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

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6

Festivity Without Feasts: Living in the New Community, the Emergence of Inequality, and the Articulation of Hunger

Thus far, I have presented quantitative descriptions of the availability of and access to food, the pattern of consumption, and ethnographic descriptions of the cultural and social role of food and food-related activities separately. I now bring the two separated descriptions together, conducting an in-depth analysis to make sense of the riddle of my informants' claim of being hungry presented in the first chapter. This chapter will start with the qualification of the statement *malaje* (being hungry) and the availability of and access to food. The second section analyses the relations between food and food-related activities with the production of the two most important social values, autonomy and egalitarianism. The ethnographic background of Muntei, outlined in Chapter 2, will serve as the historical and social context for the analysis in the third section. This part will discuss the social transformation in the settlement brought by market intensification and state administration, which generates social inequality, contradicting the value of egalitarianism. These three parts will provide answers to why people say they are hungry, which will be explored at the end of this chapter.

6.1 Plenty of Food but Still Hungry

Chapter 3 showed that Muntei residents have an abundance of plant food, both staple and complementary. Most types of *kat* have been adapted to the island ecosystem and socio-culturally integrated into people's social life. The most important types of food (sago, tubers, and bananas) biologically reproduce themselves by vegetative regeneration. Their biological characteristics and wide distribution allow these plants to provide the most reliable source of food in the long term. This is also the case for fruit trees. The trees last for generations and can produce enormous quantities of fruits almost every year. Ecologically, all types of food have adapted well to the island ecosystem. They are able to compete with weeds and grasses that grow wildly and quickly due the humid and rainy climate. They suffer little damage caused by animals and other pests. All staple *kat* provide a stable output, are not affected by seasonal fluctuations, and are largely pest-free, and thus have considerable potential as a food reserve.

Socially, all types of plant food are important components of both the social fabric and the physical landscape. The distribution of sago and fruit trees is evidence of the history of migration, the establishment of settlements, and incipient cultivation. Even though most cultivated plants grow without much intensive human interference, sago, taro and fruit gardens in particular are the result of human activities. Further, sago, taro, and fruit trees are valuable objects that can be used for social currency. Whether as an individual or a whole garden, these plants are used primarily to create, establish and transform social relationships. Not only are they important in the exchange of material goods—sago, taro, and fruits trees—but their primary purpose is seen to lie in arranging marriages, resolving conflicts, consoling mourners, making treaties, assembling allies, making gifts, or rewarding services. These plants are part of the local legal, economic, and social system. This is why people keep cultivating plant foods and making gardens even though they do not need to do so.

Table 33 below indicates that each family in Muntei has more than enough food. This is also indicated by the list of forest, sago, and taro gardens in the table and shown in the locations of the gardens on the maps in Chapter 3. The abundance of *kat* available in various domesticated zones produces a kind of 'ethic access' (Peluso 1996). There is a general cultural understanding that everyone has a right to access *kat* resources. Fallen, ripe durian fruits can be collected by anyone. Within an *uma*, asking for sago flour or a bunch of taro is a mundane practice, especially among women. This applies for people from different *uma* who consider themselves as friends. Food cultivated in the communal land is meant to be for every member of *uma*. A person can collect ripened bananas or cassava from another's garden if they intend to consume and not sell it.

Table 33. The Average Household Possession of Gardens in Muntei in 2015 (n=45)

	Average (in Local Term)[22]	**Average (in m²)**	**Content**
Sago garden	Three plots (*telu mata*)	6,000	75 mature sago stands and thousands of sprouts
Taro garden	Two plots (*dua mata*)	600	900 taro stalks and hundreds of sprouts, hundreds of banana trees,
Forest garden			
1) with a *tinungglu/ mone* cycle	Two plots (*dua mata*)	10,000	16 durian, 32 langsat, 18 jackfruit trees, 32 mango, 36 rambutan, 18 mangosteen, hundreds of bananas; a plot of taro garden; pigs, chicken
2) with a shorter *tinungglu* cycle	One plot (*sanga mata*)	4000	300 cacao trees or 60 clove trees. 4 jackfruit, 5 durian, 5 mangos, bananas
3) without *tinungglu* cycle	One plot (*sanga mata*)	4000	250 coconut trees; 5-10 pigs; 10 chickens; 60-70 clove trees

In terms of consumption, three families representing Muntei's population have three proper meals per day, as shown in Chapter 4. There are always leftovers of sago or rice after every meal. The presence of meat in everyday meals is also relatively stable. Shrimps, frogs, and small freshwater fish are served mostly for daily meals, especially in families that retain the practice of working in the gardens. Small mammals are seasonally hunted around gardens and eaten especially during fruit season. However, the regular source of meat is saltwater fish from the market. Their involvement in cash crop production and temporary non-

farm jobs are a key factor. Money from the sale of cloves, cacao, coconut, and recently banana as well as other minor products such as taro is spent on imported food which is considered more prestigious and tastier. This may be a kind of concession they do for the decline of traditional fishing and the rise of cash crops. The cash from off-farm activities is important, especially for younger generations and latecomers who do not have a significant number of gardens.

Geographical advantage enables people to have varieties of food. The settlement has several zones, both for domesticated and undomesticated food. The environment surrounding settlements has been heavily cultivated for edible resources. Low-lying areas in the east and northwards of the settlement have been supplying sago, taro, banana, and fruits. Muntei also has hills around the settlement where people cultivate cloves. The settlement is not far away from the coastal zone and few clans have ancestral land there. For half of the Muntei population, having coconut and clove gardens in the Muntei hills and the coastal zone provides them with not only source of regular income but also allows them to enjoy a regular supply of fish, shellfish, and other edible resources sourced around the coast. The combination of various domesticated and undomesticated spaces enables people to undertake both subsistence and market-oriented activities.

Why Hunger

Although there is no indication of food shortages, people told me frequently that they are *sitakiba*, 'those without meat'. Often, this term is followed by the term *malaje* (being hungry). "*Kalulut sitakiba*, *malaje kai*" or "Because we do not have meat, we are hungry." In South Siberut, the term *sitakiba* is more prevalent among people in the upstream settlements where, geographically speaking, they are far from the sea and do not have the skills to fish nor regular access to saltwater fish. Yet, the people of Muntei also often claim that they, indeed, are *sitakiba*. The term *sitakiba* might be associated with the access to saltwater fish, ability to do fishing in the sea, or the availability of meat. Yet, the data presented in Chapters 3 and 4 suggested otherwise. All the three families have meat for 90 per cent of their meals.

The term *sitakiba* is more likely linked with the decline of traditional food-related activities. As undomesticated zones have come under pressure, for example the forest being cleared to create cacao or clove gardens or a stream being dammed as a source of drinking water, fishing grounds have declined. Fishing in nearby rivers and streams is becoming rare, mainly done by older women. Young girls are now mostly busy with school, church, and doing homework. Another mode of obtaining food, hunting, is no longer practiced. The decline of traditional methods of obtaining animals is culturally important. Hunting and gathering in combination with pig and chicken keeping essentially formed the core of people's self-sufficiency for meat. Pork, chicken, and hunted game are the only types of meat that are truly 'befitting' (*mateu*). They are essentially part of cultural self-identification. The term *mateu*, and its association with satisfaction is not merely a reference to a physical state, but also a social and cultural one. Saltwater fish from market or freshwater animals collected by women are considered delicious (*mananam*), but not fully satisfying (*maektek*). Pork and chicken are the most valuable and desired, not merely because they are considered nutritious, but in the words of an informant because "they can be equally shared and satisfy everybody".

