guardian of the house. Adult males are not explicitly prohibited from the kitchen but they are rarely seen there. When men have to do something in the kitchen, they do it in a hurry and return to other parts of the house quickly. It is in the kitchen area that women enjoy full authority.

Women not only enjoy greater authority in the kitchen, but also in the entire house. They can sit on the terrace just as men do, and join them in welcoming visitors and entertaining them. They can sleep in the family room and do most of the domestic work in the hearth. Women walk freely all over the house as they go about their tasks: cooking, looking after children, cleaning. There is no sense of confinement or restraint in their movements or use of space. This lack of restraint is also reflected in other aspects of women's behaviour. Their conversation is neither dull, nor subdued. In the absence of men, it is likely to be particularly full of lively gossip and jokes, spiced with sexual innuendoes. Subjects of local interest, gardening, planning a fishing expedition, learning a new cooking technique, marriages and disputes are all discussed in a lively and opinionated manner.

Women and the Perpetuation of the Family

The presence of women determines the reproductive cycle of the family as a physical or social space. The family is established with a marriage. The family practically ceases to be once the mother of the house dies or returns to her clan. Without the mother, the house would be in disarray. No one would cook or do domestic chores. Children and the father would not be well managed and fed (*malilimai*). "*Makerek goukgouk sitakina* (they are like chicks without a hen)," as one of my informants aptly put it. Soon after a widower loses his spouse, he is urged to marry again to start another cycle of family formation. While this pressure to re-marry is placed upon widows as well, the more intense pressure to re-marry is reserved for widowers. A widow may continue to live well in a house, but the same is not true for a widowed man.

The widowed man (*sigobbai*) is considered more miserable than the widow (*sipulumang*) because it is assumed that without a wife he will not have proper food regularly and will not have anybody to help him to wash his clothes. A widower that remains in the house once his wife has died is unheard of in Muntei. It is considered shameful for men to cook, wash clothes, and do other domestic chores. Usually, a widower eats and stays in the house of one of his sons. However, the presence of a widower usually creates a tension, since he is expected to live as a guest, which can cause discomfort to all parties involved. A widower may feel embarrassed to ask his daughter-in-law for food or to partake in meals freely. As a result, a widower generally tends to have an unsettled life. Some wander around the settlement. Others stay out of sight by semi-permanently living in the garden. This is rather different from the life of a widow. As part of the patrilineal system, it would be customary for a widow to return to her pre-marital clan. Yet, in Muntei, nearly all widowed women continue to live in the house with their unmarried children.

Thus, as long as there is an adult woman in a house, the house continues to be a family. Adult women are able to live comfortably in the house without men, while adult men certainly have a hard life without a woman. This explains why women enjoy greater autonomy and power in the domestic sphere than in public. Women who have given birth to more sons certainly earn social prestige but they do not automatically attain more independency at any level. However, women who are industrious and diligent in

food provision will always enjoy both social status and power. This identification of the woman within the domestic arena should not be construed as merely symptomatic of their absence from the public domain. What should be stressed is that women's activities play a part in the self-sufficient of a household. Women ensure that the family is a solid foundation upon which men can build their authority. With the never-ending task of domestic work, the role of women is paramount to the reproduction of the family.

5.8 Sharing Food, Reproducing Community: Equality in Ritual Meals

The Ritual (Punen)

Sharing and eating food together are an integral part of a communal religious ritual. In Muntei, the communal ritual is commonly called *punen* (Picture 47). *Punen* is derived from the noun *kunen* (activities) and is associated with 'doing something which has a certain outcome'. It is closer to English term 'event', 'festivity', or 'ceremony' and has a broader meaning, which can be translated as 'an event out of the ordinary that requires a series of activities which have to be done within a set time'.[19] The term has been translated, adopted, and codified by both the Protestant and Catholic churches and has now been spread and employed across the archipelago to refer to any religious event, either for traditional religious or church- or village-based communal gatherings.

However, people also deploy the term *lia* or *puliaijat* when they refer to traditional ceremonial events.[20] People often conflate *punen* and *lia* or *puliaijat* when they talk about communal ceremonies. These two terms, however, have never been used for ceremonial events in the church. When I pressed for a more detailed explanation, it was revealed that these terms are both applied to, and are associated with, traditional religious ceremonial events but refer to different processes in the event. *Punen* refers to the whole ceremonial event, including the process and the series of activities such as preparing food, inviting guests, and making ornaments. *Lia* specifically alludes to the acts and events of the slaughtering of pigs and chickens, the enactment of invocations and offerings to the spirits, and communal feast. During a *punen*, *lia* or *puliaijat* occurs when all participants are present, animals are ready to be sacrificed, and a series of taboos are in effect.

Punen may be conducted for many different reasons or with a specific aim and have different durations, but are mostly related to major life events: marriage, death, and the inauguration of collective possessions such as the construction of a longhouse and the initiation of a new shaman. Other related events such as moving into a new house, curing rituals, making a new garden, or clearing the houses are usually integrated into the ritual for major live events. During my 15-months of fieldwork, I attended and participated in eight *punen* from six different *uma*. They included two *punen panunggru* (mortuary rituals), one *punen pasibitbit uma* (clearing the house ritual), two *punen pabetei* (curing ritual), two *punen pangurei* (marriage rituals), one *punen tinungglu* (creating a new garden). I found that other minor and smaller *punen* are enacted during or as part of those larger *punen*. For example, the *punen tinungglu* I attended in *uma* Samekmek was carried out together with punen *abak* (a ritual for new canoes). During a *pasibitbit uma* punen of Sakukuret, I observed that several minor *punen*, such as *eneget* for children, *nemnem kabei* for infants and *punen masin* (ritual for machine) for a small outboard machine they had just bought, were also organised. The duration of each *punen* I attended was also different. Minor and smaller *punen* last for a few hours up to a half of a day, while a large *punen* can be a few days. Generally, the more important the ritual, the longer it lasts.

The eight different *punen* I attended shared at least three common features. First, *punen* consist of a series of performative and coordinative acts to reinforce the relations between the spirit of the living, the

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Picture 47. A communal ritual (*punen*) organized by *uma* Sakukuret. Two shamans perform an opening of the ritual (2014).

spirits of ancestors, and the spirits who own hunted animals. Preparing food, inviting allies, slaughtering sacrificed animals, cooking food, and giving offerings are acts to establish communion between those spirits. Secondly, *punen* requires collective sacrifice. All participants, the members of an *uma* and invited guests, have to contribute food, labour, and other possessions. A lot of work goes into preparing for the actual event. There has to be sufficient food. Each family in an *uma* is expected to contribute sago, taro, chicken, and pigs. Days before the ritual, women collect flowers from nearby gardens and forests and prepare food. Individualism is suppressed by a collective sense of taboo. Everyone sacrifices his individuality to re-enact the unity of the *uma*. Third, the availability of pigs, in particular, determines when and how the ritual can be enacted. Affines and allies are invited to attend, usually a few days ahead of the ritual when pigs necessary for the *punen* are already secured. This enables them to contribute something, usually a chicken or a small piglet.

"Do Not Eat Raw Food": Taboo of Punen and Social Order

During *punen*, but particularly in stage of *lia*, all members of the *uma* are obliged to attend. A few allies and affines are also invited. The participants are prohibited from walking away from the ritual house until the proceedings have been completed. They also have to abandon productive work such as cutting trees and clearing weeds in the garden. Contact with members of other groups is strongly discouraged. It is also taboo for members of other *uma* to step into the house where the ritual is being organised. Flowers and leaves of *duruk* (sugar palm) are strung together around the house.

During preparation, usually one or two days prior to animal sacrifices and invocations to the spirits, taboos are rather loose. People still consume food in their houses or work in the gardens, feeding pigs and chickens. However, when sacrificed animals are about to be killed for the offering and a gong is beaten to start *lia*, participants must gather together and are banned from consuming raw food. It is also taboo to consume smoked or wild meat. Eating meals alone is also prohibited. Participants are also prevented from having sexual intercourse during *lia*.