The importance of pigs and chickens lies in the ability for people to share them. This can be particularly seen in their consumption, which is never an individual event. Consuming domestic animals is always a matter for the kin-group involving particular social alliances and institutions. The owner of the pig can never freely decide when and how many pigs are slaughtered, distributed, and consumed. It seems that the contribution of pigs follows the principle "from each according to their abilities, to each according to the needs of kin-group." The consumption of meat, therefore, does not only correspond with the type of meal, the type of activities to obtain it, and the status of meal, but also with the value of the activities that precede

the meal. The consumption of pork and chicken, hence, marks the frequency of communal ceremonies, the ability of sharing, and the unity of the group.

The consumption of meat presented in Figure 18 below serves as a good starting point to find an explanation as to why my informants deploy the term *sitakiba* and complain about the lack of meat, the sense of hunger and social values this entails. The Aman Aturan family has the fewest ritual feasts. This family consumes pork and chicken together with other members of Sarorougot and invited associates from their wider network only once every three months. The lower frequency of ritual feasts means that they mostly eat in the house. This is rather different for Aman Santo's family. The latter had the most ritual feasts and the least family level meals. The number of ritual feasts of this family is double that of the Aman Aturan and Aman Alfon families put together.

There are many reasons why Aman Santo's family has a much higher number of ritual feasts. It is well known that members of Sakukuret are the best pig keepers around. They have plenty of pigs and chickens in different gardens. Sakukuret also maintain relationships with their genealogical line in Madobak, which have a more hinterland-oriented livelihood and have firmly maintained *sabulungan* beliefs in which *punen* is the most important social event. When Sakukuret people in Madobak organise a ritual feast, the members of the Aman Santo family are always invited. This is rather different from the families of Aman Aturan and Aman Alfon. They obviously are not pig keepers and members of *uma* that have moved entirely into Muntei and are devoted to cash crop production. Only two members of *uma* Saruruk have pigs. The other twenty have spent much time in the coastal zone, cultivating coconuts and producing copra, with less time to have ritual feasts. The less frequent ritual feasting of Saruruk and Sarorougot gives an indication that communal feasts are perhaps less frequent for *uma* with all their members and affiliates living in Muntei.

It is worth emphasising that the livelihood strategies do not necessarily affect the ability to have a ritual feast; *punen* is not just organised because someone has many pigs. The reasons for having *punen* are myriad, and livelihood preference has no direct consequence. A teacher who has a regular salary might have more *punen* than pig keepers as pigs nowadays are available regularly in the local market. Certainly, Aman Aturan and Aman Alfon families have money from cash crops and can afford meat—as they demonstrate with their purchase of saltwater fish. At the same time, the timing and decision of having ritual feasts are certainly not determined solely by the availability of cash. These animals cannot just be bought, slaughtered, and enjoyed whenever cash is available.

Nonetheless, the lack of eating *iba-t-punen* means that the family and the group have less events to share and eat together. This is apparently the case for the Aman Aturan family; Aman Aturan regularly complained about the lack of ritual feasting (*punen*) in his *uma* and he deployed the term '*malaje*' and 'without meat' to explain their lack of togetherness. He frequently expressed bitter remorse that Sarorougot is the smallest clan and rarely has a ritual feast. He considers that their life is harder than others because his *uma* has a small number of families and it lacks a wider social network. Their genealogical relatives are far away in Taileleu and they have long been out of contact with them. If there is a problem, nobody helps them. He frequently cites the fact that he has to pay education fees for his son by himself. When he is ill from *gout*, none of his relatives brings him pigs and chickens for a curing ritual. While his family is staying in the settlement, the other two families are busy keeping their coconut gardens in the *nusa*. As all households have focused on cash crop production, the Sarorougot lack the resources for a communal feas.

After listening carefully to Aman Aturan's complaint and analysing quantitative data, only gradually did I come to understand the subtlest messages that were ingrained in the '*sitakiba*' or '*malaje*' statements. I recalled my earlier experience in 2004 when, as an undergraduate student, I visited Ugai hamlet upstream to do research on forest cultivation. A man asked me why I left a city in Java and decided to stay in their village. The question was posed as his wife prepared dinner. This question was followed by another about

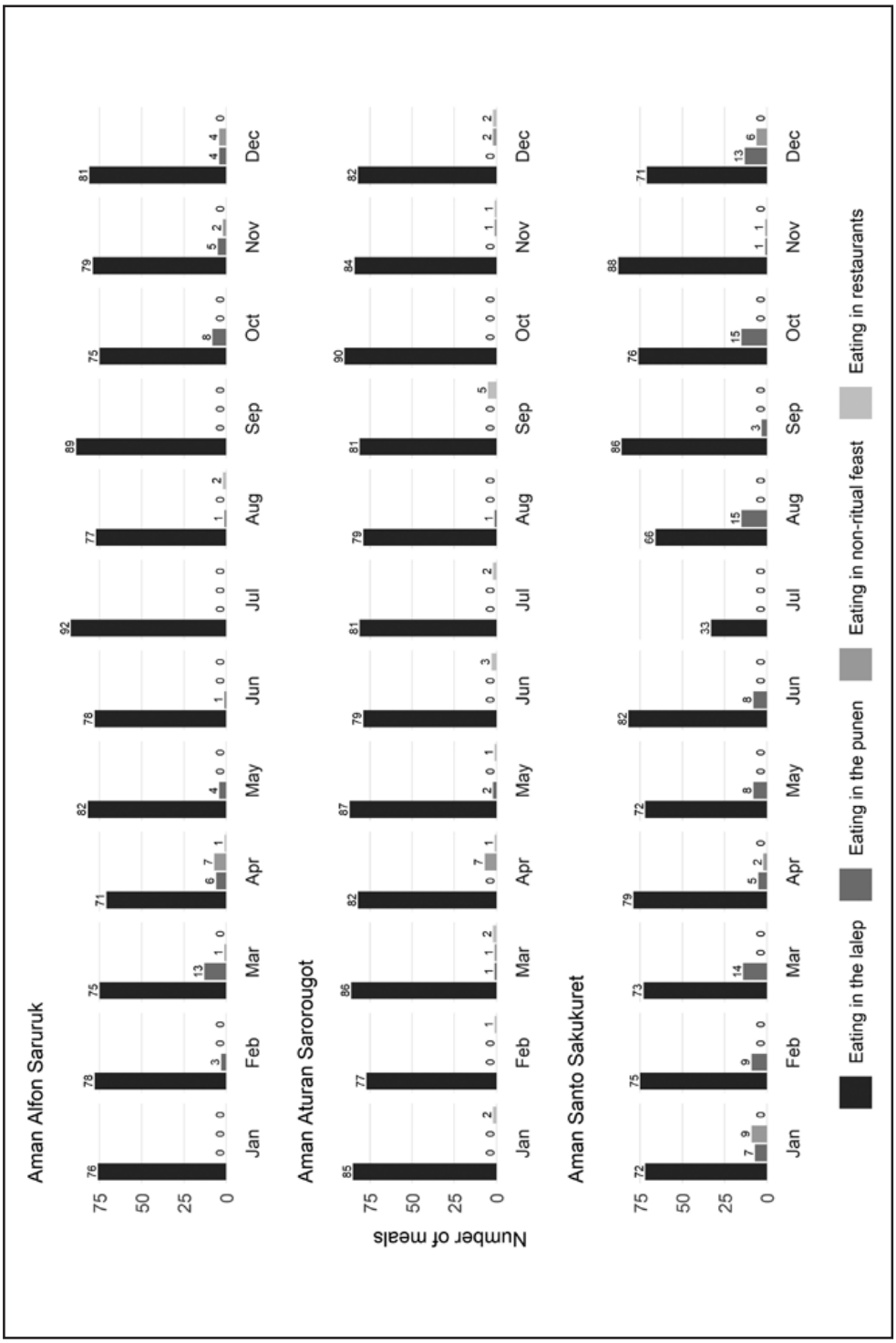

Figure 18. Modes of Eating of Three Families in Muntei (2013)

why I had abandoned what they considered to be a privileged life on the mainland—the land of rice, paved roads, luxuries, and above all, bountiful meat. It was not that the village was facing a dearth of food, causing them to worry. Ugai is a good place with plenty of banana, sago, and taro. Yet, they could not comprehend that I had made a choice to leave the city and stay in a place where I had to eat sago and taro.