Schefold (1982) provides an excellent interpretation of the role of food and sex taboos in the communal ritual. He describes that eating sour and raw food and sexual taboos are associated with the success of hunting expeditions. People told me exactly the same things as the Sakuddei people told Schefold. Unprocessed and wild foods are considered sour (*malagak*) and associated with sharpness. Wild orange or mango can make lips burn. This is interpreted as signifying that the participants could injure themselves with their sharp weapons (machete, spears). Sexual intercourse is a private relationship and, as such, contradicts the collective goal of the group. If a couple isolates itself from the rest of the group during a communal ritual, it betrays its purpose. The taboo complex is part of a set of performances to entice the spirit of game animals and to make the spirits of the participants happy. Taboo transgressions would make the spirit of game animals avoid the ritual and cause participants to get injured.

While I generally support Schefold's analysis, I observed that food and the taboo complex are not merely acted out symbolically. I found that the role of food is tangible and has a concrete effect. Firstly, food and sex taboos mark *punen* as an entirely social and cultural affair. All activities associated with nature are prohibited. Raw food is a natural product. Sex is a natural activity that all animals engage in. Hence, the aforementioned taboo on uncooked substances and sex are deemed to fall into the natural sphere. Anything that comes from the natural world is denied. Further food-related and sex taboos do not merely try to enact a symbolic explanation of the disorderliness of everyday life but are aimed at transforming disorderliness caused by selfishness of an individual interest—which instigates competition, rivalry, social tension—into collective solidarity through sharing the same substance (cooked food). Taboos are applied to all participants and aimed at suppressing individualism in favour of the unity of the group. The taboo of ingesting is not only meant to symbolise nature/culture, but also to transform individualism into collective actions in the social sphere. According to residents, every participant must be able to control his/her selfishness in order to make *punen* successful.

All food taboos in the ritual are a manifestation of the denial of individual acts and motivated by an ultimate collective purpose, given that the ritual feast is at the core of communal identity. The taboo is a guide for the social construction of a person, a directive on how to perform one's social roles. Thus, participants are prohibited from consuming or keeping their own food and must contribute to ritual food. They cannot participate in activities done individually, out of sight. Their labour is to be devoted only to the ritual. They must also eat the same cooked food. While outside the ritual, their daily activities may be aimed at obtaining individual social prestige, in the ritual, individual actions are coordinated for achieving togetherness. All these codes of conduct transform the individual into an equal part of the collective.

Feeding the Spirits: Food in the Punen Procession

The ultimate objective of *punen* is the communion of spirits—the spirits of the participants, the spirits of ancestors, and the autochthonous spirits in the forest. To come closer together, all spirits are required to be summoned and enticed. The invitation and enticement of spirits require *gaud* (Picture 48). *Gaud* are important offerings made to attract spirits through a shaman and the leader of ceremony. *Gaud* comprises diverse leaves, flowers, and food, and is a term typically applied to an item that serves a single purpose. Each *gaud* has properties and qualities (*kerek buluk loinak*), both physical and metaphorical, which provide

power and correspond to a wish or aim of *punen*. Each type of *gaud* is used to perform specific events in which each action is directed at the different spirits. However, the *gaud* can affect the world of spirits only through the invocation of the leader of ceremony[21] (*kerek tiboijet*). The energy or power that emanates from *gaud* has to be in tandem with invocation of human agency. For example, the most common *gaud* is the leaves of the *aileleppet*. The first leaves of the *aileleppet* plant are called on to lower the body temperature of the participants and to cool the angry spirits (the word *aileleppet* is derived from *maileppet*, meaning 'cool'). To give a certain and expected effect and affect, *kerek buluk loinak aileleppet* and *kerek tiboijet* of the shaman have to come together (*pasese enungania*). In the invocation, the leader calls out *aileleppet* and asks it to perform specific tasks that correspond to the element attached to it. In the hands of the leader, *aileleppet* are treated like conscious beings; *gaud* are objects vested with a sort of disembodied intelligence.

Leaves and flowers are not the only *gaud*. Food items are constantly offered to the spirits of the participants, either human, ancestral, or those of the forest and the sea who own the hunted game. Coconuts, chickens, and pigs are the most important *gaud* during the ritual process. When everything needed for *punen* is ready, sacrificed animals are about to be slaughtered, and *lia* is about to enacted, the *punen* leader begins the process of food offerings in the house by sounding a gong and uttering a call for the sacrificed pigs. The leader then comes to the house heirloom (*bakkat katsaila*) and offers *gaud*, consisting of several herbs like the leaves of the *doro* palm (*Arenga* sp). Some of the leaves are put in the heirloom while others are given to the participants.

A whole coconut fruit is the first food *gaud* to be offered. It is cut open with a machete, the flesh sliced and given to the assistant (*pamuri*), normally the oldest son of the leader, and to the youngest son. A slice is put in the *bakkat katsaila* as an offering to the ancestral spirits, and another is offered to the spirit

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Picture 48. Teu Rima, the shaman, makes an offering with a magic charm (*gaud*) in the mortuary ritual of *uma* Sagari (2014).

of the game animal by the post where the *bakkat katsaila* is located. The rest of the flesh is sliced up and given to the wife of the ritual leader and grandchildren. In the invocation, the qualities of the coconut are metaphorically associated with the aim of the ritual: protection of the group from negative external influences and prosperity and unity of the group. The shell of the coconut is symbolised as a protective shield that will prevent the penetration of external powers and spirits. The fruit also symbolises the power of life, bearing many offspring and sprouting a new generation. The number of coconuts deployed in the ritual depends on the number of families that attend the ritual and the size of the ritual.

Chicken is offered in the sequence of events**,** particularly to the spirits of the forest and water and the spirits of the participants. The leader of *punen* takes the chicken and gently swings it over the head of the participants, touching their bodies with its tail feathers. The chicken is then killed and its entrails (*lauru*) are read to predict the results of the hunting expedition to be conducted after the end of the ritual. In the invocation, the leader invokes the spirits of the hunted animals to appease them and to ask them to be hunted easily. He also calls for the protection of the spirits of the participants from negative powers. The number of chickens killed and offered is proportional to the importance of the ritual and depends on the reading of the *lauru*. A blurred *lauru* means that an animal spirit has not been appeased. Another chicken might have to be sacrificed until the *lauru* is favourable.

After chickens, pigs are sacrificed (*teinungakek*) as *gaud*. Each pig is persuaded not to be angry and is offered a flower and leaf *gaud*. The leader of the ritual brushes the *katsaila* stalk against the pig's body and asks permission to read their *lauru*. The invocation is aimed particularly towards the spirits of the hunted animals. The entrails, especially the lungs and the heart of the pig, are then read. The carcasses of the chickens and pigs are brought out of the house to be singed and later butchered, sorted, and divided. However, the chicken's liver, tail fat, right thigh, and the pigs' right leg are set aside by the leader and his wife and stuffed inside a few bamboo tubes for the next event. Later, this meat is taken out of the bamboo and put on the wooden plate (*lulag*) along with taro dumplings rolled in coconut. As the leader of ceremony splits up the bamboo and places slices of liver meat on the dumpling, an invocation is uttered toward the spirits of the ancestors by the *bakkat katsaila*.

The placement of liver meat into intestines mimics the position of coconut flesh relative to the coconut shell. The liver is safely positioned on the right half of the hearth. When the chicken is split into two halves, the liver is protected. The liver's power to protect, is activated through the leader's speech. Other slices of liver and dumplings are then offered to the spirits of participants and the spirits of the game animals. The liver is food for the spirits, the *gaud*. The leftover slices of meat are given to the leader's wife, children, and grandchildren. The rest of the meat is collected and put together in a bamboo pole, and later cooked by the wife of the leader. When the leader performs a series of offerings, the procession of the communal meal has begun.

***Eating Together: Transformative Quality of Food in* Punen**

The next set of offerings is generally performed in a manner identical to the earlier phase and is conducted by the leader of *punen*. The mood is more upbeat as the communal feast starts. After the gong is resounded, the leader takes more *subbet* in the wooden platter and breaks up the cooked liver and tail fat, uttering phrases similar to those accompanying the opening of the coconut. The presentation of the chicken's liver and its tail to the *bakkat katsaila* serves the same purpose as that of the presentation of the coconut: the protection of the group from bad influences. The tail meat invokes the ability of the chicken to run away from or avoid danger approaching from behind. In the case of human beings, the danger is from bad influences or spirits. The leader also invokes the reproductive ability of chickens so that it may help the members present to have many children.