While they understood that I brought a small amount of scholarship funds with me, my host was afraid that I would be hungry. He was worried that I would find it difficult to eat sago or taro every day. "We do not have rice. Your belly will not be happy. Your soul will not be happy. Eventually, you will get sick." There was a sense that I would be hungry if I consumed unfamiliar food. There was also a sense that I would have trouble eating alone and without family. As every family has *punen*, I am the only person in the settlement who will not enjoy eating together and consuming domestic animals. They referred to my loneliness as *malaje* as nobody would share food and eat together with me.

In understanding the cultural meaning of *malaje* (being hungry), it became clear that the term is deployed more as social and cultural statement. The term *sitakiba* or *malaje* does not necessarily convey the condition of absence or lack of meat. The term *sitakiba* has a deeper meaning if we consider the cultural meaning of meat and what it embodies. Having enough meat equates to being socially and physically satisfied. Another layer of meaning to 'being hungry' is added when there is meat but not enough to share it with others. The term *sitakiba* is strongly associated with a person/family who lacks communal feasts. Aman Aturan is just one of the families that use this word frequently. Without a communal feast, they do not have meat that can be distributed, shared, and consumed. The words '*iba*' and '*hunger*', therefore, are closely associated with sharing meat with each other. They are hungry because they have meat but cannot share it with others.

Furthermore, people use the idiom *malaje* to indicate that they have encountered a failure of social relations. They say *malaje* when they are left alone to feel their loneliness. They are *malaje* when they have no relatives and are far away from domesticated places. Here, *malaje* is the state of a person being outside the community. It is attached to a person who is removed from his or her social milieu. When people refer to hunger, it is primarily a reference to the lack of sociality or social relationship that manifests in the absence of sharing and eating together. Thus, being hungry is closely related to a lack of solidarity and togetherness.

6.2 Food, Actions, and Social Values

Chapters 4 and 5 describe gardening as the most valued activity. The process of opening and clearing undomesticated forest to create a garden full of plant foods and domestic animals is the underlying schema of life in Muntei and it delineates the most basic values. The villagers value the actions of gardening and the product of gardens because, for them, they epitomise the process of transforming the undomesticated (natural) into the domesticated (social). Gardening and the garden embody social values in the sense that they require and result in cooperation and social relations. A garden is certainly not established by an individual but by a man and woman in the context of the family institution. Social relations are required to create gardens, which have, in this sense, become social products. Producing food through gardens is thus the concretisation of conscious and productive human actions and also the epitome of the values held for them.

My analysis suggests that there is an idea behind the importance of human actions in gardening: in order to live, people must eat and work. Work continually consumes energy that is produced by the consumption of food, which, in turn, is acquired by transforming natural spaces and products into consumables through a set of social activities and transformative processes. For transforming undomesticated spaces and raw

food into a meal, people require social relations. Only humans have the ability to make this transformation. Only humans process raw food into cooked food. Transforming natural products through cultivation and the processing of food resources into a meal defines people's humanity.

Producing food is also valued since it defines the socially perceptible qualities of people in Muntei, both as human beings and as Mentawaians. Producing food is inseparable to the qualification of person, gender differentiation, labour division, and the reproduction of family as the basic social unit and the reproduction of *uma* as the basic social organisation. Producing food is also crucial for the process of self-identification and for the construction of the other, as described in Chapter 5. People see food as having both inherent and acquired attributes, which are imparted upon those who produce and ingest them. Gardening and pig keeping are concrete activities that maintain the political autonomy of Muntei people amid the intrusion of interethnic social relations with Minangkabau and other migrants. Therefore, planting sago or tending to pigs is better understood as part of the wider process of constructing a social person and society itself, rather than merely as the production of material subsistence, despite it including the latter.

Producing and having plenty of food resources, either animals and plants, are associated with the ability of a social person to have 'power' and 'potency'. Possessing gardens and pigs is evidence of a person's prestige and also a means for producing prestige. Having lots of animal and plant food generates an aura of independence. It contributes to the constitution of an individual actor as an autonomous social being and a family as the basic autonomous social unit. The will of being autonomous motivates and activates people to create new gardens and then to exchange its products. It also enables a person to initiate a new social exchange, but also to re-establish and expand existing ones. By having regular social exchange of garden products, men circulate and attain social prestige and autonomy. This is because an individual's identity is distributed or expanded as his garden products are increasingly circulated throughout the exchange network. Further, exchanging garden products constructs and maintains intersubjective social relations, and builds and renews social relations on an ad hoc basis. By exchanging these highly valued items, people create the web of social relationships that define and bind them as a community.

What Kind of a Valued Social Person? The Importance of Autonomy

What kind of social persons do people value? In Chapters 5, I tried to describe that activities related to the production of food contribute to the positive construction of a social actor. A good gardener is a good human being. A good gardener always keeps himself busy and is making something. As a result, he/she is never dependent upon others. He/she is not subordinate to others. Essentially, he has autonomous or sovereign will— decision-making power. Therefore, autonomy is valued as the ultimate basis for action for a social person. This is in contrast to people who do not produce something. A person without a garden is one who engages a minimum of social activity and will, a condition that can easily subject them to subordination by others. He has no gardens and no food, and his motionless body possesses immobility *patuat* (perspective). Being lazy or inactive (*mabeili)* is considered shameful as it signifies always being dependent on others. A person without a garden never has autonomy. Here, autonomy and willingness to act productively and independently are the qualities of a social person.

Indeed, the term autonomy is not an *emic* term postulated by people themselves but a term I deploy to define qualities produced by the relative amounts of activities or actions involved in producing food and gardens. The range of the social activities they engage in throughout their everyday lives in producing food is ultimately aimed at turning themselves into a decision maker or the locus of decision-making. The level of activities or action is not necessarily the amount of time and energy necessary to produce a garden or to have food, but rather the amount of time and energy deemed culturally necessary, which often exceeds the minimum amount necessary to get the job done. The activities must be part of total social life. The value

attributed to certain task/activities is, therefore, a relative measure of its socially defined importance. Here, being an autonomous, independent person is the ultimate value for an individual and family as it is the basis of any social relations. Autonomy is the quality attached to a good adult person or to a *family*.

Now, we can clearly see the parallel of producing persons and the production of food, as well as the link between them. The autonomy and political equality of an adult person or a family are acquired through the capacity to have sufficient food. By feeding themselves, adults in the family can nurture and feed their children, infusing them with the value of autonomy and developing the children into autonomous social beings. Hence, the autonomy of a person is inseparable from the state of self-sufficiency. Autonomy and self-sufficiency are made visible by the products of garden labour. Self-sufficiency is a necessary characteristic of autonomy; it is the opposite to dependency and being hungry. Food is not only a symbol of nurturing but an active agent to transform nurture and to create autonomy. Producing food contributes to the production of autonomy as a social value. Activities such as planting, tending, cooking, and especially gardening, are highly valued as they give a person sufficient amounts of food, which forms the basis of social actions and valuation.