The defining feature of the second set of offering is that they feature only cooked meat, marking a fundamental shift in the proceedings. The participants consume exclusively cooked meals. While the leader performs the ritual, the participants start preparing firewood, heating up a few large pans, and boiling meat for the communal meal. Cooking is crucial to understanding the state of *lia* (*mulia*) in which food is the transformative agent in the two themes of the ritual—the protection of the group from external (bad) influences and the resuscitation of the internal unity of the group—both symbolically and literally. In the penultimate stage of *mulia*, the cooked meat is sorted and divided into muscle meat (*akula*), fat (*lainang*), skin (*kulit*), and entrails (*siribaga*). An equal share (*otcai*) is put aside for each family. Boiled meat is then served, accompanied by taro dumplings and sago. Each family takes a spot and eats together.

The communal meal in *punen* resembles daily family meals. Each family has its own place in the ritual. The food is laid on the *lulag* platter or a large metal plate (*talam*), with members of each family sitting around it. Eating together makes forces each family equal and fosters unity. It is performed by the family in an undivided way, which realises equality, yet simultaneously marks the boundaries of each family. Arguably, food in itself does not produce these qualities. Instead, it is the transformative process in which food plays a central role that produces them. The meal enjoyed by all the families is not from the garden of any single family, but the result of the labour of all participants. Each family contributes pigs and chickens of varying quantities and sizes, as well as sago, banana, and tubers. All contributed food is assembled, cooked, spread out on the floor, and then distributed equally. The collected meat is all cooked together, in the same pot or pan, whereby individual contributions become integrated into a unified whole that is subsequently shared equally by everyone. Thus, through the eating of collectively produced and processed food, they perform acts of giving and sharing.

At the end of the communal meal, the leader of *punen* makes an offering to the spiritual forces. Taro dumplings and the special meat cooked in the bamboo tubes are put on the *lulag* alongside plant *gaud*. The leader performs the offering with his wife on behalf of all present. He utters a spell addressed to spirits of ancestors, the owners of hunted game, and living persons. The invocation is identical to the previous one, which is aimed at the diversion of sickness and bad powers and the attraction of a healthy life and good influences. Once the invocation has been concluded, the leader informs the *simagre* of the participants that they are now no longer threatened by bad forces. He also expresses that he expects they will grow as a group until they are old. A small portion of the taro balls and the meat is offered to the spirit in attendance before the heirloom. Then, the leader's wife and eldest male grandchild are summoned to replace the leader. The meat is given to the leader's wife who then gives the meat to the boy. Later, the leader and his wife exclusively eat dumplings, and the special meat cooked in the bamboo, with sago before the *bakkat katsaila*.

The meat consumed in the latest phase comes from the upper right thigh of the chicken. The form of the meat is round (*simuine*). As the leader splits the bamboo containing the meat, he utters a speech addressed to the spiritual forces. Then, he offers a slice of meat to the spirits of the ancestors, participants, and those that own wild animals. He calls upon the spirits to ensure that the group will be 'round' and that the participants will be 'united' their lifecycle to a great age. The leader then asks his wife to figuratively accept the meat he offers. The wife accepts, saying, '*ngemet*' (welcome) and both touch their right hand to the *lulag* platter. A portion of meat is taken by the *rimata* and given to his wife. Then they eat the food from the plate freely, without any specific codes.

If the *uma* intends to complete the *punen* with ritual game hunting in the sea or forest, a small ritual is organised the following day. A pig is slaughtered and the uncooked meat is offered by the leader to the spirits of the game animal and the ancestors. The invocation summons the spirits in order to appease them so that the hunters have an easy expedition. The meat is then cooked and consumed by the participants who are departing for the hunt. A portion of meat is put in the heirloom by the *sikebbukat*. Of all the *punen*

I attended, only one (a mortuary ritual of *uma* Salakoppak) was completed with ritual hunting. The Sagari men were successful in obtaining a turtle after two days hunting on the east coast of Siberut. The success of the Sagari men in obtaining hunted game accomplished the ritual and marked the definitive end of the *punen*. Other *punen*, however, were not completed with hunting. People say that the game animal can be substituted with a domestic animal.