A person's autonomy can only be attained through the family, a social institution that enables men and women to share their labour and produce their own food. Ideally, autonomy applies to everyone, but in fact it occurs primarily among adult or married men. Women and young men are regarded as autonomous but they have little opportunity to express themselves and little voice in public matters. They are not fully autonomous subjects since they depend on adult men to access food (property, land, and labour). Autonomy is a basic quality for social actors within the family since it gives them an equal voice. Within an *uma*, each family must be autonomous and politically equal. *Uma*, the immediate collective matrix or social identity of the self and family, must be autonomous and equal within the wider Mentawaian whole. In short, food is of tremendous significance in terms of the status and the quality attached to a person's autonomy. Without food and gardens, an adult person or family or *uma* is negatively valued. With plenty of food and gardens, they are positively valued.

Sharing and Eating Together: Producing Communal Value

Although all activities related to food production are valued, people also value certain activities related to food: sharing and eating together. While autonomy is a core value, it can also instigate rivalry and competition that pose a danger to the mutual co-existence between individuals and families. Possessing plenty of gardens can generate a negative valuation since it can be dangerous, subterranean, and a threat to the cohesiveness of the community. While having plenty of food is dangerous, the ultimate taboo is eating alone. Keeping food for yourself is strongly prohibited as it is the ultimate manifestation of selfishness, the extreme version of autonomy. It is seen as a threat to society as it prevents development of social relations. Eating alone is deemed anti-social and thus immoral. Eating alone will cause sickness. The absence of sharing food is thought to be the cause of community misfortune. People drown as a consequence. Sharing and eating together are important to prevent someone being hungry, but primarily these actions forestall individual autonomy and prestige. Sharing and eating food together symbolise and manifest an egalitarian value or ethos. In everyday life, daily meals represent the most basic form of both autonomy and egalitarianism created in the domestic sphere (family). Occasionally, lavish and ritualised communal meals in the public sphere (*uma*) serve as a social renewal.

Daily meals both represent and constitute the autonomy and egalitarian ethos within family. Daily meals also have basic structural significance for Mentawaian practices of kinship. Food continues the social relatedness that commences with natural relations (sex). There is an obvious idea of kinship as a process of becoming in which, through living in the same house and eating together, people become related. Sharing and consuming

substances together, i.e. food. This is continuously reproduced through daily communal meals. Food giving and sharing in daily communal meals are mundane and repetitive activities but they are valued because they create and renew the social bonds between the father and mother and between the parents and the children. The medium, food, that produces such a bond, is therefore imbued with social value.

The most important activities that imbue social values are the sharing and eating of food in *punen*. A ritual feast is a socio-cultural institution created to transform individual autonomy into a collective goal. In a ritual feast, all autonomous social actors are expected to contribute their wealth and labour. They produce food and eat, but it is only when they eat together that the food they produce is valued beyond its materiality. In a ritual feast, all the food, but particularly domestic animals, are removed from the individual person or family that produces them. The food is distributed among all families and consumed by them. In this way, food produces and generates the group (*uma*). Sharing and eating food together are social processes organised to generate social solidarity and a shared identity.

The ability of the group to enact a ritual feast and to transform individual autonomy creates an event during which everyone is free from envy and jealousy and joyously participates in communal meals. Food has value as a transformative agent in this kind of production. The more meat on the *lulag*, the bigger the *punen* is and the more the social prestige earned by the *uma*. The more the meat is offered to the spiritual forces, the greater their ability to protect themselves against sorcery will be. Thus, such events allow the group to assert its autonomy at a higher level. In turn, this autonomy means the group has the ability to freely develop any collective social relations with other groups.

Contributing food and labour to a series of performances and invocations in the ritual transforms the autonomy of the individual person and family into collective structured experiences in the *uma*. The sense of communal solidarity in the ritual has largely been conceived as an effort to repress individual autonomy, which is seen as a perverse version of the egalitarian ideals that are the basis of the community. The obligation to give away the fruits of one's labour and the products of one's personal gardens has been placed on people in order to offset the risks posed by autonomy. Individual sacrifice and sharing of personal wealth are not regarded merely as a way for an individual to earn social or collective recognition but also to dispel envy. If jealousy and rage are not resolved collectively, the resentment that emerges certainly produces social tension. The ritual feast is a tangible demonstration of the rejection of selfishness and social disorder.

6.3 The Emergence of Social Inequality

Chapter 2 provided an ethnographic and historical context that is important in understanding social transformation and the social values it brings. I have highlighted that the people of Muntei have had fairly continuous contact with missionaries, the colonial and post-colonial state, and the market. There have been many intrusions into their social world. Their involvement in cash-crop production and state institutions also has certain consequences for food production and consumption, and thus for social values. These external stimuli have forced each *uma* and family to abandon life in their traditional settlement (*pulaggaijat*) and live together in a larger and official settlement, in order to embrace a world religion and to engage in cash-crop production. While in a traditional setting in the old settlement people would largely exchange pigs, chickens, sago, or fruit trees between themselves, the arrival of traders complicated and stretched these existing social exchanges. In this section, I will analyse how involvement in cash-crop production and state administration generates social values that contradict egalitarianism.

The Effect of Cash Crops

Selling and buying a commodity are certainly not new for the people of Muntei. Chapter 2 explained that they have been participating in the market economy through the trading of forest products and other commodities for imported goods since at least the 18th century. Initially, the production of coconut complicated local food production but did not fundamentally alter it. Both coconuts and cloves were adopted and cultivated in the same way as fruit gardens were. Both crops also occupy a specific area of hilly landscape, mainly along the eastern coast where dry winds from the sea are present. Around the settlement, the effect of the cultivation of cloves and coconuts on staple food, however, is less visible. These crops do not compete with sago, taro, and fruit trees. Economically and socially, cash crop production has been subsumed in the basic schema of producing autonomous persons and the egalitarianism ethos of the group. These crops are treated the same way as sago palms or durian trees and are part of local legal and social system. It is true that the products of planting, nurturing, and harvesting of cloves and coconut are not comestible in a way that can be shared communally. Instead, dried clove buds and copra are sold for inedible cash. Cash from selling copra or *nilam* has never been shared equally with all kinsmen in the same way as pork or chicken meat. Money from coconuts or clove buds has been spent to gain individual prestige—constructing houses and to buy wristwatches or televisions. They also acquired valuable goods such as gongs or large cooking pans. These items, just like garden products, were attained to establish social prestige and autonomy.

Yet, involvement in cash-crop production also enabled people to instill communal values in another way. Personal belongings such as a mosquito net or a bush knife (*tegle*) obtained from selling copra or cloves could be shared communally. These could be part of or contribute to the collective affairs such as the payment of a bride-price or compensation for a dispute. These imported goods were indigenised and completely incorporated into existing social relationships, becoming a medium for producing social values as they were subsumed into the basic schema of sharing and collective use. There is also a general understanding that those who have more coconut or clove gardens must help fellow kinsmen in need. Helping a nephew to attend university or paying their bride-price represents not only the communal duty of giving young people an understanding of a new world, but also a clan's task to gain social prestige and prowess to show that they are a more successful group than others. By sending members of the clan to the mainland for university, the clans not only instill the new but compatible value of formal education into the roster of activities that they need to acquire to become social actors, but it also enhances their reputations as being a modern group.