Sharing Food: Bringing Uma into Being

All the *punen* I attended in several *uma* involved the killing of animals and communal meals. I have never heard of a *punen* occurring without pigs and chicken. People say that pigs and chickens must be sacrificed and offered to the spirits to be *mulia* or to have *lia*. Eating meat together is also a must in every *punen*. The flesh of a domestic animal is probably one of the most important offerings that can be made to spirits. Pigs and pork are just as imperative to rituals. The availability of pigs and chickens determines the timing and the size of the ritual. The ability to provide domestic meat represents a kind of potential for ritual action. We can return to the role of pigs, and to a lesser extent, chickens, as a token value and a way of obtaining communal ideals, explaining why meat has to be eaten together. The meat represents a value that can only be realised through it being giving away to others and consumed collectively.

During *punen*, all families are aggregates of persons; food consumed together is an aggregate of human actions (Picture 49). As in the family, adult men and women are the producers and contributors while children are consumers. Every adult contributes food and labour to the *punen*. Unmarried persons are not expected to give possessions, but instead their labour. Each family is encouraged and expected but not compelled to provide sago, coconut, taro, chicken, and pork. The role of men and women in *punen* is similar to their role in general. Women work in the inner space of the ritual house and perform a task of preparing *kat* (sago and *subbet*) and serve drinks (sweet tea or coffee) (Picture 50). The men perform a task of preparing and cooking all the meat in the large iron pan during the ritual process and determine the distribution (Picture 51 & 52). Every adult man does whatever he can to help prepare chickens and pigs, *gaud* and the communal meal. They work together to slaughter the sacrificed animals, singe, butcher, and distribute the meat. In such public events, men perform and display the act of offering. All tasks to prepare meat are carried out in the front space of the ritual house.

Whilst there is an arrangement differentiated along gender lines, *punen* commemorate an ethos whereby the only possible excuse for accumulating personal wealth and asserting social prestige is to acquire the ability to give it all away. Giving and sharing food, the product of human activities, especially domestic animals, generate unity. Any families who participate in *punen* have their own *otcai*, regardless their contribution. The contributors of pigs, and even the head of ritual, do not enjoy any privilege and are not celebrated. Each adult person and family has equal rights and obligations. No matter how much a family contributes, each family receives an equal portion of the food (*otcai*). A family that contributed all pigs will be given the same amount of food as other families.

Food, particularly meat, is the substance that sustains the existence of *uma*, evident from the fact that eating together is the focus of the ritual that is so important for group unity and identity. The meat of pigs and chickens is not only a product of labour and skill, but also invisible potency such as a person's magic and ability to transcend the perspective of the spirits. Pigs are valuable human (social) products. For pigs to become the life force of people, they must be consumed and shared communally. The absence of rituals implies absence of sharing meat. The absence of sharing meat is the lack of social relations, the lack of individual labour devoted to the perpetuation of the group.

Muntei residents believe that those eating together in *punen* are sharing the same mind and perspective (Picture 53 & 54). They are equal. They are a group firstly united by biological ties. Yet, cumulative social

relations are entailed by the pile of food on the *lulag*. The ties that bind the group can only be truly perpetuated if there is a denial of individual pleasure for the sake of the welfare of all members. If they do not share food for and in *punen*, they are no longer one *uma* and considered as different group.

It is necessary to emphasise that participation and contribution in the ritual is by no means compulsory. The leader of *punen* or the head of the family does not have any political authority to punish any individual that does not want to contribute to and participate in the ritual. Thus, *punen* is experienced and formulated in terms of a voluntary model. The participating families are independent institutions and social actors are continually confronted with negative (selfishness, individualism) and positive possibilities (togetherness, solidarity, equality) whose realisations are being grounded by the procedures in the ritual and which require determination of personal will. The communal meal in *punen* are the means through which social actors continually redefine and even remake themselves to generate political equality. By sharing and eating together, they reproduce and transform the social structure which constitutes the collective actions of each and every person in the *uma*. Food is both symbol and agent of solidarity and equality.

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Picture 49. A pile of meat ready to cook is an aggregate of human actions and social relations (2014)

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Picture 50. Women prepare sago and taro balls (*subbet*) in the *punen* (2019)

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Picture 51. Men prepare pigs and chickens the most important sacrificed animal (*iba-t-punen*) (2015)

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Picture 52. Men slaughter pigs (2015)

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Picture 53. Eating and sharing together in a *punen*. All members of *uma*, social alllies and friends enjoy food together (2016)

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Picture 54. All men, women, old, young, and children are equal. Sharing and eating food together bring egalitarianism in *uma* into being (2015)