In short, producing commodities for the market has allowed them to not merely preserve the existing tension between the autonomy of a person and the egalitarian ethos of the group, but also to intensify the dialectical processes of generating these values. When there was a boom period, money from selling crops was used to construct a large house or to acquire communal items such as a gong and to organise an elaborated ritual. Selling rattan and copra enabled a person to accumulate foreign objects, generate autonomy, and pursue social prestige. In turn, it might generate or intensify existing competition and rivalry (*pako*). The more intensive rivalry instigated social exchanges and rituals. In anticipation of such a tension, each person had to produce more gardens, either for subsistence or for cash crops to sell on the market. As a result, the greater tension and competition generated attempts to strengthen the solidarity of the clan, and greater efforts to establish political equality through social exchanges among clans. In short, their involvement in cash crop production and the influx of external goods intensified the actions to balance autonomy and egalitarianism, stretching and extending the balance without breaking it.

The involvement in cash production, nonetheless, has produced social differentiation. During the peak of copra and clove production in the mid-1980s, people saw some families or *uma* gain more than others. The pioneer Sasabirut clans had the advantage of having land on the small islands or along the coast and

were the first to cultivate cloves in the hills around Muntei. When the price of copra and cloves was high during 1980s and early 1990s, their crops already produced a substantial yield. Sarereiket did not have this advantage. When members of Sakukuret, Sakakadut, Salemurat and Sailuluni arrived in Muntei in the mid-1980s, the hills were already filled with cloves from the pioneer clans. The latter also did not have experience with cultivating land in the small islets. As a result, the pioneer clans, especially those who have both cloves and coconut gardens along the coast and in the hills around Muntei, have gained greater prosperity. This can be detected in the number and composition of young men and women from Muntei attending university or schooling in Padang since the 1990s. They are mostly from pioneer families. The other sign of prosperity can be seen in terms of housing. Semi-permanent brick houses with tin roofs are predominantly owned by members of the pioneer clans.

The inequality, however, is rather relative. Having no advantage in terms of land for coconut gardens and being too late for cultivating cloves around Muntei, the latecomers from Rereiket quickly seized the opportunity to develop semi-intensive traditional forest gardens and especially pig keeping, which are practices that have been largely abandoned by the pioneers. *Uma* Sakukuret, Sailuluni, and more recently Sakaliou have become specialists in pig keeping. They exchanged pigs with the pioneers and other neighbours and eventually acquired substantial wealth. They, just as their pioneer counterparts, have spent their fortune on constructing permanent houses with tin roofs and sending their children away to the mainland for higher education. Luck and timing of cash-crop booms have also complicated the fortunes of those involved in commodity production. When the price was at the highest point in the mid-1990s, all members of the *uma* Samekmek had already harvested their *nilam* garden in the old settlement near Kokok river. While others were still clearing their forest, they already sold litres of distilled *nilam* oil. They earned a fortune, at least by local standards, and spent it on building permanent houses and collectively constructing an impressive *sapo-uma*.

Other latecomers from Rereiket such as the *uma* Sauddeinuk, Sakakadut, Salemurat, and Samapoupou did not experience such advantages. They only started coconut production recently and struggled to access land for their cloves. A few families of the Saruruk, Saleleggu, and Sabulat that were not involved in coconut production and who relied on wage labour around the settlement also did not have a regular income. All these families consider themselves unfortunate as they cannot send their children to Padang or upgrade their houses. They saw an emergence of inequality in terms of housing, education, and limited non-gardening work in the settlement.

Market Intensification and Pressure to Traditional Food Production

The intensification of the market can be detected from the impact of cacao on sago and pig production, the two most important types of food. The effect of cacao on Muntei shows how market intensification influences food production and social values. Cacao drastically changed the valuation of the swamp forest. With cacao, the swamp forest has become a symbol of development and economic progress. This change in resource valuation has pushed people towards cacao production and a wider market economy. They cut sago palms and replaced them with cacao trees.

Another immediate effect of cacao was the change in land tenure. Cacao has complicated the basic principles within the *uma* and the family. The claimant of cultivated land after the production of cash crop have triggered the privatisation of communal land. The production of cacao transforms the value of land as a symbol and manifestation of an *uma*'s unity into segregated plots owned by individual families. Cacao demands tenure security and encourages individual families to enclose their cultivated land separately from their *uma*'s land. The privatisation of land is part of the larger changing position of the *uma* as the pivot of social production. The stronger emphasis of family as the core unit of production in cacao

cultivation has complicated the relations of *uma* and the family, which were already stretched when they cultivated coconut and cloves. Reciprocal relations within *uma* may not have entirely been diminished, but involvement in cash crop production has forced the family to establish and maintain a degree of spatial and social autonomy from the *uma*, with whom the family members were previously tied via the sharing of food, ritual obligations, and gift exchange. While the enclosure of land has not entirely separated individual family from the flexible and fluid arrangements of *uma's* social relations and obligation, it did affect the solidarity between families and the contribution of each family when the *uma* is organising a *punen*. For example, the new generation born in the settlement and devoted to cash crops prefers to build a larger brick house than a longhouse or buying pigs for a large *punen*.

The conversion of sago and *onaja* have pressured people to participate more and more in commodity production and abandon their food crops. However, agrarian differentiation and the compulsion to neglect food production have not been emerging in Muntei cacao production as it happened elsewhere when indigenous people became involved in cacao and other cash crop production (Li 2014; 2016; Hall 2004). The combination of land availability, the limited participation of migrants, and the encumbrance surrounding the privatization of ancestral land have prevented the enclosure of the entire land into private property. Some people have tried to make adjustments by planting taro and banana in the early years of cacao production while the seeds of cacao were growing. Others selected mature gardens, cutting few unproductive fruits trees and integrating cacao with some valuable durian. It seems that Muntei people still have a choice to participate either in cash or food production and do not surrender their land entirely for market production.

The most significant impact of cacao production is on traditional pig keeping. The prohibition of pig keeping along the banks of the Mara River that I have described in Chapter 3 seems quite dramatic, but it follows a precedent present long before the hamlet's decision. Most men raised in the settlement told me that traditional pig husbandry was not suitable for contemporary life. There were a number of reasons for abandoning pig husbandry. A complicated system of taboos was a handicap for ordinary people to participate in commercial ventures. They felt that pig husbandry requires difficult skills, with few direct benefits but many risks. The taboos would prevent them working in cash crops. Another commonly mentioned reason is that pig keeping required hard work. Pigs require daily attention but are easily wiped out with an attack of *oiluk*, a kind of swine flue. Regular feeding required owners to travel back and forth to pig huts at least once a day, sometimes having to cross the river. The facing of difficult taboos and heavy labour was not always rewarded. People claim that it is easier to work on cash crops because cloves and coconuts produce a stable harvest and are not related to complicated taboos and rituals.

The third reason is that space for traditional pig keeping has grown increasingly scarce. The impossibility of practicing traditional pig husbandry comes from the transformation of sago gardens and swampy forest into cacao gardens. Pig owners eventually found that their pig hut was no longer in the middle of sago gardens and secondary forest but surrounded by hundreds of plots of cacao gardens. The places where swine previously browsed wild tubers, snails, and roots was soon cleared, trenched, and drained. Cacao gardens are very different from sago gardens, where the owner of cultivated plants and the land was not always the same person. All cacao gardens have been cultivated individually. The owners of the cacao gardens have invested their money and other possessions in land with the expectation that the investment would help them to get a decent return. Inside their fixed and bounded plot, the cacao growers take exclusive rights for all concerted efforts they make including uncultivated vegetation that was previously free to take for humans or non-humans. This makes the practice of semi-domesticated pig husbandry, which relies on an extensive area, impossible to maintain. There is a swift perception about pig keeping: allowing pigs to roam around in cacao gardens became a threat for their livelihood. Surrounded by cacao gardens, pigs became a pest. The prohibition on pig keeping in and around the settlement and the cacao gardens symbolically represents,

and literally manifests, the significant shift of social life of the people of Muntei. People are continually, as I have shown in Chapter 3, redefining and even remaking themselves through the production and consumption of pork and yet, they are increasingly seen as a problem too in a new circumstance. In the meeting in question, the words of Aman Sege Salakoppak (53), the head of Peining Butet hamlet expressed the general perception on pig keeping:

> We are all Maliggai children.[23] We were all born with pigs. When we are sick or have a family member passed away, we begged Aman Limakok to give his pigs. I swear to our ancestors; our life is in pig owners' hands! But… but, we will be starving if pigs eat cacao and coconut sprouts. We don't want to lose the money that we spent for land. We all now need *hasil* [product of cash crops] so we can earn money. Otherwise we will be poorer. Look, our neighbour along the Mara River are not only people from Silaoinan, Puro or Maileppet. Our brothers from Nias, Java, the Batak lands also cultivate land there. They do not want pigs around their gardens. We are all poor Maliggai children living in a bad time. We can't live with pigs in gardens.

He points to several issues underpinning the perceived shift in relation to pig keeping. First, he highlights the importance of pigs in the social relations and the prominent role of pig owners for the entire community in Muntei. He uses the myth of Maliggai, the Mentawaians' ancestor who brought pigs to them, to remind the audience that they possess a distinctive pig culture. Pig owners are respected since communities rely on their herd for important occasions. Second, however, he emphasises that pigs cannot coexist with the new crops. Pigs are a source of trouble. This hints at the transformation of spatial arrangements. Third, he shows that the people of Muntei are now part of larger social networks: the interest of migrants to cultivate cash crops, the involvement of financial investments in land, and the expectations related to the crops. To attain a better future, they must adapt to commodity production at the expense of their pig culture. Their old desirable object has to be given away as the pigs have become a threat to new valuable ones.

Both pigs and cash crops are the reasons why people spend time and energy working in the gardens. By producing commodities for the market, people see the meaning or importance of their own creative energy and capacity to be productive as means through which to acquire money. By having more money, they can buy clothing and modern luxuries such televisions and motorcycles. Their involvement in commodity production has helped people to reorganise their desire for goods that they do not produce themselves. They can obtain food and other goods from elsewhere. Furthermore, income from cash crops can connect their actions and activities to larger social networks beyond their settlement or even their island. Money seems to be a concrete form of desire, contributing to social prestige and somehow replacing pigs. The new way of acquiring prestige through cash-crop cultivation and money-based exchange has added a sense of pride and autonomy. Paddling a canoe full of copra or putting down a sack of dried cloves in front of a merchant's store is something people can be proud of. They can wander into a migrant's shop to examine the goods, select their clothes, and buy a sack of rice. Having a regular source of money from a good cacao garden represents the ultimate social significance of their activities, the means by which it is integrated into the broader relations.

Market intensification has forced some people to accept that they are no longer pig producers. Instead, their activities are directed towards cash-crop production. In a traditional setting, having pigs would assure their livelihood and was an obvious way to obtain the forms of autonomy and privilege that allow people to obtain and assert social prestige. Keeping pigs provided a guarantee of life security. In the contemporary setting, they now have to accept that their future lies in their involvement in the cash-crop economy. There are still a handful of pig keepers in Muntei, but their number is rapidly decreasing. And there are no new pig keepers, as young men have little interest in it. This is not to say that pigs cannot be sold for money,

or that they are less valuable or no longer important. On the contrary, pigs are still valuable, desirable, and important. Yet, producing pigs is seen to be impractical. Unlike dried clove buds or cacao beans, pigs cannot be kept in storage. The market for pigs is also limited. The traders are predominantly Minangkabau. For religious reasons, the Minangkabau traders do not collect pigs and deliver them on to regional market. Cacao, copra, or cloves are the only means by which traders incorporate the people of Muntei in wider social networks. A sack of dried cacao beans is valuable because it can create social relations with others. It can be exchanged at a migrant's shop, pay for a ferry ticket at a travel company, and be saved for their children when they enter a university. Commodity production has become an important part of the overall process of social life since it produces the person they want to be. They feel the future is no longer about becoming a pig producer, the animal that embodies the value of sharing and egalitarianism.

Eating Money: The State and the Emergence of Elite

In Chapter 2, I described how that incorporation into the state administration requires several new institutions such as the village head, the hamlets, the schools, and the church. These institutions have offered positions for some villagers to be power brokers for relevant government agencies and officials. While some positions were selected by people themselves, they are not rooted in an egalitarian-traditional setting but imposed from outside and installed more for external purposes. With external support and connections, those who hold a position in an introduced organisation have an advantage and gain more social prestige and power over others. Eventually, certain people have developed the ability to establish authority and have learned to be intermediaries between the villagers and government institutions and officials. These people have taken the opportunity to establish a link with particular state institutions and officials, and to establish themselves as representatives of the settlement. This has provided them with power and authority over other people. The position of power brokers is quite clearly reinforced by successive development projects. They are able to profit from state hand-outs, while others need more assistance to negotiate the increased array of rules and bureaucratic procedures that are part and parcel of state formation processes in general, and development in particular. The power brokers become elites in the settlement and are seen as those who gain more than common people. This creates social inequality as the authority and privilege they have are associated with a mode of either social, cultural, or economic prestige.

Certain uma and families benefit more from development projects than others. They belong to the elite (*sautek*) created through the state administration. The members of the elite who have benefited from the state are always accused of betraying the community. Sagari and Salakkopak have constantly been accused of being 'money eaters' (*sikop bulagat*). *Sikop bulagat* is a popular term applied to those in charge of a development project but who keep the benefits of it for themselves or their families. It was initially an accusation directed towards Minangkabau people, especially those who hold authority or administrate state funds, for instance by running development projects on the island. Now, the term is also applied to fellow Muntei and other Mentawaian residents who 'keep' public funds in their pocket—a euphemism for any form of corruption done by officials. Therefore, not only Sagari and Salakoppak men stand accused, but all *sautek:* the head of a hamlet, the village secretary, or the head of the district have all been accused of being 'money eaters' (*sikop bulagat*).

The usage of 'eating' is particularly telling. 'Eating money' is perhaps not a term originally created by the people of Muntei or other Mentawaians. Most people in Indonesia generally use the term 'eating money" to refer any form of corruption. Yet, the term is particularly apt in the Muntei context. Eating money is always attributed to those who have benefitted from their positions as the officers or implementers of a development project. The term has always been used with regard to demanding fairness, equal rights, and equality. According to them, any authority, power, and wealth should ideally be shared. Everyone should

have a fair share (*otcai*), either in the form of cash or development hands out. *Otcai* represents political equality and help (*paroman*).

The accusation of 'eating money' is not a trivial matter, even though it is often articulated in a jocular tone. To claim a person is 'eating money' is as serious accusation, as eating alone and not sharing are asocial acts. They breach a taboo that is punishable by sickness and even death (remember the *sikaoinan*). It is worth saying that people believe that money comes from the market and the state. The metaphor of 'eating money' illustrates the ultimate idea that humans naturally tend to be corrupt when they hold power without any institution or social mechanism to force them to share. The accusation of local elites 'eating money' is commonly associated with their selfishness and sickness, and the lack of sharing.

The complaint of elite 'eating money' is regularly heard in daily conversation. Everytime I sat in the varanda of a house talking about a government project or the village officers, the conversation inevitably went into the direction of complaining about the head of village or the person in charge of government project. The complaint was particularly strong when it came from a small clan or family who is less prominent and has no power and authority. One complaint I recorded is from a Salelenggu family. Aman Jeto, the head of family, is a full-time gardener and a part-time chainsaw operator. He lamented that he is rarely asked by the village officers to supply wood materials for the government projects. He critisized that people in charge of development saved government money for their own families. It is not surprising that he deploys food-related-terms to protest:

> *Sautek* [elite] and their family eat *sarat simananam* [delicious things]. They always have money. They steal it from us. They eat meat (pork) a lot. Every day, they go to market and buy fish. Their children always have rice on their plate. They have smooth skins [*mabubut*] from regularly eating delicious food and working mainly in the office. They get all the money from *pamerenta* [government]. Once they are up, they do not want to go down. They keep their place. Someday, they will be sick as they do not share wealth.

Aman Jeto understands that 'eating money', however, is not the most serious thing. He said that he could be the money eater if he holds government projects or become the head of the hamlet. He admits that whoever is in power certainly has self-interest. "Holding authority and power is a delicious thing. It looks like you have plenty of pigs and food!" Aman Jeto claims. The central problem is the failure to share. As described in Chapter 6, illness results from any substance consumed alone. Hence, it is strongly believed that all 'money eaters' (*sikom bulagat)* will eventually suffer serious illnesses. Consider the wrath of *sikaoinan*: healing rituals are needed to remove something eaten or enjoyed by someone alone. The substance must be removed from the body, extracted, and shared. Pork, sago, or taro can be shared and this will convert sickness into the possibility of successful social relations. Power, authority, and money, however, are not food. They may be shared but cannot be divided, distributed, shared, and consumed as pork or chicken. While the illness of 'eating alone' is curable, there is no ritual to remove money 'from' the body of the sick person and share it with the community. The 'money eater' eventually dies.

Eating money is a social metaphor for the social inequality that people have experienced since living in the settlement. State development projects restructured social relations, contributing to the rise of 'money eaters'. The state and its development projects not only favoured Minangkabau people, as in the past, but also a few Mentawaians who are positioned as patrons of the projects and power brokers. The development processes have created an uneven distribution of power and resources. While the development projects might not be particularly large in scope and scale, they can offer power and positions, and create local elites. The prominent people from Sagari and Salakoppak were the first to seek and take advantage of

development hand-outs or government schemes to build new roads, schools, and other infrastructure. Their children were educated and have access to government jobs—opportunities that remain limited and require recommendations and connections, and are usually afforded to those close to state officials and bureaucrats and, more importantly, those who have cash to offer.

6.4 Festivity Without Feasts

It has been almost four decades since the first people moved from Siberut Hulu to Muntei. Currently, they are living together and enjoy communal life. People gather in narrow spaces along the Siberut River and in the hills around Muntei, living quite literally side by side. They socialise every single day, spending time greeting and talking to each other. The settlement has a collective and festive atmosphere like that during a ritual feast—unlike the old settlement, where they spent most of their time in their gardens or their own houses. Young men and women have unlimited time to socialise with their peers in the church, school, the local kiosks, or on the volleyball pitch. Enjoying collective moments in public arenas makes the village more attractive compared to a lone hut in the middle of the gardens. For the children, they are in the settlement most of the time as all of them were born and raised in the hamlets. Another appeal of the settlement is the variety of livelihoods. People can devote their time to both traditional gardening, cash-crop production, and off-garden earning activities. The members of the older generation are ambivalent. They enjoy living in the settlement but feel that there is not much work for them. They enthusiastically attend Sunday mass and watch people all dressed up in fine clothes, but sometimes they prefer the calmness and quietness of the old gardens.

Muntei is a settlement with a new community, consisting of hundreds of people from several *uma* tied to government authority and the market relations. While the self-identification and loyalty to their *uma* remains unshakeable, people have gradually identified themselves as 'people from Muntei', regardless their origin, clan, or ethnicity. They have been living on the same land, sharing the name of hamlets and villages, and enjoying access to modern infrastructure. Apparently, Muntei as a community has generally brought satisfaction.

The only resentment shared by both the older and younger generation is the lack of meat. Teu Rima, the shaman or Aman Reju of Samekmek, bemoaned the lack of meat; but this does not necessarily mean a shortage of domestic animals or the absence of meat itself. Meat brings people together and creates unity. The lack of sharing meat—or food in general—in the settlement illustrates a lack of togetherness, cohesion, and solidarity. Now, they meet and greet each other often but do not eat pork together. There is a collective identity but no equality. They are members of Muntei settlement but have no equal chance to belong to the elites. The statement that they are lacking meat illustrates their ambivalent position to living in the settlement. They emphasise that they live as a solid, proper, and strong community, yet resent the lack of communal feasts, which are synonymous with solidarity and egalitarianism.

Maintaining Egalitarianism?

While they have experienced social inequality, people have tried to maintain their egalitarianism. One particular attempt to bring unity, not surprisingly, is through food. Three times a year, people in the settlement organise the slaughtering of pigs (Pictures 55 & 56). As they are predominantly Catholic, the church facilitates the event. Easter, Christmas, and New Year's Eve are the moments when people collectively buy and slaughter pigs. There are a few members of the church appointed to a committee that organises the event together with a night party. The church will first compile a list of people who want to collect money for obtaining the pigs. The number of people on the list and the amount of money collected will determine the number of pigs they can buy. Non-Catholics are encouraged to participate too.

DARMANTO

Picture 55. Muntei people distribute pork during Christmas festive (2014)

DARMANTO

Picture 56. Muntei women prepare shared food in Christmas festive in the Catholic Church. Note that there is no sago, *subbet*, or meat in the event but just foreign snack (biscuits, crackers, cookies etc.) (2014)

The slaughtering of pigs has been steadily organised since people moved to Muntei in 1981. The joy with which people participate in this event illustrates their willingness to maintain the unity of the community. The slaughter is the biggest and perhaps only regular communal occasion at the settlement level. The process of killing and chopping the pigs and the distribution of the meat, is almost identical to the sacrificing and killing of pigs during a regular *punen*. All buyers participate in slaughtering and distributing the meat. Young men help their fathers and uncles with minor jobs such as washing the pigs' intestines or sharpening knives. Children enjoy this event with great laughter. People stand around, watching with eyes moving back and forth between the meat and the knives. The meat is then sorted and divided according to the list of people who have committed to buy. The names on the list are called aloud, and one by one, the buyers collect the meat, put it on trays and take it home.

To some extent, the event brings egalitarianism beyond the *uma*. It allows people to feel togetherness and unity. The process of killing and distributing the meat is equivalent to traditional ceremonies. A shaman will do a small offering before the animals are slaughtered. However, the egalitarianism in this event seems incomplete. The main difference to traditional *punen* is that the Catholic pig slaughtering is not followed by a communal feast. The fresh meat is brought home, cooked, and consumed in individual families. The average amount of meat is also not particularly large. In three years (2013-2015), the average weight of the meat taken home by each household was about 1.4 kilograms, which is only enough for one meal (*sanga kopman*) for a family. Moreover, the mechanism of obtaining meat is rather different from that of the *punen*. The pig owners neither give their animals freely, nor provide a discount for the price. They buy the meat the same as everyone else. The meat they bring home is put up for sale. Only those with cash can enjoy it.

The fact that wealthier families are able to buy more meat than others puts people and the church in a dilemma: the church buys a certain number of pigs so that every household can get at least a portion of meat, since the price of meat increases in the period before important events such as Christmas. But if they buy more pigs, some families will get more meat than others, with wealthier families certainly dominating the purchasing. However, the church would also be blamed for providing only a small amount of meat. Virtually no one is satisfied with the meat bought from the church. Eventually, wealthier families buy another pig for themselves. They may also perform a mini-ritual for themselves that shows off their wealth.

The Catholic feast, despite being a communal event, shows different types of sharing. People do not share the meat and do not eat together. All meat is distributed equally but cooked and eaten in the individual household. The wealthier people do not provide the slaughtered pig. The event is not a social mediation for redistributing wealth and possessions. All they do is buy meat in a collective manner, no different from buying rice or sardines from a trader's shop and then eating at home. The meat they get is not entirely an equal portion (*otcai*) as a few families who have more money get more while others get less. Hence, the event does not generate equality. Unlike the ritual feasts in traditional *punen*, each family's meal during Christmas or Easter does not come from the collective food contributed by all families in the settlement from their own gardens. Therefore, the event does not integrate the work of each family and every clan into the ultimate unity of the settlement as a whole.

Against Egalitarianism: Contemporary Social Life in The Settlement

Living in the settlement has transformed food production and reconfigured the social values it entails. By staying in the *barasi*, people have focused on cash crops, converting their sago and abandoning their pigs. Productive work has shifted from producing and exchanging food and other garden products between clans to producing and exchanging goods with traders. Cultivating crops means less time for raising the pigs and chickens necessary for exchanges and religious ceremonies. With limited social and cultural exchanges involving rituals and exchange of garden products, the settlement lacks reciprocity. Instead,

the people competitively devote their labour to better housing, modern devices, and cash-crop plots. All this pulls them into the cash economy and requires a dedication to their cash crops. It means that they have to gradually leave behind some traditional practices that once defined their unity and solidarity—pig keeping, building longhouses, and ritual hunting.

This is not to say that social transformation has fundamentally transformed the full range of existing social relations. Reciprocal relations within and between *uma* and other traditional institutions are certainly maintained but some have also found new forms. Despite public acceptance that many traditional rituals have been modified, they have not entirely vanished. The market and the state have stretched existing patterns of reciprocal relations within and between groups. Within clans, subsistence items (e.g. sago, fruit, vegetables) are constantly changing hands. Reciprocal relations include helping other clan members to pursue further education or a more prestigious job. Between clans, people maintain social allies not by exchanging pigs and frequently serving kinsmen with plenty of animal fat in rituals, but by electing their kinsmen as the head of hamlets or the head of local church, or sending money for higher education on the mainland. Between clans, social exchanges mainly involve land transfers.

In general, Muntei residents do not have substantial complaints over living in the new settlement. They enjoy the paved road, the church, the school and governmental services. The move to Muntei has fulfilled their desire to have a better life, compared to a muddy and isolated place in the old settlement. Living in the new settlement is what they envisioned four decades ago. When I asked Aman Reju for his opinion about living in the settlement, he gave me the following comparison:

> I guess living in Muntei looks like your education and your life. You had an experience of study and life in Indonesia and now you study and live in the Netherlands. You must enjoy living abroad. Otherwise you will stay with us in Siberut. For you, studying in the Netherland is better life. You are learning new languages, eating new food, and having a good road. You travel with train and airplane and not with canoe or walk on feet. We now have a better life than in the old settlement. We are able to travel by motorcycle or speedboat, compared to paddling a canoe. Living in a brick house is better than living in a wooden hut. Having coconut and clove garden is better life than just having sago and taro. Living in Muntei is better as we got development projects. It is better than being ignored by the government.

Aman Reju's statements contain various understandings of a better life. It seems that the better life is a kind of desire. The desire of being fully incorporated into the nation-state and development agendas. The desire of being involved in the wider market community and commodity-based production. The better life is associated with having a different way of life that contrasts with the traditional way of life. It does not necessary mean that all aspects of the traditional life are worse compared to the new one. Having lots of pigs and gardens has been, and is still considered, a better thing than just having a brick house, for example. Yet, in contemporary circumstances, the better life is strongly associated with the ability to have progress. The progress means that they have material goods from the market, holding authority and power (being a *sautek*, head of a government project) and having a permanent job. A better life also includes the ability to have what others have beyond their status. It is no longer enough to merely have basic necessities such as food, a house, a machete, and mosquito nets. While pigs and the longhouse are still important features and sources of social prestige, most youngsters in Muntei do not aim to have a large longhouse, many more pigs or larger rituals. Their aspirations are to enrol at a university, be civil servants, or get a regular salary from a non-agricultural job in the city. Owning many pigs is still desirable as pigs can be converted to cash. Yet, the aspirations of the villagers and direction of the development of Muntei are moving toward becoming 'like those on the mainland" who

produce commodities on a regular basis or work for wages. People feel that having a combination cash and food crops in several gardens, and securing government jobs is a real sign of a better life.

However, the fulfilled desire of a better life in the new settlement has presented a dilemma. They have a better life but they no longer share the good part of the life. Their food might be better and more varied but not everybody has equal access to it. The practice of sharing is declining. People start to keep food for themselves. The lack of meat and the notion of hunger are both physical and social conditions of people's new social life. They are both symbols of and the actual cost to be paid in the pursuit of a better life in the government settlement, incorporation into to the market and the state administration. The settlement is a better place, but it is not a place where they can raise pigs. It is not a place where all residents enjoy equal consumption of pork and communal feasts. The settlement is not where the ultimate aim of social production is to ensure equality and to bring egalitarian values into being. Not everyone in the settlement is equally successful at acquiring possessions, dominance, and power. The gardens are productive, but not for sago and pigs. The products of the gardens can instigate autonomy and prestige, but they cannot always be easily shared and certainly cannot be consumed. Social productions have now complicated the balance relations between family and the *uma*. In the settlement, people build brick houses, not longhouses. Each nuclear family dedicates its labour towards commodity production but spends little of the fruits of its labour on others. *Uma* as a social organisation might be still important for communal ceremonies, but there is a growing feeling that inequality within *uma* has become more visible. This is why the better life in the settlement comes with the complaints of a lack of solidarity and cohesiveness.

While they have a problem with inequality, it is incorrect to portray Muntei people as victims of state development or the market. They are active and conscious participants of the social transformation who pay the social costs of their own social productions. The main problem is that there is not a sociocultural schema or institution that suppresses the social inequality which accompanies progress and development. All their social actions—such as making cacao gardens or sending children to university—are aimed at producing autonomy but do little to ensure equality. The flow of cash, from either the state or the market, is unevenly distributed across families and social groups, which in effect produces a new social hierarchy. The privatisation of land has also broken up the traditional arrangements of land relations and shifted the balance of *uma*-nuclear family relations. The major problem of living in the settlement then is not a lack of autonomy, but the absence of social mechanisms to share social prestige and transform autonomy into egalitarianism. The emerging social inequality reflects the lack of sharing and inadequate social relations. It is the polar opposite of egalitarian values.

The shaman's social comments, mentioned at the outset of this dissertation, are best read as an expression of this sense of social insecurity: a newfound experience of how a better life in the settlement can be acquired, but at the cost of the most important social values: equality, solidarity and togetherness. Hunger is appearing because of both physical and social transformation. Cash crops have replaced sago and pigs. Sago and fruit gardens are considered less valuable than cacao. Pigs are seen as troublesome for cash crops. People now eat more rice and less pork. Engaging in the market economy and with the state leads to the uncontrolled autonomy of the family, which in turn creates increasing social inequality. The emergence of inequality and the transformation of *uma*-nuclear family relations as a threat to solidarity are not mitigated, as genuine sharing and communal feasts at the entire settlement level are now virtually absent. This is why people associate hunger and a lack of solidarity with the consumption of meat despite there being no evidence that they have less meat and food than in the past. Complaints about the lack of meat have to be seen in this light, where social production in the settlement has created autonomy but not a collective institution to preserve their egalitarian values to guard against the emergence of systematic forms of social inequality. Hunger is a social sentiment to express the dangers of social inequality.